

# Lenin as Scientific Manager Under Monopoly Capitalism, State Capitalism, and Socialism: A Response to Scoville

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I argue that Lenin's views on scientific management did not shift as drastically as Scoville (2001) claims from 1913 to 1918. The seeds of Lenin's 1918 views on Taylorism actually were contained in an article he wrote in 1914, three years before the October Revolution. In addition, I argue that Lenin did not uncritically embrace the implementation of scientific management in the construction of socialism in the Soviet Republic, as argued by Scoville. I present evidence that Lenin viewed Taylorism as only a temporary measure to be used in the transitory stage of *state capitalism* that he believed characterized the Soviet Republic in 1918. Finally, because Scoville does not differentiate between the transitory stage of state capitalism and socialism in the Soviet Republic's early years, he states that Lenin advocated the use of scientific management under socialism. I argue that there is insufficient evidence to support this position.

IN HIS THOUGHT-PROVOKING ARTICLE ON THE EVOLUTION OF LENIN'S VIEWS on scientific management (or Taylorism), Scoville (2001) argues that there was a dramatic transformation in Lenin's pre-revolutionary views from 1913 to his post-revolutionary views in 1918. In a nutshell, Scoville (2001:620) argues that Lenin's views of Taylorism in 1913 "could only be termed as scornful" but that by 1918 "Lenin's enthusiasm for well-managed Taylorism is present" in his pronouncements on the subject (2001:621). In this article I argue that Lenin's views on scientific management did not shift as drastically as Scoville (2001) argues from 1913 to 1918. Rather, there was a consistent and gradual evolution of Lenin's views on Taylorism, with the seeds of his 1918 views actually appearing in his writings 3 years before the October Revolution. In addition, in this article I argue that Lenin did not uncritically embrace the implementation of scientific management in the construction of socialism in the Soviet Republic, as

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argued by Scoville (2001), but that he viewed Taylorism as only a temporary measure to be used in the transitory stage of *state capitalism* that Lenin believed characterized the Soviet Republic in 1918. Thus, because Scoville (2001) does not differentiate between the transitory stage of state capitalism and socialism in the early years of the Soviet Republic, he argues that Lenin advocated the use of scientific management under socialism. I argue that there is insufficient evidence to support this position.

### Lenin's Views on Scientific Management before the Russian Revolution

As Scoville (2001:620) points out, in "A 'Scientific' System of Sweating" (1913) Lenin wrote that scientific management is one of "the latest methods of exploiting the workers: . . . It is sweating in strict accordance with all the precepts of science." Lenin elaborates on the "scientific system" of Taylorism as being concerned with developing the most efficient working methods through the techniques of timing and filming the motions of workers. And what is the result of this system? For the capitalist, the system offers tremendous benefits:

The capitalist cuts his expenditures by *half* or more. His profits grow. The bourgeoisie is delighted and cannot praise the Taylors enough! [1913:595].

For the workers, under monopoly capitalism, according to Lenin, this new system offers more dire consequences:

The workers get a wage increase at first. But hundreds of workers get the sack. Those who are left have to work four times more intensively, doing a back-breaking job. When he has been drained of all his strength, the worker will be kicked out. Only young and sturdy workers are taken on [1913:595].

Thus, according to Lenin, the implementation of scientific management under monopoly capitalism leads to dramatic increases in profits for capitalists while it leads to massive layoffs of workers and a substantial intensification of work for those workers who are not laid off and retain their jobs.

Although Scoville (2001) believes that Lenin's views on scientific management had changed dramatically by 1918, the seeds of this change were already present in one of his articles written in 1914, which is neither mentioned nor discussed by Scoville. In "The Taylor System—Man's Enslavement by the Machine" (1914), Lenin reiterates how Taylorism has greatly reduced the time involved in completing work tasks while the capitalist increases profits and the workers have to work many times harder for

slightly more pay. Up to this point, the analysis in this article is similar to that in “A ‘Scientific’ System of Sweating” (1913). However, in this article, Lenin takes his analysis one step further. Rather than merely criticizing the use of Taylorism under monopoly capitalism, Lenin argues that Taylorism would be quite an aid to workers if it could be separated from its attachment to capital and administered by workers’ organizations as well as implemented “in the distribution of labour in society as a whole” rather than being confined to each individual factory. Lenin states:

The Taylor system—without its initiators knowing or wishing it—is preparing the time when the proletariat will take over all social production and appoint its own workers’ committees for the purpose of properly distributing and rationalising all social labour. Large-scale production, machinery, railways, telephone—all provide thousands of opportunities to cut by three-fourths the working time of the organised workers and make them four times better off than they are today [1913:154].

Thus, once the monopoly capitalist is removed from the process and no longer benefits from Taylorism, Lenin believes that the implementation of scientific management can lead to a drastic reduction in working time and to a dramatic increase in the standard of living for workers. As one will be able to see, this article provides a bridge to Lenin’s analysis of the use of Taylorism in the Soviet Republic after the revolution. This article also helps to explain Lenin’s serious and dispassionate analysis of Taylor’s, Seubert’s, and Gilbreth’s works on scientific management in preparation of one of his classic works, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, as discussed and analyzed by Scoville (2001).

## Lenin’s Views on Scientific Management after the Russian Revolution

In the period immediately following the revolution, Lenin was clearly preoccupied with getting the Soviet economy up and running efficiently. In “The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government” (1918), Lenin called for the introduction of strict accounting procedures and labor discipline in the administration of production. In order to achieve this labor discipline, Lenin called for the introduction of Taylorism:

We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out, or to the amount of work done by the railways, the water transport system, etc., etc. [1918:258].

Lenin continues his analysis of Taylorism in this postrevolution article, which is consistent with that in “The Taylor System—Man’s Enslavement by the Machine” (1914):

The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. . . . We must organize in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our own ends. At the same time, in working to raise the productivity of labour, we must take into account the specific features of the transition period from capitalism to socialism, which, on the one hand, require that the foundations be laid of the socialist organisation of competition, and, on the other hand, require the use of compulsion, so that the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat shall not be desecrated by the practice of a lily-livered proletarian government [1914:259].

This is the first time that Lenin mentions the necessity of implementing Taylorism under the transitional stage from capitalism to socialism. In later articles he will develop this idea to a greater extent when he discusses the period and problems of administering state capitalism under a workers’ government. However, when engaging in a polemical exchange over the implementation of Taylorism with the “Left Communists,” it becomes apparent that Lenin does not enthusiastically embrace the implementation of scientific management in Russia at this time and views it as only a temporary measure.

In “Session of the All-Russia C.E.C.” (1918) Lenin defends the thesis that the immediate task of the new Soviet government is to direct the construction of the transitional stage of state capitalism against the protestations of the “Left Communists” who argue that such a move would be a step backwards. He argues that the development of state capitalism is a necessary condition for the development of socialism and that such a stage requires that accounting and control of production, along with the introduction of labor discipline, be implemented to develop the economic basis for the *transition* to socialism. In order to introduce labor discipline, Lenin repeats that it is necessary to implement Taylorism and piece work, although it is a *temporary* measure that is a “step back”:

We, however, must tell the workers: yes, it is a step back, but we have to help ourselves to find a remedy. . . . This cannot be done by any outburst of revolutionary fervour, by any knock-out blow to the bourgeoisie. It can be done only

by self-discipline, only by organising the labour of the workers and the peasants, only by accounting and control. . . . This we have not learnt, but must learn, it is the road to socialism, the sole road . . . [1918:301–2].

In “‘Left-Wing’ Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality” (1918) Lenin steps up his attack on the “Left Communists” and explains why the introduction of state capitalism is a progressive step when administered by a workers’ government. The “Left Communists,” however, were opposed to the introduction of both Taylorism and piece work in industry, believing that it would lead to the undermining of the revolution. They believed that:

[T]he introduction of labour discipline in connection with the restoration of capitalist management of industry cannot considerably increase the productivity of labour, but it will diminish the class initiative, activity and organisation of the proletariat. It threatens to enslave the working class; it will rouse discontent among the backward elements as well as among the vanguard of the proletariat [1918:348].

To summarize the arguments of the “Left Communists,” they believed that any use of capitalist technology, whether administered by socialists or not, would lead back to the road of capitalism and exploitation by the bourgeoisie. Thus Taylorism, which was a system developed and perfected by the technicians of capitalism, could not be divorced from the socio-economic system in which it was developed, regardless of whether or not socialists were administering the economy for the benefit of the working class.

Concerning the transitory stage of state capitalism, the “Left Communists” viewed such a stage as a step backward toward capitalism because of the use of capitalist technicians in helping to rebuild the devastated regime, the implementation of accounting and control measures, as well as the linking of wages to productivity. Lenin, who had a more dialectical view, saw capitalism as being a combination of the brutal exploitation of workers with great achievements in science and culture. Thus, in any transition to socialism, Lenin realized that the scientific and cultural achievements of capitalism would have to be used in advancing the position of the workers and the workers’ state, even if only for a temporary period of time.

### Did Lenin Support Taylorism under Socialism?

Scoville explicitly states that Lenin would have supported the implementation of Taylorism under socialism. In his article, he concludes:

We need to focus our eyes on the importance of the concept of “science” in the intellectual framework of Marxism. Marx had conducted the scientific analysis of capitalism; the Marxists had developed the basis for “scientific socialism.” When the “science of work” comes along, it is straightforwardly adopted as a natural part of the whole schema. Put alternatively, the *unscientific* management of work would surely be *un-Marxist*.

Scientific management, so reprehensible under capitalism, is not—as a cynic might charge—suddenly and inconsistently acceptable for the socialist state but is in fact a necessary feature of such a state [2001:625].

Besides Scoville (2001), other scholars have argued that Lenin supported the implementation of Taylorism under socialism (Braverman 1974; Merkle 1980; Nyland 1987; Kössler and Muchie 1989). Merkle (1980), who believes that socialism, rather than state capitalism, was implemented immediately after the October Revolution, points out that Lenin believed that Taylorism provided the solution for organizing both work and industry under socialism. According to Merkle, Lenin supported the implementation of scientific management under socialism because

[T]he use of capitalist “management” is not capitalism, Lenin said, when it is used only in the organization of work, and when the workers’ commissars “watch the manager’s every step” [1980:114].

Fleron and Fleron (1972), whose views are similar to the theoretical analyses of the “Left Communists” in the early years of the Bolshevik regime, argue that Lenin openly supported the implementation of scientific management in socialist society because he did not understand that using “capitalist industrial machine technology” meant that the underlying social values imbedded in this technology ultimately shaped a society’s socioeconomic system. According to Fleron and Fleron (1972:81), Lenin did not condemn the use of Taylorism under any socioeconomic system but only the use to which Taylorism was put under capitalism—“the great increase in labor productivity which it results in is applauded; the fact that the workers’ pay is not increased in proportion to this increased productivity is criticized.” Once the proletariat “is freed from its enslavement by capital” and a socialist state is developed and placed under workers’ control, the use of Taylorism would be justified. Thus Fleron and Fleron (1972) imply that Lenin supported Taylorism under socialism because of his view that Taylorism, when freed from capital, was essentially a “value-free” and nonpolitical scientific methodology. Although Lenin never specifically discussed the use of Taylorism under socialism, Fleron and Fleron have extrapolated this analysis from his writings in the 1913 to 1918 period.

Nyland (1987) points out that Lenin advocated the implementation of Taylorism under socialism because he realized that the “greatest scientific achievement” under capitalism could be used to further the interests of the working class. Kössler and Muchie (1989), who like Merkle (1980), believe that socialism, as opposed to state capitalism, took hold immediately in the Soviet Republic after the October Revolution, argue that Lenin supported the implementation of Taylorism under socialism because it was consistent with Lenin’s conception of how the Bolshevik Party—the vanguard party of the working class—should be structured. According to Kössler and Muchie (1989), Lenin viewed the party as being composed of intellectuals who guided the working class every day. The organizational structure of the party was similar to the organization of production under Taylorism, where “intellectual” labor was separate from and guided “manual” labor on a daily basis (1989:71). Thus Kössler and Muchie (1989) conclude that, as in Bolshevism, Lenin was attracted to Taylorism because of its centralized control.

Whether Lenin supported the implementation of scientific management under socialism is an open question; it is quite plausible that Lenin would not have advocated the use of Taylorism under socialism. Lenin clearly advocated a number of other temporary measures, in addition to scientific management, under the transition to socialism (state capitalism) that he would not have been in favor of under a fully developed socialism. The “New Economic Program” (NEP) implemented by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in 1921 is one such example. This policy was clearly viewed by Lenin as a temporary measure (Fischer 1964; Shub 1948) to provide increased grain shipments to the cities by providing the peasants with “capitalist” incentives.

However, once a fully developed socialism had been achieved, it is quite possible that Lenin would have left the decision of whether to continue to use Taylorism up to the trade unions and the worker Soviets. It is also possible that Lenin would not have opposed the self-Taylorization of the proletariat under socialism. Nevertheless, it is quite another point to state that Lenin would have definitively advocated under socialism an organization of production that he advocated under the transitional stage of state capitalism.

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