

## A FEASIBLE SOCIALISM?\*

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Is socialism a contemporary issue? Judging by what one reads in the newspapers, by the general climate of opinion and by the heavy spread by the media, the answer would appear to be 'no'. People certainly talk about socialism, but only in order to denounce or discredit it. 'Authentic socialism' is a dangerous utopia or at best an illusion. 'Actually existing socialism' is a nightmare. The recent experience of socialist governments in Western Europe, proves that socialism is a sham, since they cannot or will not avoid adopting a harsh economic liberalism. Yet here we have one of the leading figures in Soviet studies proposing a 'feasible socialism'. A writer who specialises in the economics of the USSR and the Eastern bloc and who has never been noted for his support for socialism now puts forward his own version of socialism. One's first impression—though, given the present anti-socialist climate, perhaps it is merely a hope—is that the author is coming to the aid of at least a certain socialism. The favourable comments made by Perry Anderson in his latest book tend to strengthen that impression: 'In a work of luminous freshness and clarity, common sense and good humour, analytic logic and empirical detail, Nove has put to rest a century of unexamined preconceptions and illusions about what might be on the other side of capital, and awoken us to our first real vision of what a socialist economy, under democratic control, might look like.'

On a second reading, one begins to have doubts. It is only natural that an intellectual who was born in Russia and who is presumably familiar with controversies on the left should continue to take an interest in socialist problems. He rejects **Marx's** conceptualisation, but gives his reasons for doing so and his argument is coherent. It is obvious from his earlier writings on the Soviet Union that he also rejects the results of the Soviet experiment. In his book on socialism, he simply summarises his earlier views; the reasons for his rejection of the Soviet Union are obvious and are supported by well documented arguments. But it is by no means self-evident that we have to accept that what he has to say has anything to do with a socialist vision.

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\*Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1983.

## A FEASIBLE SOCIALISM

### I. WHICH SOCIALISM?

#### *Critique of Marx*

The author's starting point is a harsh critique of Marx which is central to his whole argument: 'It is my contention that Marx had little to say about the economics of socialism, and that the little he did say was either irrelevant or directly misleading' (p. 10). According to Nove, everything that Marx said, directly or indirectly, about socialism is unacceptable; his main complaint appears to be that Marx is illogical, unrealistic and takes no account of the complexities of the modern world. The disappearance of the market and the withering away of the law of value, which are central themes in Marx, will lead to the despotism of centralised planning and to the power of despots. The only hope for a 'free association of producers' lies at the level of individual factories. The extension of **self-**management to the whole of society is inconceivable. The interests of the 'associated producers' vary from factory to factory. The assumption that there can be a spontaneous harmony between the interests of all workers and that local interests can merge into a general interest is a hollow dream that has nothing to do with the harsh realities of life. It is in fact more than a mad dream; it is a religious projection. It is all the more far-fetched and senseless in that there is and always will be such a thing as scarcity, not to mention selfishness and other aspects of social life. Hence Nove's sceptical comments about the 'golden age of abundance' which 'removes conflict over resource-allocation. . . a communist steady-state equilibrium. . . Then there is no reason for various individuals to compete, to take possession for their own use of what is freely available to all' (p. 15).<sup>2</sup> The abundance which was to have led to the emergence of the New Man still eludes us. Resources are not unlimited, and there will always be conflict, or even pitched battles, over scarce commodities, all of which leaves little room for illusions as to man's goodness or generosity. There is no good genie to distribute everything bounteously; it is more a matter of managing a real world that is both complex and uncertain.

These are the main arguments advanced to prove that political economy—in other words the management of relative scarcity—will continue to apply under socialism. For Nove and many other writers, the claim that the law of value will wither away under socialism—an argument used by Marx and most, but not all, Marxists, though Lenin appears not to accept it—lies at the heart of the Marxist utopia and it is this which makes it so unrealistic. 'The evident need to calculate, evaluate, devise criteria for choice between alternatives, at all levels of economic life' (p. 20) means that the law of value will pertain under socialism. Marx is further criticised for ignoring use-value and concentrating on exchange-value in his explanation of capitalism. The latter concept is bound up with the conditions of production, and Marx emphasises production at the expense of **circula-**

tion. Marx's minimisation of use-value leads him to under-estimate the role of the market and to ignore the interests of consumers. In that sense, the Soviet planners are simply following the example set by their great forebear. In short, 'Marx had little that was relevant to say about computation of costs under socialism (and implied that under full communism costs would not matter anyhow)' (p. 27). When Marx does intervene in the debate, he does so with his famous and woolly theory that under socialism, economic life will be transparent. But as Nove reminds us, transparency becomes an opaque mirror when the '12 million identifiable different products' (p. 33) manufactured in the USSR get in the way. The vast range of tasks to be performed and the range of available skills mean that 'some hierarchy and subordination are inescapable in organising production' and there is therefore a need 'for a realistic. . . assessment of the role and limits of democratic procedures in economic decision-making' (p. 50).

Similarly, it is essential for there to be a state which rises above individual interests. Market regulation and a certain degree of competition are essential because *ex ante* regulation is impossible. Real needs cannot be determined before the market has been diagnosed, unless of course consumers are forced by drastic means to accept certain products for their limited needs. Nove is thinking here primarily of the Soviet experience, which he knows very well. Does, then socialism have any meaning? It does, if by socialism we mean that accidents of birth or fortune should not confer excessive privileges upon anyone. And 'feasible socialism' is certainly meaningful: it means 'a state of affairs which could exist in some major part of the developed world within the lifetime of a child already conceived' (p. 197). Realism, a sense of reality and a sense of proportion provide the leitmotif of Nove's book and many of his common-sense remarks remind one of the best features of the Anglo-American tradition.

### *A Negative Example: 'Real Socialism'*

The same sober tone and the same spirit of synthesis characterise the chapter on the Soviet Union. Marx provided the negative theoretical model; the USSR provides the negative practical example. The Soviet Union is taken as a negative example because the fortunes and misfortunes of its concrete experience demonstrate the need for a market, and the urgent necessity to relax the grip of centralism—the absurd centralisation of millions of decisions—and to encourage various categories of citizens to take the initiative as both producers and consumers.

It is possible to establish 'a close connection between the rejection of the market and the system of upward managerial responsibility' (p. 82). The collectivisation of agriculture was 'a disastrous course' (p. 85). Although it cannot be denied that the living standards of the peasantry have improved since the death of Stalin, this has not put an end to **aliena-**

tion. Farmers are better paid, but the farms are still large and those who work them are still poorly motivated. The economic situation has to be improved; basic principles may even have to be radically revised. Essentials that cannot be obtained legally are obtained 'by other means'; this applies, for instance, to the constant and delicate problem of how to obtain inputs (raw materials) for industry. The result is the 'second economy', which is now an essential part of economic life. The logic of the Soviet system of production obviously demands the restoration of market relations. According to Nove, this is both an economic truth and an economic necessity; the regime's attempts to conceal that fact do nothing to help economic activity or the needs of consumers and citizens. Conversely, 'the existing price system renders necessary the existence of the central apparatus' (p. 101), and that in turn means that those who control that apparatus must have power and privileges.

This unreasonable and sometimes irrational system does not, however, result from the direct application of the principles of socialism and, certain features aside, it has nothing to do with the work of Marx. Nove is not unaware of the need to take into account the impact of specifically Russian features and of the historical context: 'the despotic political past; the weakness of spontaneous social forces (which partly explain the rise of despotism and are partly explained by it); economic and social backwardness, and the way in which these elements were reinforced by Leninist politics and the exigencies of civil war and "socialist construction" ' (p. 112).

Nove also assesses the attempts at reform in other 'real socialist' countries and describes the specificities of Yugoslavia, Poland, China and Hungary. He concludes that the least unsatisfactory reform was that instituted in Hungary in 1968. Despite its many faults, it represents a step in the right direction: market elements are being reintroduced; centralisation is becoming more flexible; prices reflect economic realities to a certain extent; factories and especially farmers are allowed a certain initiative. Nove contrasts the caution and moderation with which reform in Hungary has been implemented with the adventurism of Poland's economic plans in the seventies and with the over-decentralisation of Yugoslavia's self-management.

Having made these critical remarks on both **Marxist** theory and the practical experience of real socialism, the author devotes two chapters to his positive views, to 'his' socialism, and makes a fairly classic distinction between the transition to socialism and the socialist phase in the strict sense of the term.

I am discussing Nove's conception of socialism, but he himself discusses the economics of socialism. He writes as an economist but his comments take him far beyond economics in any strict sense and lead him to elaborate a whole vision of society, as we can see from his frequent remarks about

ideology, the new man and contradictions. That of course is perfectly legitimate. Socialism is even less reducible to political economy (accumulation, investment, relations between different sectors) than capitalism. There is **much** more than that at stake, namely the future of the societies concerned.

## II. TRANSITION AND SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY

Nove's concern for realism leads him to think of socialism within the context of a single nation. He is well aware that 'socialism in one country' was one of the great slogans of the Stalinist period and was closely associated with Stalin **himself**,<sup>4</sup> and Nove's use of it at times sounds deliberately provocative. Stalin was certainly a realist, but only in the sense that he believed in *Realpolitik*. His vision of the construction of socialism in the USSR, however, was so unrealistic as to be aberrant. Presumably Nove is not in fact being provocative but simply rejecting the 'far-fetched fantasy' of 'universal, worldwide socialism' (p. 155). Even if we accept the most favourable hypothesis, this lies in the distant future. In the meantime, we have the more prosaic task of dealing with the real world. And the real world means nation-states. Nation-states will not go away and their existence therefore determines the various national experiences of socialism.

As far as the developed world is concerned, Nove's comments are often founded in the British context. One sometimes has the impression that the old tradition of insularity and the feeling that there is something specific about Britain are more important than the realism he constantly evokes to justify his project for socialism in one **country**.

Whatever the starting point may be—developed capitalism, real socialism or underdevelopment—a period of transition is inevitable. In that respect, the author belongs to the classic socialist tradition from which Stalin departed when, in **1936**, he decreed that the USSR had suddenly but definitely entered the socialist era. For several decades the official communist movement throughout the world gave up thinking about the transition to socialism and left the task of continuing the classic tradition to isolated currents (Trotskyism) and individuals.

Nove's analysis of the transition from developed capitalism to socialism at times seems closer to the critiques made of the left of the Labour Party in Britain, of the Chilean experience under Allende or even of a certain *gauchisme* than to any positive or credible theory of transition. Several paragraphs are devoted to defending the idea that the key to transition lies in an increase in productivity rather than in the redistribution of wealth (p. 156 f). Redistributive programmes simply result in an equal distribution of poverty and are in no sense a step towards socialism. This is true and, in my view, a fairly classical position, provided of course

that we ignore the propaganda value of redistribution for the labour movement. Such egalitarian programmes alienate the middle classes from the regime and can lead to disaster, as in Chile (p. 156). Making a larger cake is more important than dividing up the existing cake (p. 159). A wages policy which could restrict excessive wage claims without introducing strict price controls would remove many problems, and particularly the threat of a ~~return~~ to the black market.

Within the general framework of 'socialism in one country', Nove argues for an open economy and rejects the notion of autarky. Similarly, he regards drastic import controls as highly dangerous (p. 162). Such policies, which are supported by the Labour left, are simply unrealistic and would lead to a shift to the right (p. 165). The alternative would be to give in to the temptation to do away with elections and to adopt the logic of a 'people's democracy' backed up by a 'socialist' militia and police force. That would certainly protect the regime from the consequences of its failures, but it would be a terrible price to pay, and Nove rightly concludes that it would lead to the negation of socialism.

According to the classical model, the transitional period involves a certain socialisation of the economy. Nove departs from this schema by suggesting that the economy should remain open: 'Since there would be a mixed economy, with a large and important private sector, market forces must be allowed to function, and not be disrupted by a combination of price controls, import restrictions and material-allocation' (p. 165). Does the socialisation of the economy mean nationalisations? Here again, the author takes the view that whilst nationalisation itself can easily be achieved, its aims are not easy to **realise**. Capitalists can certainly be dispossessed, but it is rather more difficult 'to divert the profits from private appropriation to the public purse' (p. 167). The third objective of nationalisation—'serving the public good rather than making private profits' (p. 167)—is still more problematic and implies the introduction of criteria for efficiency in nationalised industries. Whilst the nationalisation of water services (p. 168) is not unpopular, the same cannot be said of many other services. Their 'duty, purpose and function' (p. 170) have to be taken into account so as to counter-balance the frequently narrow and selfish interests of workers in the nationalised industries. Noting that 'the interests of the producers and the consumers are not identical and can conflict' (p. 172), Nove then turns to his *bête noire*: irresponsible trade unions and British trade unions in particular. He calls for a trade union movement which can rise above short-sighted sectional considerations (p. 172).

At the other extreme, nationalised industries 'must be responsive to the users' needs, operate economically and with technical efficiency, reflect government policy where this affects them, and, last but not least, they must associate their employees with the decision-making processes,

so that they have some real sense of "belonging", some pride in quality and achievement' (p. 173). All this is fine, but is it any more realistic or any less vague than the 'wild imaginings' of the 'dogmatists' whom Nove constantly attacks? The author himself does not seem very convinced. He ends with the rather sceptical comment that this 'will require great efforts by all concerned' (p. 173). By rejecting the idea of a 'recipe for a transition to socialism' (p. 175) he then restricts the scope of his comments still further. Nove often seems to attenuate his suggestions in an attempt to make the emphasis he places on the harsh realities of life more acceptable. Thus, whilst he accepts that hierarchy should continue to exercise its prerogatives, he also recommends 'the introduction of elements of workers' participation' (p. 175), but such vague formulae can do little to reassure workers who are all too accustomed to being dispossessed of their rights. The suggestion that 'a moderate socialist government' (p. 175) should cooperate with the employers' organisations but that cooperation 'might be conditional upon some restriction on distributed profits' (*ibid*) is even less reassuring. This really is rather vague. Nove claims that 'so much would depend upon a whole series of "unknowns" ' (*ibid*), both at home and abroad, but in fact the argument is all too familiar. What Nove is describing is not a transition to socialism and the dispossession of the capitalists, but a variant on social-democratic politics. He takes us back to a period which seemed to have gone for ever: to the period when social-democracy tried to implement at least part of its programme and was not simply content to apply the policies of its right-wing adversaries, as it does today.

Having said that, the entire discussion revolves around a 'simple' situation in that it is premised upon the existence of advanced capitalism and of a democratic tradition. Whilst we may not enjoy abundance, we certainly do not face the extreme scarcity endured by the vast majority of nations and we do not live in a socio-historical context for which social democracy is an alien idea.

Nove concedes that political change *may* be the key (p. 178), though 'political change' is rather a euphemistic way of describing what is in fact a real conflict of social interests. The transition from capitalism to socialism would involve, and would be dominated by, an anti-capitalist process. To say that it would not be a peaceful process is an understatement, but Nove has nothing to say about this. His desire to avoid discussing these harsh realities and the possible ferocity of class antagonisms is quite understandable, but is it realistic, coming from an author who is so determined to be a realist? By arguing that 'the most vicious conflicts sometimes occur not between but within the classes, over a wide variety of issues' (p. 19), he simply avoids the issue. Conflict within classes is certainly one of socialism's greatest problems, but that does not alter the fact that conflicts between classes are of primary importance, as is perfectly

obvious from the spontaneous comments that managerial elites in Peking, Moscow, New York, or anywhere else for that matter, make about peasants and workers. Faced with a choice between the authoritarianism of real socialism, not to mention the Soviet dissident Yanov's advocacy of 'the reinforcement of hereditary privilege, and the enforcement of social discipline' (p. 179), and the democratisation of the planning system, Nove obviously opts for the latter solution, but precisely how 'planning with market elements' can be implemented remains to be seen. Broadly speaking, the answer would appear to be a Hungarian-style reform: 'first to relax the control of the party and state over agricultural production, and, secondly, to allow the creation of industrial and service co-operatives. . . This implies competition: competition for labour, which would have greater freedom to decide for whom to work; competition for customers' (pp. 180-181). This in its turn implies the possibility of failure and therefore the need to penalise failure.

Nove's solution may well be possible, or even **reasonable**,<sup>4</sup> but it remains very vague. Surely there is an obvious contradiction between his discussion of economies that have for decades been bogged down in absurd but enduring management systems and the suggestion that 'the creation of small autonomous units, especially co-operatives, would be the most urgent and most acceptable first step' (p. 182). Can the effects of Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods be undone by such cautious reforms? Whilst Nove quite rightly refuses to accept demonological explanations for developments in the Soviet Union and whilst he does display a welcome sobriety, he cannot, and presumably does not wish to, deny the magnitude of the tasks involved in transforming the Soviet system.

Nove devotes considerable space to the poor countries, a term which refers both to the 'developing countries' and to the 'real socialist' countries, but he makes it quite clear from the outset (p. 154) that here we are discussing a process of modernisation rather than socialism or even a transition to socialism. In fact this section, even more so than the rest of the book, offers a critique of leftist perspectives rather than constructive proposals.

Whole pages are devoted to refuting the concepts of unequal exchange and dependency (Frank, **Amin**, Emmanuel), and the concept of autarky. Nove's approach leads him to the conclusion that 'a Third World country which seeks to develop under socialist auspices will clearly have to face the fact of dependence on foreign trade. In many instances it will be a growing dependence, as its import requirements increase' (p. 189). The panacea is 'a mixed economy' (p. 193). Quite aside from its specific functions, planning may also, as G. Myrdal noted, have a mobilising function. Caution and realism are the watchwords: 'agricultural co-operation is a desirable aim, but *in no circumstances* should it be enforced upon an unwilling peasantry. . . As **Engels** said a hundred years ago, it is

essential to proceed very carefully and patiently' (p. 193). Unfortunately, his Soviet disciples tend all too often to forget this common-sense advice.

Private firms. . . co-operatives. . . market regulation. . . the central role of the state. . . Nove himself wonders whether it might not be more appropriate to describe this as 'state capitalism' (p. 193). Is it socialism? If socialism is seen as requiring industrialisation, then obviously the requirements of capital accumulation will occupy a high priority (p. 195). Nove is perhaps too ready to describe as 'socialist development' all those features of the brutal accumulation of capital which many Third World countries dress up in a socialist terminology which is even more hollow and threadbare than that used to disguise the commodity known as 'real socialism'. It is quite true that we are not talking about Scandinavia (p. 195) and that it may be a question of fighting for survival. If survival is the issue, peaceful and cautious solutions may not be adequate to the scale of the challenge or to the monstrosity of what is happening as poverty and underdevelopment increase throughout the world.

### *Feasible Socialism*

These then, are the elements and perspectives which Nove uses in his final chapter on 'feasible socialism'. By 'feasible' he means a socialism which could be achieved within the lifetime of a child already conceived 'without our having to make or accept implausible or far-fetched assumptions about society, human beings and the economy' (p. 197). It is unreasonable to hope for abundance. On the other hand, it has to be assumed that 'the state will exist; indeed it will have major politico-economic functions. The state cannot be run meaningfully by all its citizens, and so there is bound to be a division between governors and governed' (p. 197). The verdict is quite clear, as is the assumption that there must be 'a multi-party democracy, with periodic elections to a parliament' (p. 197). The market and competition are also important elements in Nove's socialism.

Nove then goes on to examine in detail the workings of his society and makes some interesting comments on the different kinds of enterprises that will exist within it. Enterprises should be as small as possible to allow real participation on the part of the producers. Some must of necessity be larger because of the need for economies of scale. He therefore envisages a whole range of enterprises including centralised state enterprises, state-owned enterprises (with a management responsible to the workforce), co-operatives, small-scale private enterprises and even freelance self-employed workers (p. 200). Competition will continue to exist, but there will be no 'wasteful' individual competition. Private enterprise will be mainly confined to individuals, but entrepreneurs will be able to employ a few people (p. 207).<sup>5</sup> However, 'be it noted that there is no provision for any class of capitalists; our small entrepreneur *works*. There is then no unearned income arising simply from *ownership*

of capital or land' (p. 207). Whereas the sections on transition are ambiguous, there is here a challenge to the logic of capital (or private capitals). Planning will establish ground rules 'determining the share of total GNP devoted to investment, as distinct from current consumption, and this in turn would affect the rules that are made to ensure adequate savings' (p. 208). The proposed system requires 'prices that balance supply and demand, that reflect cost and use-value. This does *not* exclude subsidies whenever these are considered to be socially desirable, or where external economies are significant (public transport. . .)' (p. 210). Profits will still be made, but they will not be appropriated by capitalists. Even under socialism, there will still be a division of labour because the Marxist vision of abundance is a utopia (p. 214). Nove does, however, qualify this somewhat abrupt comment, which is quite alien to the socialist tradition. He restricts the division of labour to 'functional necessities', and does not preclude the possibility of jobs being rotated insofar as that is possible. Although inequality will still exist and will lead to wage differentials determined by supply and demand of skills, it will be kept to a minimum. References to responsible trade unions and to the active participation of at least a minority of the working population indicate that Nove's vision is inspired by the socialist tradition, even if it is not utopian: 'We must expect any meaningful self-management to alter the worker's frequently passive or negative attitude to work.' (p. 221) If that is possible, why should it not be possible to make the other transformations which the author regards as utopian? Here, he in fact briefly entertains an idea which he rejects elsewhere, namely that the behaviour characteristic of specific contexts at a specific time cannot simply be projected on to a different context. This is of course an idea that is basic to socialism, and we will return to it later.

Nove soon returns to his usual approach. The exchange of commodities will continue to play an important role in foreign trade, and even in trade between 'socialist states' (p. 224). He then devotes some stimulating pages to 'the economic role of democratic politics'. He describes how democratically elected assemblies 'would adopt, amend and choose between internally consistent perspective plans for the economy as a whole' (p. 226). Although he does return to the old tradition of democratic socialism, many of his remarks justify the question which he himself asks: 'Is it socialism?' (p. 227). And when he asserts that 'the danger one foresees is not of a vote to "restore capitalism" ' (p. 229), it is difficult not to conclude that he is indulging in wishful thinking. This comment is based upon the recent experiences of Czechoslovakia (1968) and Poland. It may well be accurate, but Nove does underestimate external pressures and the strength of capitalism at the international level. In fact, the whole book takes little account of the international dimension, a point to which we will also return.

Nove ends with a veritable profession of faith: 'at least the socialism here presented should minimise class struggle, provide the institutional setting for tolerable and tolerant living, at reasonable material standards, with a feasible degree of sovereignty and a wide choice of activities for the citizens' (pp. 229-230). This is a humane and a humanist vision, but is it realistic? It is more reformist than revolutionary and it is designed to improve and adjust the real world rather than to revolutionise it. Nove makes the point himself: ' "Permanent revolution" can be a disaster, as China's cultural revolution has shown. It disorganises, impoverishes, confuses. But permanent vigilance, *permanent reform* will surely be a "must" ' (p. 230). Nove has finally stated the underlying theme: 'permanent reform'. But is that really an alternative?

### III. SOCIALISM WITHOUT REVOLUTION

Nove's book on socialism has a number of strengths. It is written by a man who has a socialist culture—and that in itself is rarer than one might think—and he avoids many of the usual **clichés**. It is written without bitterness, and even with a certain humour. In many ways, it is very attractive. But, as Peny Anderson notes, it is mainly of interest in that it is 'the first central work of the post-war epoch for and about socialism that is clearly written from outside the Marxist **tradition**'.<sup>6</sup>

The author has the considerable advantage of having a detailed professional knowledge of the experience of 'real socialism', and he approaches his subject with sobriety, eschewing all grandiloquence. His work thus represents a challenge to the way Marxism dominates socialist theory and certain socialist practices. It is a challenge that has to be taken up. Nove's defence of market socialism cannot be ignored. Although most thinkers and activists belonging to the socialist tradition would of course regard it as a heresy, this conception has to be included in the socialist debate. A number of Nove's comments and suggestions are pertinent and can only stimulate an open honest debate on socialism. But having said that, we have to question both Nove's 'realism' and the notion that his work provides a description of a possible socialism.

#### *Unrealistic Realism*

There is one notable absence in Nove's work: the real environment. The world in which we live is of course made up of nation-states. But if we ignore the effect of international realities, we are being as unrealistic as those who see everything in terms of world socialism. In that sense, the world-system approach adopted by Immanuel Wallerstein is more realistic, even if it is highly debatable and has already been **challenged**.<sup>7</sup> Without wishing to accept all the views of Wallerstein and his followers, it has to be admitted that the capitalist system has considerable vitality and that

it is a pervasive system. Although Anderson praises Nove's book, he also criticises it for being unrealistic. Nove's vision of socialism fails to take into account **internal** and external anti-socialist pressures: 'Nowhere is there any sense of what a titanic political change would have to occur, with what fierceness of social struggle, for the economic model of socialism he advocates ever to **materialise**.'<sup>8</sup> In other words, 'What has disappeared. . . is virtually all attention to the historical dynamics of any serious conflict over the control of the means of production, as the twentieth century demonstrates **them**.'<sup>9</sup>

We do not have to go back to outdated Stalinist notions to point out the obvious: capitalism would resist the anti-capitalist process with all its might and at every level, national and international. Nove assumes that, provided that we take into account all the economic, social and psychological constraints, we can peacefully get on with the task of building socialism and that no external pressures will be brought to bear. That in itself is a somewhat unrealistic **assumption**.<sup>10</sup> Unless, of course, this socialism is so novel that neither the non-socialist countries, the authoritarian and centralist 'real socialist' countries nor the capitalist countries will find it objectionable. Nove's socialism would have a system of planning, but it would also have a market, a hierarchy, an army and a national territory. It would not disrupt the international consensus. It might well annoy its neighbours, but they would certainly not find it intolerable. Nove's socialism in fact looks like a rehash of the old **social-democratic** model, the only difference being that it takes into account certain realities that the old model did not deign to consider and that it attempts to answer problems that the old model did not have to face. This non-revolutionary vision of transformation is certainly far removed from that of socialist utopias, so much so that it looks more **like** an attempt to reform and **humanise** capitalism rather than a possible form of socialism. After all, in Nove's model, capitalism still exists during the transitional period. It is only during the socialist phase, which is reached by some mysterious **salto mortale**, that the capitalists disappear. Nove might well agree with that point, but he would presumably argue that his 'reformist' society would lead to a better standard of living and would make it possible to build a more just society. But we can immediately object that there is nothing realistic about dreaming of a reformism that is at once cautious and audacious, especially not at a time when capitalism is becoming more barbaric and represents an affront to human dignity. Can we really speak of realism, when Nove claims that the underdeveloped countries will have to embark on the transition to socialism armed only with their own resources, that each country will have to get by as best it can? Where does that leave Bangladesh, black Africa, or even China, with its population of one billion? It is Nove's very insistence on being realistic that makes his proposals so unrealistic. The economics of

'feasible socialism' may mean more than 'socialism without **Marx**'; they may even mean 'socialism without socialism'. Nove's reasonable approach and his rational, or even rationalist, tone belie his undoubted socialist convictions and make even the possibility of socialism seem unlikely.

As we have seen, he has nothing, or nothing specific, to say about the break with capitalism (or bureaucracy in the 'real socialist' countries). It is only in the chapter on socialism that the capitalists disappear. Prior to that, Nove makes no direct attack on capitalism. He assumes that in the Eastern-bloc countries, the system will spontaneously reform itself. He argues that in the Third World, the issue is modernisation rather than socialism. Whatever the situation, there is no mention of conflict. The issue is always avoided. Perhaps this simply reflects the author's fears about the possibility of revolutionary violence. The logic of revolution can of course lead to the negation of socialism, even if it is disguised as socialism. The experience of history leaves no doubts on that score. But the same experience quite clearly teaches us that unless we face the fact that there is a conflict of interests, no real change is possible, nothing can be done to improve the position of the majority, and still less can be done to promote human dignity.

Nove is the author of a number of well-documented studies of the class nature of the Soviet regime and of the characteristics of its ruling elite.<sup>11</sup> But, curiously enough, he has nothing to say about those issues here. He is certainly aware of the selfish individual interests of the ruling elite, yet he simply remarks that a desire for survival might stimulate a desire for reform on its part. The elite may well opt for reform, as certain elements within it presumably realise that sometimes it is necessary to change much in order to change nothing. But elites usually display a stubborn, if not violent, desire to retain their privileges and are very much aware that their interests are not those of the majority. They also display a propensity to use force and at times extreme force to preserve their frequently excessive privileges. To restrict the argument to recent years; reforms in Eastern-bloc countries have often gone hand in hand with repression, and economic liberalisation has often led to a hardening of the regime. Both the elite and the masses have found that conflict is the only stimulus to change and, in certain circumstances, the only thing that opens up channels of communication. The fact that the masses came to the fore in varying degrees in China, Hungary and Poland did a lot to stimulate economic reforms. But even though it is widely recognised within the Soviet Union that there must be economic changes, the desire for change comes up against the inertia of the state apparatus and the masses show little desire to challenge it. Even if they are stimulated by pressure from below, reforms tend to ensure the continued survival of a system of domination which is incarnated in social forces that are determined to defend their own interests. All this has little to do with Nove's vision of the transition to

socialism. It could, however, be said that in the East the authorities are developing more sophisticated ways of running their societies. The brutal, despotic methods which characterised earlier phases (such as the Stalin period in the USSR) are giving way to methods which are certainly authoritarian but which are more skillful in that privileges are negotiated in exchange for concessions. And the louder the protests from below, the greater the concessions. In other words, the social struggle—the class struggle—still manifests its effects in various ways.

George Orwell, that avowed enemy of totalitarianism and supporter of democratic socialism, was more realistic about this than Nove. He knew that any change which altered the basis of class **privilege** in a country like Great Britain would not be a peaceful affair and opined that 'the London gutters will have to run with **blood**'.<sup>12</sup> One does not have to have a taste for violence to see that the stakes are too high to allow for peaceful solutions. Nove himself places too much emphasis on the fact that human beings will always be selfish not to understand this. He admits that **non-capitalism** in fact means anti-capitalism (or anti-bureaucratism in the Eastern-bloc countries) and that it involves conflict, in other words a harsh and probably violent struggle. He is right to hope that errors can be avoided and that the birth pangs of the transitional period can be mitigated, but if he believes that conflict can be avoided, he has to abandon any hope for socialism. He would do better to revive the best aspects of the liberal tradition, defined in its traditional Anglo-American sense (and not in the sense that Reagan uses the word), or to return to a certain social-democratic vision, though it is far from certain that that vision still possesses any credibility.

We spoke earlier of 'socialism without socialism'. The irony is quite in keeping with the ironic and at times off-hand remarks which the author makes so often (especially towards the end of the preface written for the French edition). It is almost as though he wanted to distance himself from his own book, as though he was aware that his 'realism' undermines his socialist vision. Perhaps he realises that his project can be implemented only because it is so innocuous or, alternatively, that it cannot be implemented because it is not sufficiently motivated. Nove is obviously fascinated by the problem of socialism and by the adventures and mis-adventures of the Russian revolution. But he is also a specialist in Soviet affairs, a serious and well-informed analyst, and a sober, detached scholar. He therefore concentrates on reality as it is and reaches the sombre conclusion that whilst progress may be possible, a different society is unthinkable. He argues, for instance, that if human beings are selfish in one context, they will always be selfish. If he believes that socialism is dead, he should say so openly. The passion, the devotion, the intelligence and the terror which socialism has inspired deserve more **than** a passing salute, a fashionably dry realism and a few offhand comments.

## IV. THE PROBLEMATIC OF SOCIALISM: THE OLD AND THE NEW

Given that Nove does discuss the problematic of socialism seriously, we cannot avoid the questions he raises. Is the only alternative to his proposals a return to the 'stupid' or 'intelligent' forms of dogmatism he denounces so tirelessly? Are a stateless society, abundance and world socialism really so many dangerous mirages? One cannot jettison so many aspects of the old socialist project quite that easily. I have tried to show this by bringing out the difficulties and contradictions involved in Nove's project. But it may be more useful to stress the positive aspects of the major themes of socialism.

We can begin with abundance, the theme with which Nove quite rightly opens his argument. The problems of abundance and scarcity legitimately dominate the whole debate over socialism. No one can deny that abundance is unlikely to exist in the near future. It is possible that abundance would have harmful effects. I think that mankind would happily take that risk. But rejecting the idea that lies behind the notion of abundance implies rather more than admitting that scarcity is inevitable. It implies denying a possibility that has existed ever since industrial capitalism first revealed its potential: the possibility that the human condition could be improved to a degree that would have been unthinkable in any previous period of history.

This brings us to the heart of the problem: the concrete possibility of a massive improvement in the human condition. In other words, industrial capitalism meant that it was possible to find a practical solution to the evils of the past. It was no longer a matter of bringing heaven down to earth, as it had been in Feuerbach's day; the point was to recognise that industry had reshaped the world and that the world now held the solution to the 'curses of the past'. Before the industrial period, it had been impossible to imagine a world in which necessities could be widely available. There was no need to define the terms of the argument strictly; what was certain beyond any doubt was that there could be infinitely more, that things would be infinitely **better**.<sup>13</sup> The potential for at least relative abundance meant that individuals could be more equal and that they had a greater right to happiness in this life. The whole socialist tradition saw the development of society in terms of an expansion of its potential. As Nove himself notes, 'It was quite proper for Marx in 1880 to attack Malthus and to stress how great are the still unused resources of the earth' (p. 17). It will of course be objected that overpopulation is now a serious problem throughout the world and that relative scarcity at least is obviously going to be with us for a long time to come. That is undeniable, but it does mean that there is no basis for socialism. By observing what was really happening in certain countries, and especially in England, the early socialists came to the conclusion that the industrial age had

opened up radically new and previously unthinkable possibilities for human liberation. In other words, poverty was not inevitable. Does a century's hindsight mean that we have to add anything to that? We have to add that the industrial age also has a dangerous potential. But that has in fact always been the other side to the socialist tradition, with its slogan of 'socialism or barbarism'. That slogan shows how far the capitalist industrial movement, or in other words the industrial reality of the nineteenth-century world, could be seen as a threat to the human race. There are two sides to the socialist vision of the industrial world: it has the potential to liberate mankind, but society has first to be mastered. All this is well known, but it tends to be forgotten. It is often forgotten that socialists have always taken the view that historical analysis is itself a historical phenomenon and that they have always rejected 'naturalist' explanations of society. Nove's book reflects the ambiguities of the period in which we live. No one would deny that the modern world contains horrifying possibilities. But at the same time, there is a tendency to think that it *inevitably* generates such fearful evils that there is no possibility of radical liberation and that society is governed by *inexorable natural laws*. We have replaced the fates of the Ancient World with a new sense of *fatality*.<sup>14</sup> It is as inexorable as ever and seems to preclude the possibility of creating a society that might be radically better than that of the past. A radically better society would be one which could free the majority from poverty, submission and oppression. We are now infinitely richer than we once were (in the West, at least), but it is generally accepted that, more than ever before, we are *of necessity* a threat to ourselves and to our environment. Fate and natural laws apply to all, and they are no less rigid or demanding than the laws of God. And, as in the Ancient World, anyone who defies fate provokes the wrath of the gods. We simply have to submit to the gods, to heaven or to their earthly representatives. Economic laws are inexorable, and scarcity is man's lot. To say that this takes us back to the pre-socialist or even the pre-Enlightenment period would be an understatement. It brings us back to the present day, to the daily press in Paris, London or Peking, to the eternal litanies about the harsh realities of economics, the inevitability of inequality, and the inescapable constraints of the economy. The general diagnosis is not wrong, and it is quite true that the modern world does pose serious threats to mankind. It is the explanations that are phantasmagorical. What is worse, they represent a form of ideological manipulation. It is both absurd and socially inevitable (in terms of individual interests) to argue that abundance is impossible because there is no limit to the things we can desire and then to conclude that scarcity will therefore always be man's lot. And it is equally absurd to claim that the existence of scarcity means that there can never be a truly egalitarian society and that there is no hope of mankind ever being anything but selfish and acquisitive. To argue that we must accept that this is

impossible (the ideological tune of the moment) or that we can only make minor improvements which leave the existing structures of society largely intact (**Nove**) is not a realistic acceptance of the immense problems facing the modern world. It is tantamount to bowing to the invasive power of capitalism. To claim that our present situation is the outcome of natural and not social objective forces really does mean putting capitalism in command and making it the master of ideology, if not the master of our very minds. I have quoted Nove's argument to the effect that selfishness and acquisitiveness are an eternal part of human nature. A lot of other writers probably accept this view, and it is probably true that it represents the popular consensus. But unless we accept social ills as something natural, no one can argue that this will always be the case. Even if abundance is impossible, no rational person can prove that we are therefore objectively condemned to live in an unequal, oppressive and alienating society. To claim that societies which have the potential of our societies must of necessity be flawed in that way is a religious or, to be more accurate, an ideological argument. But it is quite true to say that there are no limits to the social desire to sustain a social logic which makes inequality and oppression seem natural and inevitable. The socialist tradition rejects the view that the 'density' of societies is governed by 'natural' laws and quite rightly argues that societies are historical, that the rise of capitalist industry contains within it a new potential, as do the demands which social groups raise and the forms of action which they develop. The socialist tradition is based upon the conviction that it is objectively and materially possible to create a new society, that the mobilisation of the human will (militant action on the part of the dispossessed) can provide an answer to mankind's most pressing problems. This is more than a mobilising myth à la **Sorel** and more than a form of science fiction (a utopian vision rather than a utopia), even though they too are important elements of the socialist tradition. The fact that such a society may never exist, or that it may exist only in a very distant future, that the hopes of the early socialists who, like everyone else thought in terms of their own lifetimes and not in terms of geological eras, will not easily be fulfilled does not invalidate the ideas which lie at the heart of modern socialism. And it certainly does not invalidate **Marx's** ideas. The rise of industrial capitalism and the social changes it generated helped to popularise ideas that first emerged with the Enlightenment: it was possible for human beings to have a different destiny.

The millenarianism, the religious vision of redemption and the mystical elements which ran through and clung to the socialism which emerged from this new vision of history and which influenced militant forms of action are less important than the obvious and unprecedented fact that industrial society and all the social concepts it implied meant that the question of liberating mankind was no longer a hollow dream or a poetic

fantasy about going back to the **golden** age: it had become a concrete problem. It was certainly an infinitely difficult problem, infinitely more complex than the whole socialist tradition believed it to be. But it has to be remembered, and this is something which is all too often forgotten, that the socialism Marx conceived was a synthesis of the theoretical and practical elements that were available to him. It seemed at that time that socialism would emerge quite naturally from a relatively **uncomplicated** capitalism. It seemed that socialism would be easy to **construct**.<sup>15</sup> It was based upon productive forces which were much more limited than those we know today, but it also reflected a more restricted range of needs, a stronger communal tradition, a lesser degree of capitalism and, it has to be said, a lower tolerance of mass barbarism. The past is dead and **gone**. We have to live, think and act with the effects of history. The history with which we must live is the history of the development of capitalism and, whatever Marx may have thought, it is far from having exhausted its potential for expansion. The realities of history have given the lie to that argument, and no one can deny the fact. Whilst capitalism or the modern industrial system has developed to a remarkable degree, its harmful effects are also greater than ever before. It has a capacity for all the most modern forms of modern violence, an ability to suppress and a constant tendency to create extremes of wealth and poverty on both a national and an international scale. As the theoreticians of totalitarianism knew only too well, there is such a thing as modern barbarism and even if we do not identify it with capitalism, it is undoubtedly part of the modern world. Barbarism is simply one aspect of a world that has been reshaped and invaded by the values of the West and its industrial logic. Taking this situation into account is one thing, but turning the problem of abundance into a bogeyman is another thing altogether. If we accept that the constraints of social life are inescapable, then we have to admit that the improvements we are proposing can never be made.

In his introduction, Nove comments that 'I am aware that human acquisitiveness is a force which cannot be ignored, which indeed must be harnessed in the search for efficiency' (p. 7). The tone is very reminiscent of Hobbes' suggestion that there must be some force to tame the intrinsic evils of human nature. Even if we introduce a greater balance of powers and increase public accountability, this implies that we must accept that someone must have authority over the majority. We thus legitimise something which will become authoritarian or even despotic.

This much is obvious from the value that is attached to the particularly threatening institution of the state. Much as Nove may mock the old programmes for a stateless socialism, and much as he may argue that the absence of any state can lead to the worst forms of despotism, he cannot deny that statism too has its dangers. How can anyone fail to see that the most brutal societies of the twentieth century have arisen when the state

has been granted excessive powers and when power has been handed over to the state or to an omniscient head of state? If the state, nationalism and selfishness are always to be with us, even in attenuated form, we can only conclude that more horrors lie in **store**.<sup>16</sup> Rather than refusing to accept the obvious, we should, rationally but boldly, take into account the complexity of a world which no longer permits the simple hopes and solutions we inherited from the past. Of course we cannot do away with the state or with nations by **waving** a magic wand. We should, however, remember that in Mao's China the extension of the rights of the state went hand in hand with the restriction or even the abolition of the rights of the individual. Nor should it be forgotten that Soviet society is, in its present form, very legalistic. We have only to look at a rapidly developing capitalist state like Singapore or at certain impoverished Third World countries to see what state despotism means. Even in Europe (and the US), calls to roll back the state mask the insidious **growth** of a state that is all the stronger for being less visible but more pervasive. The ruling class has always longed for the day when citizens would internalise the view that the system is legitimate. Rather than accepting the state as something inevitable, we have to think of at least provisional ways to prevent the spread of statism and to allow individuals and collectivities to take more initiative and power. It is at this level that Nove and others have many interesting and stimulating comments to make. But putting all these good ideas into practice means that we have to think against the state **and** mobilise **against** the state. In other words, the word revolution is still on the agenda, even if it does strike fear into some hearts.

We have to learn from the past. We have to weigh up the risks of the inevitable destabilisation that a revolution would produce. We have to face the question of money, of the market and of the hierarchy of skills realistically and unflinchingly. We have to take a realistic view of the **withering** away of the state. And I would point out in passing that the socialist tradition is not quite so blind to all these questions as is sometimes claimed. Time and time again, socialists have proclaimed that socialism must allow people to develop their skills and must not lead to **uniformity**,<sup>17</sup> that during the transitional period and even during the first phases of socialism there will be certain inequalities because there will be no such thing as abundance.<sup>18</sup> But if inequality persists and does not disappear, and if hierarchy is still similar to the one we know today, we **cannot** speak of socialism or even of an improvement in the human condition. As Marx said in a rather different context, that kind of socialism is simply old night **soil**.<sup>19</sup>

This brings us to the question of the immutability of human nature, which is **merely** the obverse of the abundance argument. Abundance is impossible because men and women are what they are: egotistic, **self-centred** creatures. Once we accept this argument, we reject the problematic

of socialism. If nothing can really change, if there is room for only minor improvements, the world will always be a jungle in which man fights man. A whole host of thinkers have used a vast range of arguments to prove that we need a society or a regime that can control or bridle man's animal instincts. It is often argued that we need an authoritarian power to defend the common interest against the rapacity of individual instincts, or that we at least need some authority to restrain the excesses of a zoological being who, his pretensions notwithstanding, is still very close to his animal origins—and indeed that he is a particularly unpleasant animal. It was against this very argument, which has been central to the thinking of societies of all periods, that the Enlightenment and the socialist tradition which derives from it rebelled. The new world which the thinkers of the eighteenth century foresaw was not a world of large scale industry. In many ways it was similar to the world the *Encyclopédistes* glimpsed when they published volumes of plates showing ingenious but primitive artisan techniques. The world they wanted to see offered new possibilities and a new framework for the analysis of man's relationship with the outside world. They believed of course that new environments produce new forms of behaviour. We could now add that new environments can produce either negative or positive changes. If the historical environment deteriorates, behaviour will also deteriorate. But nothing is immutable. On the contrary, the twentieth century has seen rapid changes in ethics and value systems all over the world. The die has not been cast. If it had been, it would be pointless to discuss socialism, even in speculative terms. The critical tradition which became an influential current of thought after the Enlightenment was not mistaken when it saw human liberation in terms of a dialectic between reciprocal changes in the human environment and in human beings themselves.

The terms in which the problem is now posed are obviously not what they once were. Our task has become more difficult and we have to revise radically our outdated and simplistic ideas. The task may be more difficult and more complex, it may take longer than we once thought and it may lead to unexpected results, but none of this removes the urgent need to get down to it. Unlike Nove, who believes that we can construct a form of socialism by using elements of the real world as it now is, I believe that we have to find a path to a different future by critically examining both past and present, even if it is true that the road to liberation is a long road. Perhaps the task will never be completed. But it is still the **only** task worthy of mankind. This is the heritage left us by the socialist tradition and by Marx himself. In that sense, we still have to construct socialism with Marx and with the socialist tradition.

## NOTES

Perry Anderson, *In The Tracks of Historical Materialism*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 100.

Cf. p. 60: 'It seems also that to assume away personal selfishness, acquisitiveness, competitiveness is **far-fetched**.'

3. It was in fact Bukharin who created and theorised this problematic.
4. Ernest Mandel replies at length to Nove's criticisms in Chapter 10 ('Is Socialism really Possible, Necessary, Desirable') of his forthcoming book on socialism, *Marx's Theoretical Heritage: Restating the Case for Socialism at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Mandel tries to demonstrate that 'market socialism' can only lead to the restoration of capitalism. On the other hand, he argues that a democratically centralised marketless socialism is both practicable and necessary. Ultimately the debate centres upon the role of the market in social development rather than upon the need for a market as such. Mandel follows the majority socialist tradition in arguing that the market must eventually wither away. According to Nove, the market will be central to the activity of socialist society, but it will not have the role that it has under capitalism. In his reply to Nove, Mandel accepts that it might be possible (or useful?) to have individual enterprises under socialism. In recent years, the People's Republic of China, which once banned practically all private economic activity, has begun to allow individuals to own property on a small scale. Individual private enterprise is restricted to areas in which there are serious shortages (of restaurants, hairdressers, etc.). This sector is still limited but it is developing very rapidly and larger enterprises which employ people outside the family are beginning to appear.
6. Anderson, *In the Tracks*. . . , p. 101.
7. For a selection of material by Wallerstein's followers and his critics, see Christopher K. Chase-Dunn, (ed.), *The Socialist States in the World-System*, Sage Publications, 1982. Cf. Roland Lew, 'Problématique du "socialisme réel": à propos de quelques publications récentes', *Revue des pays de l'est*, (Brussels), no. 1, 1984.
8. Anderson, *In the Tracks*. . . , p. 102.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
10. According to Anderson, Nove's book is characterised by 'a typically utopian abstraction of actual historical reality and its empirical field of forces' and his socialism is 'located in thin air' (*ibid*). There is something of a contradiction between these criticisms and the earlier favourable comments.
11. Including a very interesting study entitled 'The Class Struggle of the Soviet Union Revisited', *Soviet Studies*, no. 3, July 1983, pp. 298-312.
12. George Orwell, 'My Country Left or Right', *The Collected Letters, Essays and Journalism of George Orwell*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1968, vol. 1, *An Age Like This*, p. 539; Cf. 'The Lion and the Unicorn', vol. 2, *My Country Left or Right*, pp. 56-109; Simon Leys, *Orwell ou la haine de la politique*, Paris, Herman, 1984.
13. In his recent 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', Norman Geras discusses different possible meanings of 'abundance' in Marx. He concludes that the term cannot refer to an unlimited abundance, which is **truly** impossible (a continent for everyone). For Marx, 'there is abundance relative to some standard of reasonableness which, large and generous as it may be possible for it to be, still falls short of any fantasy of abundance without limits', N. Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', in *New Left Review*, 150, March-April 1985, pp. 82-83. Mandel adopts a similar position in his reply to Nove.

14. Cf. Nove's comment (p. 8) to the effect that modern society's problems relate to the industrial process as such.
15. Cf. Richard Adamiak: 'All the early **nineteenth-century** socialists are confident that such a system, socialism, is not only feasible, but simple to operate and requiring no coercion'; 'State and Society in Early Socialist Thought', *Survey* vol. 26, Winter 1982, p. 11.
16. Nove often cites **Trotsky** to justify his argument, but when it comes to the eternal characteristics of human beings, he makes somewhat dubious use of his supposed ally. Thus, "Man is by nature a lazy animal", said **Trotsky** in 1920. 'He can also be lazy in 1983, and quite probably in 2020.' (p. 19). Nove is referring to **Terrorism** and **Communism**, in which **Trotsky** calls for the **militarisation** of labour. That text is very different from both Trotsky's anti-Bolshevism of the pre-1917 period and from his **anti-Stalinism** of the post-1923 period. What is more important, the views **Trotsky** held in 1920 could not have led to what he understood by socialism. It may well be true that someone who had only recently rallied to Bolshevism may have felt the need to exaggerate somewhat. It may also be true that the **cruel** civil war period introduced a note of hysteria. But that is no justification for accepting this hyperauthoritarian vision as a common sense view. There is a vast difference between the **Trotsky** of 1920, who came very close to what was to become the Stalinist position, and **Trotsky** the anti-Stalinist. Whether or not his views are consistent is another matter altogether. The striking thing about the 1920 text is that it is so ahistorical and so metaphysical, presumably because it was written in response to the urgent needs of a brief period of civil war. This makes the argument even more untenable: centuries of history are invoked to justify a difficult position which he held for only a few months before accepting the common sense solution of NEP.
17. The recent debate within political philosophy over the issue of equality and justice is a reminder that according to Marx the aim of a socialist or communist society is not to enforce egalitarianism via a process of levelling down. On the contrary, individuals must be allowed to develop their different and unequal capacities. It could even be said that Marx belongs to the 'individualist tradition', to, that is, the tradition which sees the liberation of the individual as the criterion by which any social change or reform is to be judged. Collective emancipation therefore means the liberation of all individuals. Marx has little in common with those 'socialists' who would place collective rights over those of the individual.
18. Nove is not unaware of this. He hides behind **Trotsky** to defend the idea that a market is a necessity. But **Trotsky** was not simply the leader of the revolutionary opposition. In 1922, he was a war leader; in 1932 he was an exile. In 1922, he defended NEP, a policy which he himself had recommended in vain in 1919. In 1920 he called for the **militarisation** of the economy and later produced an indefensible theoretical justification for that policy.
19. An egalitarian programme is not a guarantee of egalitarianism. As a realist, Nove will have no difficulty in agreeing with that. He will no doubt also recall that in the young state of Israel, wage differentials were very similar to those which he proposes for his socialist society (roughly one to three). That egalitarianism did not **simply** reflect the young state's objective situation; it was a value which was actively promoted.