

## Taylor and Taylorism. Public Debate and Decline in U.S. and Europe, 1900-1939

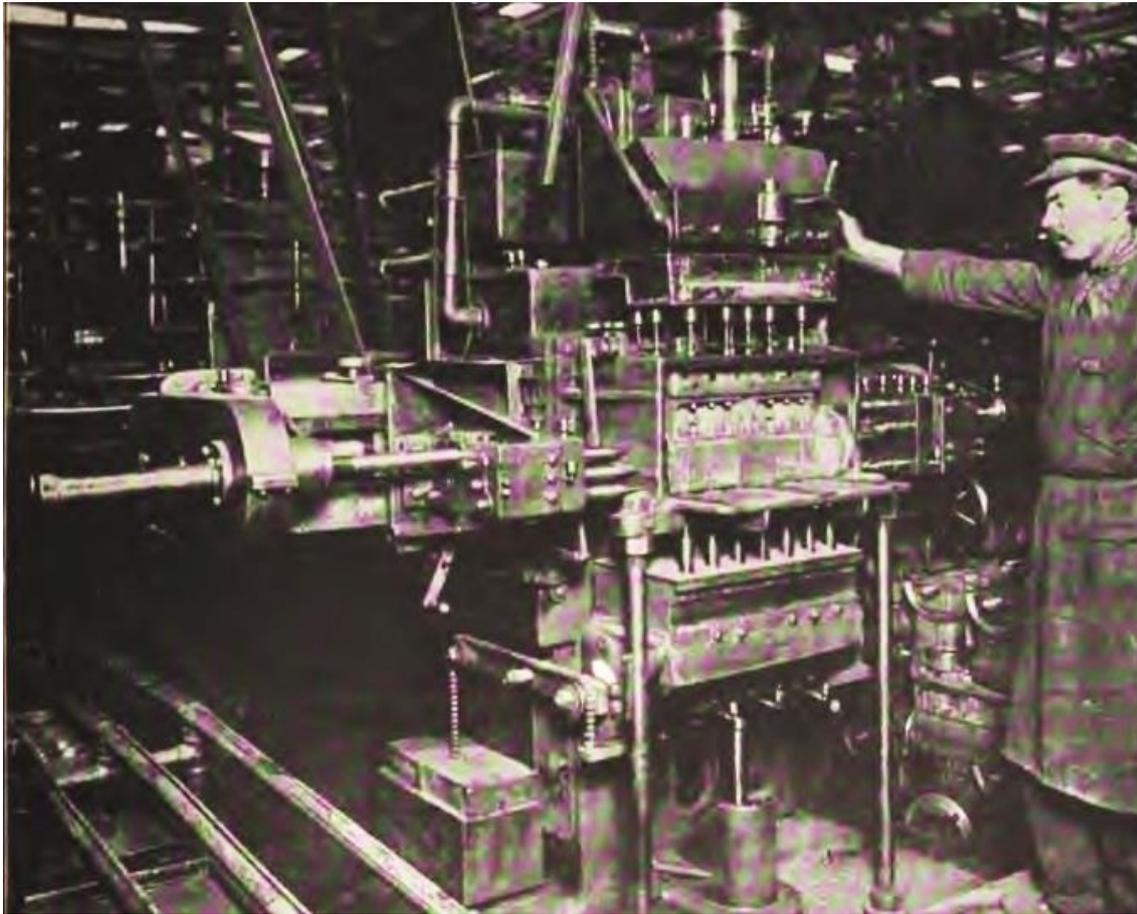


Figure: A worker at a machine at Fordwerke Highland Park in 1913. After Arnold and Faurote in 1919, p. 26.

**Working Paper Logistics 21/2018**

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Introduction of Walter Volpert und Richard Vahrenkamp (Eds.):  
Frederik Winslow Taylor: Die Grundsätze wissenschaftlicher Betriebsführung,  
Reprint Weinheim, Beltz Verlag 1977, pages LII – IXC.

Revised Introduction 2018.

Content:

1	Introductory remarks .....	1
2	Economic and ideological conditions for the emergence of Taylorism at the turn of the century 1900 in the USA. ....	6
3	Taylor - a young gentleman at the steel mill. ....	11
4	Taylor as theorist of work organization.....	13
5	Taylor as a technocrat and in the effectiveness movement .....	17
6	The controversy over Taylorism .....	20
7	Taylor's fame. ....	26
8	Bibliography.....	28

**Abstract**

Beyond the perspectives of labour science and industrial sociology, in which extensive deepening of the division of labour can be crystallized as an element of consensus under Taylorism, the concept of Taylorism found its way into general intellectual history. In 1954, the German-American management expert Drucker ranked scientific management among the most important contributions of the USA to Western culture. The dissemination of the concept of Taylorism in Western culture outlined here points to a high rank of Taylor's persons in the history of science and industry. The second chapter reflects the economic and ideological conditions for the emergence of Taylorism at the turn of the century 1900 in the U.S. in the industrial environment of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania with its steel works and machine shops. It mentions two of the developments in economic history of USA: the monopolisation and the emergence of the new assembly-oriented industries. The industrial milieu of Philadelphia, where Taylor was to gain his first industrial experience, greatly favoured the development of his later ideas as is shown.

It also seems appropriate to look back and to reflect on Taylor's actual achievements and place them in the general history of industry. This is the subject of the third chapter. Here Taylor's efforts to put his ideas into practice and their acceptance by industry and the public are critically presented. Taylor must be taken at his word and the somewhat beautifully coloured picture that he draws of his personal efficiency and the success of his management system in his publication "The Principles of Scientific Management" must be corrected by confrontation with the traditional history of early Taylor. This procedure, as a by-product, throws away some material on the history of technocratic movements that has so far remained largely unknown.

In the fourth chapter Taylor's system of work organization is shown. A deepening of the division of labour in the manufactory was his programme, an extensive administrative organisation of the company his means with which he prescribed detailed work to the part-worker and thus sought to

achieve the continuity of a factory operation under the conditions of one-off or small-series production. In a word: instead of capitalist mechanization, Taylor set a narrow-minded bureaucratization. His system led to exaggerated bureaucratization. The conflicts Taylor provoked in the Bethlehem steel mills – a leading steel mill in the United States – highlight his technocratic outsider position in the factory world of capitalist rule. The Bethlehem management perceived Taylor's efforts to reorder the power structures of the company as a dangerous attack on its very own positions, even as a "revolution", and threw Taylor out again in 1901 after three years of consulting work.

Chapter 5 shows how Taylor's ideas fell on fertile ground of the Conservation Movement and the Effectiveness Movement. Effectiveness became the magic word to cushion middle-class fears of the threat of declassification. Taylor's writing principles were entirely geared to this. Taylor has based his principles as an ideological masterpiece entirely on the instincts of the American middle class, as can be seen from his working-class image. The worker is lazy by nature and deliberately restrains his work. Only through the hard work imposed upon him by the Taylor system can he purify himself into a better person. All publications of the Effectiveness Movement had in common that they did not regard the punch card technology of Herman Hollerith as leading rationalization technology of that time used by many steel works and railway companies.

Chapter 6 portrays the broad debate on the nature of Taylorism in industrial context, for example the hearings on Taylorism in the Congress and the position of the trade unions.

The long text is available under Richard Vahrenkamp: Taylor and Taylorism. Public Debate and Decline in U.S. and Europe, 1900-1939, Tolino Media 2022.