

resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as for human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative.

In socialist circles in the Western developed capitalist world, two defensive positions have become dominant. One is the denial of the socialist character of those societies that claim to be socialist (4). Socialism has not failed, it never even existed. The assumed failure of "socialist" societies to meet human needs does not have a bearing on the realization of the socialist project, since that project has not yet been tested. It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of theoretical contributions sustaining this position have been made in developed capitalist countries.

The other defensive position is to question the feasibility of comparing systems altogether. As indicated by Adam Przeworski, "whether the socialist or the capitalist model has been more successful in practice is impossible to tell" (5). It is unclear, however, why the extremely important question of whether capitalism is superior to socialism in responding to human needs cannot be the subject of scientific investigation. Since Przeworski's primary concern, expressed in the title of his most recent article "Could We Feed Everyone?", is whether capitalism or socialism is a better road to resolving the problems of hunger and malnutrition, an investigator could compare the evolution of the nutritional levels of populations currently living under two different regimes, but which had lived under similar capitalist conditions at the beginning of the historical period under study. The difficulty of standardizing variables can weaken the validity of the comparison, but rarely to the level of making the comparison useless. It is also likely that the comparison has an unavoidable bias in favor of capitalism, since the socialist experience always evokes enormous hostility, economic blockade, and even military intervention. Such a comparison would be not of capitalism versus socialism under normal circumstances but rather of capitalism under normal circumstances, articulated to a worldwide system in which capitalist relations are dominant, versus socialism under most abnormal circumstances. Still, in spite of this intrinsic bias, I believe that such comparisons have validity and can be presented to show the superiority of one system over another in responding to key human needs, which include the prevention of hunger, malnutrition, disease, and premature death. Indeed, in developed capitalist countries, where most Western theoretical production takes place, it is usually forgotten that the majority of human beings in our historical period do not have basic socioeconomic rights such as food, clean water, treated sewage, and the ability to read. The absence of these basic rights limits all other human rights such as civil-political rights, including the rights of organization and freedom of the press. President Franklin Roosevelt put it very well in his message to Congress on January 11, 1944: "necessitous men [and women] are not free men [and women]" (6).

Contrary to Przeworski, I believe that the superiority of one system over another can indeed be shown. And one way of doing so is to show the evolution of health indicators (such as infant mortality, life expectancy, levels of nutrition, and low birth weight, whenever such data are available) in comparable countries that have followed different paths of development, capitalist versus socialist. Before focusing on the empirical information, however, several points need to be made.

First, contrary to prevalent belief, the level of health of a population is not primarily the result of medical interventions. If country A has better health indicators than country