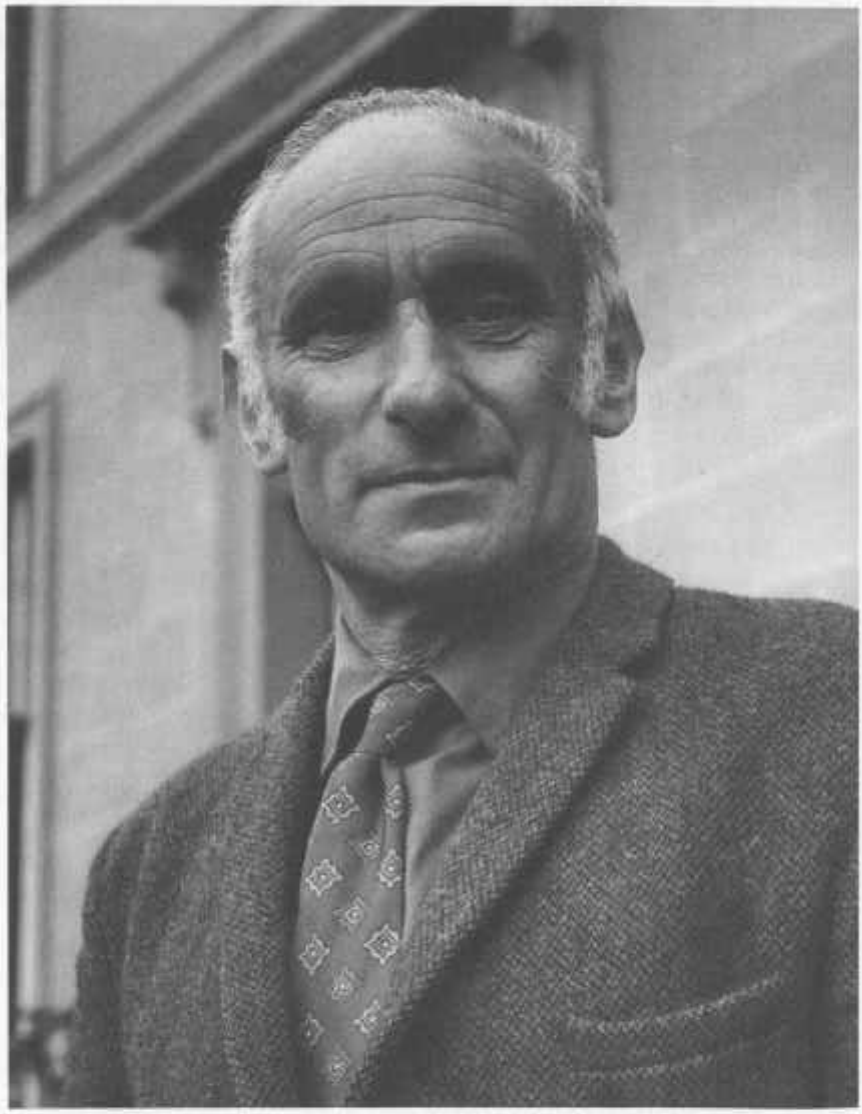

ALEC NOVE *Glasgow Evening Citizen*

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Alec Nove
1915–1994

ALEC NOVE, for long Britain's most distinguished Sovietologist, was a political economist in a tradition which is now in danger of being squeezed out of university departments. He knew in intimate detail how the Soviet economy actually worked and he could communicate his knowledge in lectures (in several languages) and in his prolific writings with unique insight, clarity, and humour. He was also in his last years an especially perceptive critic of some of the policies pursued in the Russian transition to a post-Soviet economy. The pity is that the Russian Government did not make more use of his profoundly practical knowledge, based as it was not only on an exceptional understanding of the changing economic system and of the plight of real people in Russian society but also on his experience as a civil servant in the Board of Trade in early post-war Britain as this country gradually dismantled many of its wartime controls.

Alec Nove was also more than a political economist. He made significant contributions to the study of twentieth-century Russian economic history and to the political and sociological analysis of the Soviet Union. He was, furthermore, equally at home discussing Pushkin or the very latest works of Russian creative literature and, in pre-glasnost days, his reading of the major Soviet literary journals provided him with insights unavailable to those specialists who did not stray beyond *Pravda*, the Soviet statistical yearbooks, and specialised economic publications. In the years between the death of Stalin and the accession of Gorbachev, it was often possible to discover more of the

truth about Soviet society in the form of 'fiction' than it was in the pages of *Pravda* ('Truth').

Alec Nove, whose original family name was Novakovsky, was born into a Russian Jewish family on 24 November 1915 in what was then Petrograd (later Leningrad) and is now restored to its original name of St Petersburg. His ancestors had lived for generations in the Ukraine where his paternal grandfather was a rabbi with a reputation for piety and scholarship and his maternal grandfather owned a windmill at the end of a railway line in Poltava province.

Alec's father was short but tough and, when conscripted into the Russian Army, gained a reputation as a weight-lifter and wrestler. He subsequently became politically active as a social democrat of the Menshevik variety, was arrested by the tsarist police and spent the years 1903–5 as a political prisoner. Following his release, he succeeded in attending the 1907 Congress in London of the Russian Social-Democratic Party and stayed long enough to earn his return fare while taking the opportunity to learn English. Once back in Russia he lived and worked illegally in St Petersburg, for Jews were not allowed to reside there unless they had a degree or were 'merchants of the first guild' (which meant, in effect, very rich).

Alec's mother, born in 1878, was a determined and energetic woman who, notwithstanding her father's strong disapproval, was committed to becoming a doctor. She gained admission to a women's medical faculty in St Petersburg and duly qualified as a physician in 1904. She wished to become an emancipated Russian and, once she had obtained her degree, she was able to live legally in the Russian capital. She had been practising as a doctor for some years in St Petersburg before she met her future husband in about 1912. Alec, her only child, was born when she was thirty-seven.

When Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in March 1917 Alec's mother informed him of this event and, as she later told him, he smiled. Since he was only one-and-a-half at the time, he had no memory of having made the desired political response. Alec's father held a junior post in the Provisional Government, but after the Bolsheviks seized power he was arrested by them. Upon his release, he worked for a time on the Bolshevik side in the civil war since, like many Mensheviks, he believed that the Whites were even worse. He stood for election to the Moscow soviet as a Menshevik and defeated his Bolshevik opponent, but the election was promptly annulled. In 1922 he was arrested again and exiled to Siberia but was given a choice between long-term

exile and applying for an exit visa. He left the Soviet Union later that year and found a job in London with a Dutch firm trading with Russia. It took Alec's mother and her seven-year-old son another six months to get the necessary permission to leave Russia to join Jacob Novakovsky in Belsize Park.

When the family arrived in Britain they discovered that they had distant relatives living in Manchester who had arrived in Britain at the turn of the century. They had changed their name from Novakovsky to Nove and so the new immigrants followed suit. By 1924 Alec was a pupil at King Alfred School in North London. In due course he went on to the London School of Economics where he graduated in 1936 with an Upper Second in the B.Sc.(Econ.). He seems to have celebrated by paying a visit to Paris where he saw one of the great demonstrations of that period. On his return he undertook a number of research jobs but found no permanent employment. Shortly before the war he married Joan Rainford (who died in April 1995). There were two children of the union, David and Perry, but the marriage itself did not survive the war.

Early in 1939 Nove joined the Territorials and, when war came, served in the Royal Signals. He remained in the army until 1946, finishing as a major in Intelligence. He was among the last British soldiers to get back from France in June 1940 and felt enormously lucky to survive the war. He was always conscious that if he had remained in Russia he would either have ended, as the son of an anti-Communist, in the gulag or served in the Red Army in which the losses in the first two years of the conflict reached eight million. Moreover, all Jewish prisoners of war on the Russian front were killed on the spot by the Germans. Outside every town in occupied Russia and Ukraine—not just at Babyi Yar—there was a pit of machine-gunned men, women and children whom the Germans did not bother to transport to the death camps.

Even in the British Army, Alec Nove's luck held. Twice a ship on which he might have sailed was sunk: when half his unit was sent to Singapore he happened to be in the other half. His sense of just being a survivor deepened and haunted him all his life. Reflecting on this, in an autobiography even briefer than Hume's—just two pages—which he wrote for members of his family only a few years before his death, Nove observed:

> There but for the grace of God—but why should God have shown me grace? I was just lucky. Any children I may have had could have been killed too—

> over a million children were massacred in those years, in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, Belzec. A woman survivor of Auschwitz told me how she saw lorry-loads of weeping and praying naked children which stopped close to her hut—the gas-chambers were not yet ready to receive them. She said that she lost her faith in God that day, and who could blame her?

Having survived the war, Alec Nove had to decide on a career and in 1947 he joined the Civil Service, working at first in the Board of Trade on price control and export targets. From his experience in this department he learned much about what governments can and cannot do, which stood him in good stead later. Moreover, he continued to take a keen interest in the land of his birth, having—with the encouragement of his parents—steeped himself in Russian culture from his youth and being keenly interested in Russian history, literature, and the economic system. Even in his early years at the Board of Trade he was using his lunch-hour to pursue research on the Soviet Union and was soon submitting articles to the leading British quarterly journal in the field, *Soviet Studies*, and other publications.

Alec Nove married for a second time in 1951. His wife, Irene MacPherson, was a Scot from Glasgow, and when the Board of Trade agreed to allow Alec to spend two years in the Department of Soviet Studies at the University of Glasgow the offer was as acceptable to her as to him. Alec and Irene took charge of the two boys from the first marriage (David was later to become a tax inspector and Perry a detective inspector) and a third son—the only child of this happy, second marriage—Charles (in adulthood a BBC presenter) was born in 1960.

Nove's presence in the Department, even on a temporary basis (1952–4), transformed it while, at the same time, deepening his own interest in academic study. Nevertheless, he honoured his commitment to return to Whitehall, transferring in 1956 to the Economic Section of the Treasury and working for much of the next two years on Soviet affairs in conjunction with the Joint Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of Defence. It was in 1958 that Nove became a full-time scholar, starting his university teaching career at the London School of Economics with the title of Reader in Russian Social and Economic Studies. Along with Leonard Schapiro, he provided the core of a formidable array of expertise on the Soviet Union at the LSE. In 1963, however, Nove was persuaded to apply for a new Chair and the directorship of the renamed Institute of Soviet and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow and was duly elected. Glasgow was to remain his home city

and the University his academic base right up to the time of his death in May 1994. Although he formally retired from his teaching and administrative duties in 1982, the University's standing as an important centre of study of Russia and Eastern Europe continued to benefit from Nove's presence as an Honorary Senior Research Fellow.

The atmosphere of Glasgow suited him. He enjoyed talking with his colleagues and took an obvious pleasure in developing an argument and hitting on a piquant example to drive it home. He expressed himself with gusto and took pleasure in a wide variety of recreations which he listed as 'walking in the Scottish hills, travel, music, theatre, exotic dishes'. He was an opera-lover and an enthusiastic supporter of Scottish Opera who would also make the time to write articles for a friend to publish in Paris on the historical background to the great Russian operas such as *Boris Godunov* and *Yevgeny Onegin*. He had a keen interest in sport, including chess (which he played spiritedly) and most ball-games. He enjoyed watching football and did not confine his viewing to television but attended matches in Glasgow from time to time. He had learned to play cricket as a schoolboy in London and even when over the age of fifty he turned out occasionally for the Glasgow University Staff XI (as he had done more frequently for the LSE staff team), displaying an impressive agility in the field. His love of the countryside and hillwalking consolidated his affection for his adopted country, as was evident from the fact that this globetrotting academic returned year after year to the Western Isles, particularly the Isle of Coll, for his summer holidays.

Nove was, though, an inveterate traveller. He learned much from seeing places for himself and talking with people who lived in the Communist systems he was studying. Thus, he had a special interest in paying study visits to Russia and Eastern Europe, but he was also in great demand in the rest of the world as a visiting speaker and conference participant. He spent some time in the mid-1950s in the British Embassy in Moscow and in the early 1960s he travelled to Moscow by train with his wife and new baby. In 1962–3 he accepted an invitation from his friend, Roy Laird, to be the Distinguished Visiting Rose Morgan Professor at the University of Kansas for that academic year. Following his nominal retirement, he accepted a series of visiting professorships which took him, *inter alia*, to Columbia University, Berkeley, Paris, and Stockholm. His travels from the outset of his career as a full-time academic brought him often to the United States but also to Central and South America, to various parts of Europe, to China and Japan.

As a Russophile, he was, however, particularly pained by the denial to him over many years of a Soviet visa. At the beginning of the 1970s he was put on a KGB blacklist, along with a number of other British officials, academics and journalists, in retaliation for a large-scale expulsion of Soviet spies from Britain. When the International Political Science Association held its triennial conference in Moscow in 1979, and took a strong line with the Soviet authorities by insisting that unless everyone on the conference programme received a Soviet visa the event would be called off, Nove made sure he was on the programme. He took a lively part in the proceedings and had many useful conversations outside the conference halls. His belief that this visit would form a valuable precedent and ensure his freedom to return to Russia was, unfortunately, soon shattered. The senseless ban was restored, and it was not until the Gorbachev era, when so much altered in Russia, that Alec Nove was made welcome once more. So rapidly did things change then that Nove was not only invited to give lectures in Moscow on economic reform but also to write on that subject for *Kommunist*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party which, in a sharp break with the past, was being turned into a forum for debate.

Indeed, Nove was attached to the British Embassy for six weeks in late 1989 as the first holder of a 'visiting fellowship' set up by the Ambassador, Sir Rodric Braithwaite, specifically to strengthen the Embassy's economic expertise. With sound judgement, he invited Alec Nove to be the first holder of this unusual post. Nove had extensive conversations with all the leading Russian economists from Leonid Abalkin to the young Yegor Gaidar and spent some time in Leningrad as well as Moscow. He was much impressed by the political changes, but remained gloomy about the economy, telling Braithwaite: 'Not only can't I see the light at the end of the tunnel. I can't even see the tunnel'. By the time he arrived in Moscow to take up this attachment to the British Embassy, Alec Nove was seventy-four, but as Rodric Braithwaite noted in his diary at the time, he was 'as splendid as ever'.

Nove's travels continued literally to the time of his death. It was after spending a short time back in his native St Petersburg and moving on to Sweden, where he received an honourary doctorate in Stockholm, that, along with his wife Irene, he took a holiday in Norway. On a day in which they had, in Irene's words, enjoyed an 'absolutely lovely sail on a Norwegian fjord', Alec had a massive heart attack that night and died in hospital the following day (15 May 1994). Characteristically, on the

way to the hospital he had sat up in the ambulance and said: 'I'm perfectly all right, you know'.

Alec Nove was a prolific writer, but a scholar who did not write to fulfil the expectations of extraneous bodies but because he had something compelling to say. His urge to communicate his ideas and reflections was such that he could become quite agitated if deprived of either of his most basic tools—a pen and paper. One of us recalls an encounter on Lancaster station when he expressed great concern that he would not be able to buy writing paper until the train reached Carlisle. Luckily, it was possible to supply some sheets on the spot and doubtless a newspaper article or the outline of a more substantial chapter was completed before the train reached its destination. Alec Nove turned late in life to the computer, and his relationship with it was one of endless frustration. Not wholly accepting that computers did exactly what they were instructed to do, Alec would work himself into a frenzy, pounding his desk and on occasion shouting at the machine in exasperation.

As this suggests, Alec was not someone who hid his emotions. More often than not, however, it was a boyish enthusiasm he exuded as he hurried to share the knowledge of whatever latest article by a Russian writer or meeting with a Hungarian economist had impressed him. Even when he was expressing his irritation with the latest idiocy emanating from government, whether in London or Moscow, cheerfulness kept breaking out. He had a wonderful memory for the political jokes which were told in Russia and Eastern Europe during the Communist period and his highly effective use of them in lectures and conference speeches made these presentations as entertaining as they were instructive. He could give scintillating lectures on the basis of a minimum of notes (the back of an envelope often sufficing).

Alec Nove's first academic publication (in 1949) was on Soviet law and in the course of his career he went on to produce several hundred scholarly articles and contributions to symposia. Some of them he collected into books and they made up several of the eleven single-author books he published. In addition to these there were two co-authored volumes, and eight books of which he was editor and part-author. He had a remarkable ability to see what mattered and to make connections which others missed. So much of his output was of value that there is a certain arbitrariness in picking out his major works. There is no doubt, however, that simply in terms of explaining how the Soviet economy worked (and how much less efficient it was than Soviet

propagandists claimed and Western politicians for a time feared), an important contribution was made by his first major book, *The Soviet Economy*, published originally in 1961. It went through three editions and was then radically rewritten as *The Soviet Economic System* (1977; 2nd edn., 1980; 3rd edn., 1986). His *Economic History of the USSR* (1969; 2nd edn., 1989; 3rd edn., 1992) also became a key text.

Nove was one of the first writers to show that behind the monolithic facade of the Soviet system bureaucratic battles were fought. He noted that the supposedly all-powerful State Planning Committee (*Gosplan*) was very reliant on information in the possession of the economic ministries, so that 'in practice the sheer volume of work and of decisions in *Gosplan* places very considerable powers in the hands of the ministries'. Nove, in *The Soviet Economic System*, used the term 'centralized pluralism' to encapsulate the tug-of-war which he saw as occurring between the ministries and *Gosplan* and the struggle for a greater share of resources among the various ministries. That was stretching the concept of pluralism too far, but it drew attention to an important aspect of Soviet political life which accounts from within the totalitarian paradigm tended to miss.

Nove's *Stalinism and After* (1975) was a work of political and social history which complemented his *Economic History of the USSR*. Even his most scholarly work was never especially heavily footnoted. He read widely, but his work is outstanding more for the quality of its insights than for the detail of its documentation. *Stalinism and After* was, even by Nove's standards, light on notes and it was written at high speed. In the preface Nove wrote: 'It is customary to express thanks . . . for the advice of colleagues, and I usually do so gratefully. This work, however, was largely written on a Hebridean island where I had no advice . . . '. Yet even that work, resting as it did on a lifetime of reflection on the subject, can still be read with enjoyment, notwithstanding its grim subject-matter, and for instruction, in spite of the vast amount of new information which has become available since it was written.

For all students of Russia and the Soviet Union the era which began when Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party in March 1985 was one of mounting excitement. Not only were there momentous changes in the object of their study but a vast improvement in the quantity and quality of the sources on which that study could be based. In his book, *Glasnost' in Action: Cultural Renaissance in Russia* (1989) Alec Nove produced a substantial commentary on the fruits of

the new openness for serious discussion of Stalin and Stalinism, religion and morality, social problems and the law, and the nature of the political and economic system. Writing the final pages of this book at the beginning of 1989, Nove observes:

> The essential point is that the open debate is now concerned with the very essence, the fundamentals, of the Soviet system—this for the first time in living memory. What kind of society did they have, and where are they now? Where are they going? One has a feeling that no one quite knows. Does this matter? After all, where are *we* going? In the Soviet Union it does matter, since the legitimacy of party rule rests upon its role of leading the people towards a goal.

While few people had been prepared to consider seriously the possibility that any Soviet leader would take the risk of embarking on radical reform until this actually happened (and some refused to acknowledge it even then), Alec Nove was one of the small minority who did not rule out in advance the coming to power of a reformer. Writing in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in October 1980 Nove speculated as to whether 'a younger man, hiding his light under a bushel, might base his career on a far-reaching reform programme'.

In the year before his death Nove delivered the 1993 annual W. Averell Harriman Lecture at Columbia University, New York. He entitled it 'The Soviet Union in Retrospect: An Obituary Notice'. He argues that it was in the Brezhnev era that 'the party-state bureaucracy became a real ruling class', able to enjoy its privileges in secret and no longer threatened by arbitrary arrest. But growth rates declined and stagnation threatened. Nove goes on:

> So—enter Gorbachev and *perestroika*. He surely recognized the magnitude of the task. It is my conviction that history will treat his efforts more kindly than do his contemporaries. True, he did not know just how far his own reforming logic would take him. True as well, he wished to preserve the Soviet Union. But it was to have been a very different place. I wholeheartedly disagree with those who, like Richard Pipes, believed that Gorbachev had no greater ambition than to modernize and streamline the old system, that he was a younger Brezhnev, better dressed and with a more attractive wife. The advances in freedom of speech and of the press were astonishing indeed. He clearly wished to use *glasnost* to sweep away institutions and colleagues that stood in the way of change. His foreign-policy initiatives were far-reaching. But the skeptics obstinately refused to see that any fundamental change was in process, apparently in the belief that since this was impossible, any change that was actually occurring could not be fundamental because it was occurring. Even the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the willingness to allow Eastern Europe to go its own way did not

> convince these inveterate skeptics, who now say that it was Reagan's speed up in the arms race that 'won' the Cold War.

In that same lecture Nove attributes the failure to combine reforms with the preservation of the Soviet Union to the incoherence of economic reform under Gorbachev, to Gorbachev's inability 'to understand the centrifugal force of *nationalism*' and to the dilemma of power whereby the 'one effective political instrument was the Party acting through its full-time functionaries' but as Gorbachev's reform programme became more radical, the Party apparatus itself became a major obstacle to change. Hence, Gorbachev 'sought to weaken and downgrade this apparatus', but no alternative power structure emerged in time to halt the process of political disintegration that got underway.

Alec Nove was so closely identified with Sovietology that his contributions to economics were apt to be disregarded. He had begun, though, in the 1960s to give thought to the principles by which industry in public ownership should be guided. He developed his ideas in *Efficiency Criteria for Nationalised Industries* (1973). He was alarmed by the trend towards commercial principles of operation, i.e. the adoption of the same rules as would be followed by private industry in a competitive situation. If nationalised industries were to model themselves on privately-owned undertakings, why were they nationalised in the first place? Was there not a difference of purpose and did not all businesses have to start from a clear view of their purposes? It can hardly have surprised him that the upshot of adopting commercial principles of pricing and profit-making should have been privatisation.

In reflecting on the criteria that ought to govern the behaviour of a nationalised industry Nove was led to attack the over-simplifications of current theory. It might seem that if public undertakings equated their prices with marginal cost (as would happen under perfect competition), their monopoly powers would be effectively curbed. Was it not enough to follow this simple rule? Unfortunately, as Nove points out, the rule is full of ambiguities and emerges from a conception of price determination that is a travesty of the actual competitive process. It assumes that demand varies only in quantity and impinges on a homogeneous supply that also varies in a single dimension. But in fact there are nearly always differences in quality, customer service, punctuality, availability, and all that goes to goodwill, an important determinant of customer choice and business behaviour but rarely mentioned in textbooks.

There is a further difficulty of applying the concept of marginal cost

to a business situation. Nove was fond of citing transport to show how short-sighted could be decisions on transport facilities that were in keeping with current theory. How was a railway system to use the concept? Did it apply to a particular train service or to each particular journey? If a particular service made a loss in a system showing a profit was it to be instantly discontinued? If so, what of the impact on the use of other services? In any system there was likely to be a mixture of profitable and loss-making services; and, if all the loss-making services were abandoned might not the rest then become unprofitable too, even if hitherto the operation of the system as a whole had been in profit?

Much of the argument in *Efficiency Criteria for Nationalised Industries* revolves round the interaction of one economic activity with another so that a broad view has to be taken, not one which treats the system as a collection of fragments. The book is thus a critique of microeconomics to the extent that these linkages are neglected in most expositions of the subject. It is one of the merits of the book that it gives example after example of the links between apparently separate activities, providing the reader with a realistic picture of the complexity of business decisions. Nove insistently emphasised the limitations of market forces and the need to redirect them so as to take account of what the market ignored. It is no accident that many of his examples are drawn from railways, for Nove was a great supporter of public transport and never owned a car. He was fiercely critical of the practice of closing down 'uneconomic' branch railway lines.

Alec Nove was interested in theoretical problems of Socialism, although his own political beliefs were firmly in the social democratic (or democratic socialist) tradition. He was a Labour voter who spent much time rebutting the arguments of various schools of Marxists, on the one hand, and those of dogmatic free-marketeers, on the other. He was acutely conscious of the wide gap between the hopes of the prophets of Communism and the grim realities but conscious also of the weaknesses of capitalism. In *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (1983, published in a revised edition as *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited*, 1991) Nove set himself the task of working out a realistic prescription for the functioning of a socialist economy which would be free of the excesses and weaknesses of Communism and yet be 'feasible'. As he put it in his preface to that book: 'Brought up in a social-democratic environment, son of a Menshevik who was arrested by the Bolsheviks, I inherited a somewhat critical view of Soviet

reality: if this really was socialism, I would prefer to be elsewhere. (Luckily, I *was* elsewhere!)'. Characteristically, he goes on:

> I feel increasingly ill-disposed towards those latter-day Marxists who airily ascribe all the world's evils to 'capitalism', dismiss the Soviet experience as irrelevant, and substitute for hard thinking an image of a post-revolutionary world in which there would be no economic problems at all (or where any problems that might arise would be handled smoothly by the 'associated producers' of a world commonwealth). I feel not too well-disposed either towards the Chicago school, whose belief in 'free enterprise' seems quite unaffected by the growth of giant bureaucratic corporations, and whose remedies for current ills seem to benefit the rich and ignore unemployment. And even Milton Friedman is preferable to the abstract model-builders whose works fill the pages of our professional journals, since he at least advocates action in the real world (even though I believe the action he advocates is wrong).

The Economics of Feasible Socialism is in part an exposition of the weaknesses of Marxist thinking and the highly unscientific socialism that Marx and his followers espoused. Marx provided no clear explanation of how the system was to work in the absence of a price mechanism and failed to recognise the inevitable centralisation and subsequent despotism implicit in a system unresponsive to price signals and relying purely on organisation and planning and hence on hierarchy. As a polemic against Utopian socialism Nove's book is highly effective. As a picture of a competitive, workable socialist system, it remains, however, much more sketchy. There is, for example, no mention of banks or any discussion of a capital market.

In most of his work, however, Nove is not concerned with elaborating a comprehensive alternative model to Communism, on the one hand, and the variety of capitalist economies to be found in the West, on the other. He is content to advocate improvement and reform. As he put it in the final chapter of *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited*: '"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"'.

In a debate with Milton Friedman in 1984 Nove agreed with his antagonist on the weaknesses of Soviet-type planning, but made plain that he did not share Friedman's uncritical regard for market forces. Nove claimed that this rested on several unrealistic assumptions: that externalities were minor exceptions; that oligopoly was rare; that unemployment was due only to labour market imperfections; that economies of scale did not lead to the emergence of large corporations with

extensive powers over prices; and that the distribution of property bore some recognisable relationship to present or even past economic merit. He suggested that their most serious disagreement related to those areas of human activity which should be wholly or partly excluded from the market. A market economy, he concluded, might be 'a necessary condition for human freedom, but it is certainly not a sufficient condition'.

Among the more notable of the many occasions on which each of the authors of this memoir encountered Alec Nove was when one of us took part in an all-day seminar at Chequers, convened by Margaret Thatcher early in her second term as Prime Minister. It was held on 8 September 1983 and Nove was one of eight academics who sat on one side of the table, while a formidable Government team sat on the other side. Margaret Thatcher was flanked by the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, and by her Minister of Defence at that time, Michael Heseltine. Others present included Malcolm Rifkind as Minister of State at the Foreign Office. Lady Thatcher, as she later became, devoted two-and-a-half pages of her memoirs to this seminar, while the late Sir Anthony Parsons, the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy adviser at the time, went so far as to say that it 'changed British foreign policy'. The academics present advocated a change of policy towards the Soviet Union from active avoidance of any contact with the 'evil empire' to a break with that aspect of President Reagan's policy and an attempt to seek dialogue and involvement in what was going on in Russia. Alec Nove was in a minority, though, on the scholars' side of the table in being so bold as to disagree explicitly with a statement by the Prime Minister (and only Heseltine, on the Government side, dared agree with *him*).

The invitation to Mikhail Gorbachev to visit Britain in December 1984 (three months before he became General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party) had its origins in the September 1983 Chequers seminar. The evening before Gorbachev arrived in London, Alec Nove was one of four academics (as was one of the authors of this memorial essay) invited to 10 Downing Street to discuss Gorbachev, the Soviet Union, and Britain's relations with the Soviet Union with the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. It was a good meeting, in spite of the fact that none of the academics came into the category of 'one of us'—that is to say, the Thatcherite wing of the Conservative Party. Indeed, none of the four, it is safe to say, had voted Conservative in the previous General Election. The meeting over, the group had only just

begun to descend the staircase at 10 Downing Street when Alec said loudly and clearly, 'I just wish she would consult us on domestic policy as well'. That, however, was hardly likely to happen. 'One of us' criteria were much more stringently applied in meetings on economic and social policy.

Surprisingly, Alec Nove never received any honour or mark of official recognition from British Government circles, although successive British Ambassadors to the Soviet Union greatly valued his advice. His fellow scholars were more generous in their appreciation of his enormous contribution to academic life. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1978, of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1982 and made an Honorary Fellow of the London School of Economics in the same year. He also received several honorary doctorates.

Nove had, of course, an independence of mind and intellectual honesty which made few concessions to fashion, whether the fashion of the New Left in its day or that of neoclassical economics in more recent years. He did not share the official Western optimism about the economic choices made by Russia in the post-Soviet period. In a paper written for *The Harriman Institute Forum* in the summer of 1992, Nove borrowed the title of Nikolai Bukharin's work of 1920, 'Economics of the Transition Period'. Bukharin, of course, was talking about a transition in quite another direction. Nove argued in this article that in 'Russia in particular, it is hard to see how one can rely on a market mechanism that has yet to be created, while decline accelerates and a new Time of Troubles looms ahead. To create the conditions for a market economy surely requires action, ''interventionism'', under conditions of dire emergency analogous to a wartime economy, with the real supply side in such disarray as to render impossible macroeconomic stabilization'.

In his (already-cited) Averell Harriman Lecture of 1993, he remained uncharacteristically gloomy, writing: 'The demoralized and confused Russian people ask yet again the eternal question, *kto vinovat?* (who is to blame?). What now? A new Time of Troubles, analogous to the anarchy that followed the death of Boris Godunov? Maybe. The only thing we can say for sure is that, unlike in 1611, Polish troops will *not* occupy the Kremlin. And then, in 1613, the first Romanov tsar imposed order. Who will do so tomorrow? And over what territory?' He ended his lecture by quoting the well-known lines of 'the national poet of my adopted country':

But Mousie, thou art no' thy lane
In proving foresight may be vain
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley
And leave us nought but grief an' pain
For promised joy.
Still thou art blest, compared wi' me.
The present only toucheth thee.
But och, I backward cast my ee
On prospects drear,
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess—an' fear.

ARCHIE BROWN
ALEC CAIRNCROSS
Fellows of the Academy

Note. A complete list of Alec Nove's books and an extensive and useful, albeit incomplete, list of his many articles, contributions to edited volumes, and book reviews are to be found in Ian D. Thatcher, 'Alec Nove: A Bibliographical Tribute', *Europe-Asia Studies* (formerly *Soviet Studies*), vol. 47, no. 8 (1995), 1383–1410.