

“SOCIALIST COMPETITION”

By Isaac Deutscher

THE economists and theorists of all Socialist schools of thought agree in the denunciation of capitalist competition and of its laissez-faire apologists. But behind this unanimity in denunciation can be discerned wide differences in approach and argument, differences which finally come into the open when any Socialist school tries to look beyond capitalist society and to answer the question whether Socialism itself is compatible with any form of competition. The different answers given to this question reflect broader differences between the various visions and conceptions of Socialism.

Perhaps the most crucial theoretical controversy over this subject took place between Marx and Proudhon more than a century ago. Proudhon saw Socialism essentially as a “free association” of small property owners, of independent producers owning their means of production. It was natural for him to envisage the economic activity of such a society in terms of competition. The evil of capitalism, Proudhon argued, was that it gave the banker and the industrialist a monopoly on the means of production and thus degraded the small artisan and peasant into wage-slaves. Under such conditions, genuine competition, which presupposed the equality and the freedom of those taking part in it, was impossible. The form which competition had taken under capitalism was therefore the Hegelian antithesis of free association and coöperation. Socialism would break the capitalist monopoly on the means of production; it would restore to the individual the tools of his labor; and thereby it would also restore competition to its proper rôle. From a factor of social disruption and disintegration, competition would become a factor of harmony; and Socialism would represent the final synthesis between association and competition. “Competition,” Proudhon wrote, “is as essential to labor as is division of labor . . . it is necessary for the advent of equality.” It is inherent in human nature, and therefore “there can be no question of destroying competition, a thing as impossible to destroy as liberty; we have only to find its equilibrium. . . .”

Marx’s approach was essentially historical. He replied to Proudhon’s argument with the assertion that pre-capitalist so-

ciety knew little or no competitive economic activity. The feudal landlords had been engaged in all sorts of political and military rivalry; but, as a rule, they had not confronted one another as economic competitors, buyers or sellers, because their economy had not developed in terms of market relationships. Nor had the peasant serfs (or the slaves in economies based on slave labor) competed with one another as laborers. Only as market relationships had spread and become universal, *i.e.* under capitalism, did every form of economic activity assume a competitive aspect. Even capitalism was not always competitive. In its mercantilistic beginnings it was monopolistic. Only with its growth and consolidation, and with the development of modern industry, did monopoly give place to free trade and competition. But then free competition itself, progressively concentrating wealth in the hands of the few, tended towards monopoly. Competitive economic activity was thus characteristic only for a relatively short period in man's history; and from that period Proudhon mistakenly projected it into the past and the future.

Marx did not question the assumption that the urge for emulation was inherent in human nature. He merely insisted that this urge ought not to be confused, let alone identified, with economic competitiveness. “Competition is emulation for profit.” Since, in contrast to Proudhon, he saw Socialism as the abolition of property, not a new redistribution of it, and as a free association of producers collectively owning their means of production, not as an association of small property owners, Marx could see in Socialism no room for profit and, consequently, no room for “emulation for profit.” “Socialist competition” was to him a contradiction in terms; and he ridiculed Proudhon's view about “the eternal necessity of competition.”

Of special relevance to the subject of this article is Marx's view of competition as it affects the working class, that is, of competition among the workers themselves. In one of his earliest works, “The German Ideology,” he wrote: “Competition makes individuals, not only the bourgeois but *still more so the workers*, mutually hostile, in spite of the fact that it brings them together. It takes therefore a long time before these individuals can unite.” The worker appears on the market to sell his labor force, which has become a commodity. On the labor market he competes against other members of his class; and this competition is governed by the law of supply and demand. When the market is

against him, the worker cuts the price of his peculiar commodity, agrees to work for lower wages and longer hours and compels other workers to do likewise. The competition rages inside the factory and workshop as well—competition in intensity and productivity of labor; and at the bench as on the labor market the brutality of the competition depends on the size of the “reserve army of unemployed.” Through trade unionism the workers may restrain and curb their own competition, but they cannot abolish it. The whole social and political development of the industrial working class is nothing but a constant struggle of that class to keep down the economic individualism of its members and to impose on them solidarity vis-à-vis the employers.

“The separate individuals form a class,” continues Marx, “only in so far as they have to wage a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors.” Only in so far as the workers overcome their own competitiveness and grow aware of their deeper and broader antagonism to the capitalist class do they begin to act as *eine Klasse für sich*, a class for itself. Nevertheless, under capitalism they can never quite escape the curse of competition. No matter how strong their trade union, every slump tends to destroy or to weaken their hard-won solidarity. And throughout all the phases of the trade cycle competition goes on inside the factory and the workshop; and each form of wages has a different effect on it. Time wages appear to be less detrimental to the workers’ solidarity than piece wages, for although they may induce some men to work longer hours, they do not induce them to outdo their fellow-workers by greater intensity of labor within any time limit. Piece wages, on the other hand, play much more strongly upon the worker’s competitive instinct. “Since the quality and intensity of the work are here controlled by the form of the wage itself,” Marx writes in “Das Kapital,” “the piece wage automatically registers the slightest difference in the quality and intensity of the work performed.” It “tends to develop on the one hand the individuality of the worker and with it the sense of liberty, independence and self-control of the laborers, on the other—their competition with one another. Piece work has, therefore, a tendency, while raising individual wages above the average, to lower this average itself. . . . *Piece wages is the form of wages most in harmony with the capitalist mode of production.*”¹

¹ The italics are those of the present writer. Incidentally, Marx carefully distinguished be-

Neither Marx nor Engels, nor any of their eminent intellectual disciples such as Kautsky, Plekhanov or Lenin, has ever drawn any blueprints of the society of the future. At most they all deduced certain general features of Socialism by inference from the opposite. They assumed, expressly or implicitly, that economic phenomena which they saw as being peculiar to capitalism would vanish with capitalism or would not, at any rate, survive into the age of fully-fledged Socialism. Wages, profit and rent represented such social relationships, peculiar to capitalism and unthinkable in Socialism. The same was true of the modern division of labor, especially the separation of brain work from manual labor; and, last but not least, of competition.

Marxist theory takes it for granted that the members of a Socialist community will have to perform certain functions in many ways similar to those performed by their ancestors under capitalism or feudalism. In every social order men have to produce in order to live. In every economic system there must be some balance between production and consumption. Every society, if it is not to stagnate and decay, must produce a surplus of goods over and above the sum total of the goods necessary for the upkeep of the producers, the maintenance and replacement of productive equipment and so on. Yet the social relationships within which these functions are performed are so different in various systems that it is useless to search for common historical and sociological denominators for these functions. The surplus produce of a capitalist economy takes the form of rent, profit and interest; and this determines the entire mode of life of the capitalist world. In Socialism, the surplus produce, belonging to society as a whole, would cease to be profit. The function of that surplus and its impact upon social life would be altogether different from what it was under the old order, when the scale and the rhythm of any nation's productive activity were normally determined by whether that activity was or was not profitable to the capitalist class. In the same way, the emulation in which men would engage under Socialism (or Communism) would have little or nothing in common with their ancestors' competition. Under capitalism, men compete for profits or wages. Socialist emulation would be economically disinterested.

tween “productivity” and “intensity” of labor. Higher productivity comes with improved machinery and better organization of labor; it may or it may not indicate increased exploitation. Higher intensity of labor comes from the greater physical exertion to which piece wages spur on the worker—it nearly always amounts to increased exploitation.

It is perhaps important to remember the major premise of this argument. In original Marxist theory, Communism (or Socialism) is associated with a development of mankind's productive resources and capacities superior to that achieved under capitalism at its peak. Marx and Engels held that man cannot make his leap "from necessity to freedom," from "pre-history into history," or for that matter from competition to emulation, as long as he has to devote the major part of his creative energy to the satisfaction of his material needs. Unlike some Socialist sentimentalists, the founders of the Marxist school had no quarrel with the familiar view that the higher achievements of our culture and civilization have been essentially the work of the "leisured classes." But they believed that the time was not very far off when technological development would enable mankind as a whole to become a single "leisured class," as it were, provided mankind could in time achieve a new social organization. In Marx's age the average working day in industry was twelve hours; and Marx hailed the introduction of the ten hour day in England as the first great victory of the Socialist principle. To most of his contemporaries the idea of a six or seven hour day appeared as fantastic as that of a two or three hour day may appear now. Yet, some Americans at least will perhaps agree that if the United States were merely to maintain the rate of its technological progress (and on condition that this progress does not become a factor of destruction and self-destruction), the two or three hour day should come within the realm of the possible for the American people before this century is out.

What are the implications of such a hypothesis? What would a two or three hour working day mean to the American people? It would certainly revolutionize their way of life and their outlook to an almost unimaginable extent. It would in the first instance render obsolete the inherited division of labor, especially the separation of brain work from manual labor. It would leave the physical worker with enough leisure for him to be free to acquire the education and to engage in the intellectual or artistic activity which under the present division of labor is open to the brain worker only. On the other hand, even the most specialized scientist and artist could easily perform physical labor for two or three hours, without thereby being diverted from his special intellectual pursuit.

It was some such society as this hypothetical American society

of the end of the twentieth or the beginning of the twenty-first century that Marx and Engels had before their eyes when they discussed the various phases in the development of Communism. Only in this light can one understand, for instance, the following passage, almost bursting with optimism, from Engels' "Anti-Dühring:"

In making itself the master of all the means of production, in order to use them in accordance with a social plan, society puts an end to the former subjection of men to their own means of production. *It goes without saying that society cannot itself be free unless every individual is free.* The old mode of production must therefore be revolutionized from top to bottom, and in particular the former division of labor must disappear. Its place must be taken by an organization of production in which, on the one hand, no individual can put onto other persons his share in productive labor, this natural condition of human existence, and in which, on the other hand, productive labor, instead of being a means to the subjection of men, will become a means to their emancipation, by giving each individual the opportunity to develop and exercise all his faculties, physical and mental, in all directions; in which therefore *productive labor would become a pleasure instead of a burden.* (Italics those of the present writer.)

Only in such a society, holding a modern industrial cornucopia, did Marx and Engels expect that productive labor could become a disinterested sports-like social activity and that competition could give place to emulation.

To most reform-minded Socialists and trade unionists these Marxist vistas of the future have always seemed either too unreal or too remote to be taken very seriously. The romantic undertone in Marxism has evoked a response in the revolutionaries, as Lenin's "State and Revolution" strikingly testifies. The reformists have tried more empirically to find a compromise between capitalism and Socialism; and they have tended to project that compromise on to the future, at least on those rare occasions when they have not shied off from generalizations about the future. Thus, the English Fabians imagined that Socialism would inherit most economic "categories" from capitalism and "remodel" rather than abolish them. They believed that workers' competition, *i.e.* their competition for material rewards, would be both useful and necessary to a Socialist economy, as John Stuart Mill had pointed out even before the Fabians. But while Fabian ideologists were anxious theoretically to infuse competition into the future Socialist order, the trade unionists, who have directly or indirectly drawn inspiration from them, have been concerned

mainly with eliminating or mitigating workers' competition under the existing order. The trade unions of most countries have at one time or another bitterly opposed the advance of "scientific management and organization of labor" and the introduction in industry of such innovations as the stop-watch, the man-record chart and so on. Before World War I, the American Federation of Labor vehemently denounced the attempt of employers to drive the workers into scientifically organized, "suicidal" competition in the factory shop. The A. F. of L. then rallied its following to resist the onslaught on their class solidarity, the onslaught led by Frederick Winslow Taylor. American trade unionism seems long since to have made its peace with scientific management; but the old battle-cry of the A. F. of L. was taken up in Europe, and there it has resounded for decades. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Taylor and Taylorism were to the European worker synonyms of the worst capitalist exploitation. In this opposition to "technical rationalization," the defense of the worker's interests and the fear that scientific organization of labor would result in an increase of redundant labor have inevitably been blended with an instinctively conservative attitude towards technological progress. The more limited a country's resources, and the fewer its chances for economic expansion and rapid absorption of redundant labor by new industries, the more acute has been the workers' fear of their own competitiveness.

II

Any labor party, Marxist or non-Marxist, Social Democratic or Communist, revolutionary or reformist, finds this traditional attitude untenable as soon as it assumes office. In this one respect there is little difference between Lenin and Trotsky and Attlee and Cripps. Very soon after the Bolshevik revolution Lenin tried to impress his Party with the crucial importance of industrial productivity and with the need to raise the discipline and efficiency of labor. Without hesitation he recommended to his followers "the adoption of much that is scientific and progressive in Taylor's system, the correlation of earnings and output."² He further urged his adherents to try out the effect of piece wages upon the workers and their productivity, although at the same time, in March 1918, he proposed that the new program of the

² Cf. "The Next Tasks of the Soviet Régime." Lenin's Menshevik critics bitterly attacked him more than once for urging the Russian workers to imitate the methods of American capitalism.

Party should provide for the “gradual levelling out of *all* wages and salaries in *all* occupations and categories.” He encouraged the introduction of piece work and piece wages with some caution, as an experiment; and he went on to insist on the régime’s basic commitment gradually to reduce the inequality of wage- and salary-earners. He also placed great emphasis on the value of emulation, which was to develop “in humane not in zoological forms.” He interpreted emulation rather broadly:

The problems on which emulation in the communes, associations of consumers and producers and in the soviets ought to center . . . are these: in which commune, in which part of a city, in which factory, in which village are there no hungry people, no unemployed ones, no rich idlers . . . where has more been done to raise the productivity of labor, to build new and good homes for the poor or to house them in the mansions of the rich? Where has most been done in order that every child in a poor family should get its bottle of milk?

There was little emphasis in all this on competition between individual workers for higher output and higher wages. Lenin returned to the idea of emulation in 1919, when he wrote on the so-called *Subbotniki*, groups of workers, Communist railwaymen, who, at the height of the civil war, volunteered to do special shifts of work during weekends in order to help to supply the Red Army. The *Subbotniki* started an “emulation;” and they received and expected no pay at all for their weekend shifts. Lenin extolled their enthusiasm and disinterestedness and remarked that the example given by them pointed by way of anticipation to the Socialist emulation of the future. This was an incident in the building up of Communist morale during the civil war rather than a pronouncement on economic policy; and the incident would not perhaps have been worth mentioning had it not been for the fact that Stalinist publicity for the latter-day brand of “Socialist emulation” uses Lenin’s words on the *Subbotniki* as its text. As we shall see later, the “Socialist emulation” of the Stalinist era has little in common with its alleged precedent.

During the civil war (1918–1920) and in the years that followed, Lenin did not specifically resume his advocacy of “Soviet Taylorism;” and this was no matter of chance. Scientific management and organization of labor are meaningless unless they are applied to a more or less orderly economic environment, in which at least the even flow of raw materials and equipment to the worker is assured and the worker’s basic needs are more or less

satisfied. None of these conditions existed then. The Russian economy had utterly disintegrated; industry was cut off from raw materials; industrial plant was half destroyed or rotting; and the industrial population was starving—in Moscow and Petrograd the worker's daily food ration often consisted of one-eighth of a pound of bread and a few potatoes. It was an extraordinary achievement for the Soviets to wrest from this disintegrated economy the munitions, the food and the clothing which the Red Army needed. The achievement was due to a set of emergency policies which came to be rationalized and idealized into the system of "war Communism." There was no lack of emulation among groups of Bolshevik enthusiasts; but there was little talk as yet about *Socialist* emulation. Despite all the familiar illusions of war Communism, the Bolshevik leaders were aware that this idealistic emulation was not characteristic of the economic climate of the country. Amid the appalling poverty of those years, the prevalent form of "emulation," a form in which the vast majority of the people engaged, was black market competition.

Only towards the end of the civil war, when the Soviet leaders began to prepare for the economic transition to peace, did they make a new attempt to tackle the problem; but the attempt was still made in terms of war Communism. Trotsky, hesitantly supported by the Central Committee of the Party, was the chief author of the economic policy of that period, a policy which consisted in militarization of labor, labor armies and "Socialist emulation." He submitted to the 9th Congress of the Party (1920) the following resolution which was adopted:

Every social system . . . has its own methods and ways of labor compulsion and education for labor in the interest of the exploiting classes.

The Soviet order is confronted with the task . . . of developing its own methods, designed to raise the intensity and efficiency of labor on the basis of a socialized economy and in the interests of the whole people.

On a par with the propaganda of ideas, which should influence the mind of the toiling masses, and with repressive measures, to be used against deliberate idlers, drones and disorganizers, emulation is the most powerful means towards raising productivity of labor.

In capitalist society emulation had the character of competition and led to the exploitation of man by man. In a society in which the means of production have been nationalized, emulation in labor ought, *without impinging upon the workers' solidarity*, only to raise the sum total of the products of labor.

Emulation between factories, regions, shops, workshops and individual workers should be the object of careful organization and attentive research

on the part of the trade unions and the economic administration. (The italics are those of the present writer.)

To this day these words are quoted in the U.S.S.R., without their author ever being mentioned, as a sort of a Magna Carta of Stalinist Socialist emulation. Trotsky was aware of the dilemma implied in his appeal. He insisted that emulation should not “impinge upon the workers’ solidarity,” that it should not, in other words, “degenerate” into competition. But how was this to be achieved? In the hypothetical Communist society of the future the contradiction was to resolve itself automatically. Amid an unheard-of abundance of goods, collectively produced and owned, the producers’ interest in the material rewards would gradually wither away. Men would no longer wrest from one another the necessities, and perhaps not even the luxuries, of life. Only then would emulation and solidarity become fully compatible. But how could they be made compatible at the early stages of the transition from capitalism to Communism, in a country whose economic resources were then, and were to remain for decades, greatly underdeveloped? Trotsky placed qualified trust in the nationalization of the means of production as a safeguard against the recrudescence of the old competition among the workers. But was this an adequate safeguard? Years later, Trotsky himself remarked with disillusioned sarcasm that by itself “state ownership of the means of production does not turn manure into gold.” Nor could it by itself transform competition into emulation.

In the last year of war Communism, Trotsky in his turn appeared before the Russian workers as the chief advocate of Soviet Taylorism. He had to consider whether the Russian worker could be persuaded to accept Taylorism or whatever was to pass under that name, and not to expect special material rewards for individual efficiency. Could “scientific management and organization of labor” make progress, without using wages policy as its instrument? Trotsky hesitated. Alternately he advocated the adoption of incentive wages and the equalization of wages. Lenin was quick to point to Trotsky’s inconsistency: “You cannot have emulation, *i.e.* inequality in production,” he argued, “without admitting inequality in consumption.” But “inequality in consumption”—differential wages—tended to undermine the workers’ solidarity. The “gold” of Socialist emulation was turning into the “manure” of bourgeois competition.

On the eve of N.E.P., Lenin, at any rate, was clear-sighted

enough to see that the Russian economy could not be rebuilt, and that the next step towards Socialism could not be made, without the reintroduction of a strong element of ordinary bourgeois competition, including competition between workers. But as a Marxist theorist, Lenin was also scrupulous enough not to label this "Socialist emulation." Thus he who early in 1918 had first sketched in public statements and more extensively in private notes the prospects of Socialist emulation was in later years more reticent on this subject than almost any Bolshevik leader.

After the introduction of N.E.P. in 1921 little or nothing was heard about emulation during nearly a decade. During the major part of this period the Soviet economy had to contend with vast industrial unemployment; and neither the workers nor the trade unions nor even the Party were in a mood to work out the Soviet version of Taylorism.

Only in 1929, at the beginning of the first Five Year Plan, was the call for Socialist emulation raised again. It was Stalin himself who raised it; and he did so without any of the theoretical or socio-political scruples that had inhibited the leaders of the earlier period. He was embarking upon the industrialization of the U.S.S.R. with the conviction that he had to foster among the workers the most intense competition in productivity and that he had to offer them, together with persuasion and coercion, the attraction of incentive wages. He was determined to unleash "bourgeois" competition among the workers; but he was also bent on labelling it "Socialist emulation." With characteristic vigor and crudity he stated in May 1929:

Emulation is the Communist method of constructing Socialism on the basis of the utmost activity of millions of toilers. . . . Socialist emulation and competition represent two altogether different principles. The principle of competition is defeat and death of some competitors, the victory and domination of others. The principle of Socialist emulation is that the advanced workers should render comradely assistance to those who lag behind in order to advance together.

This oversimplification served a definite purpose. The "principle" of competition is, of course, not "the defeat and death of some and victory and domination of others," although this may be the result of competition. Its principle is, as Marx put it, emulation for material reward. Stalin banished this plain and incontrovertible definition from Soviet economic thinking in order that the new régime introduced in industry together with the

Five Year Plans—the régime of shock work, Stakhanovism and of sharply differentiated incentive wages—could be invested with the halo of Socialist emulation. At the 16th Congress of the Party (1930) Stalin went even further: “The most remarkable feature of emulation,” he stated, “is that it brings about a basic change in people’s views on labor, that it transforms labor from a drudgery and a heavy burden . . . into a matter of honor, a matter of glory, a matter of bravery and heroism.” The more brutally he shifted his practical emphasis towards material rewards (and other methods in which there was neither honor nor glory nor heroism), the more did Stalin’s “ideological” propaganda describe his labor policy in terms of the ultimate Communist ideal.³

Whatever the ideological embellishments, the “bourgeois” competition which Stalin fostered in the Soviet working class was to a large extent both necessary and useful to Soviet industry. This is not the place to try to summarize Soviet labor policy under planned economy—I have recently attempted to do this in a monograph on the Soviet trade unions. Suffice it to say here that in the last decade or so before World War II the industrial working class of the U.S.S.R. expanded so rapidly that it grew from about 10 to nearly 35 percent of the Soviet population. This growth was interrupted by the war, but it has continued again since 1945–6. The bulk of the new labor force—24,000,000 people under the prewar Five Year Plans—has been recruited from the rural population. It has had to be given some elementary, hasty industrial training; and a relatively numerous section of it has had to be trained into skilled and efficient workers. The Government has had an obvious interest in gradually raising the efficiency of this vast and ceaselessly expanding mass. For this a comprehensive and elaborate system of incentive wages has been

³ That Stalin and the Politburo had their reasons for surrounding “Socialist competition” with ideological embellishments is understandable. This helped them to break down the original resistance to competition inside the Party, in the trade unions and among rank and file workers. What is much more strange is the assiduous credulity with which the ideological embellishments were sometimes accepted at the face value by outsiders. The Webbs, for instance, devoted a whole chapter of their “Soviet Communism” to the reproduction of all the myths on Socialist emulation. They surpassed themselves, however, in the following incongruous passage:

“The pleasurable excitement of Socialist emulation was actually brought into play in 1931–33 among the tens of thousands of convicted criminals, ‘politicals’ and *kulaks* employed, as we have already described, on the gigantic civil engineering works of the White Sea canal. Brigade competed with brigade as to which could shift the greatest amount of earth, lay the greatest length of rail or construct the greatest amount of embankment within the prescribed period—sometimes, it is recorded, refusing to stop work when the hour for cessation arrived, in order to complete some particular task.”

needed. Piece wages, that classical stimulant of workers' competition, became the dominant form of payment in Soviet industry. Already towards the end of the 1930s about 75 percent of all Soviet workers and employees were paid piece rates; and their proportion has grown since, while the rates have been ever more and more differentiated. This alone gives a measure of the competitive climate prevailing in the Soviet factory and workshop.

The "Socialist emulation" of the 1930s and 1940s represented only a primitive though broad approach by Soviet industry towards Taylorism and kindred versions of scientific management and organization of labor. No doubt some technologically advanced concerns and establishments carried out complex experiments in this field throughout this period. But in most sectors of Soviet industry the rhythm of technological advance was at first too slow and then too uneven and jerky, the labor force too raw and management too much hampered by political and bureaucratic interference for any systematic scientific organization of labor to be practised over most of these years. Only recently has there been evidence of a more genuine attempt to apply Soviet Taylorism more or less on a mass scale. Specialized Soviet periodicals discuss this attempt in a tone suggesting that Soviet management is breaking completely new ground. On closer analysis it seems that, despite all claims to originality, the U.S.S.R. is essentially still in the imitative period in this field, trying hard to adopt methods which have long been familiar elsewhere. The stop-watch and the man-record chart are still startling innovations. Undoubtedly, they do mark an important stage in the growth of Soviet industrial productivity.

It is only natural that Soviet conditions should impose modifications, which make the Soviet version of Taylorism in part less and in part more effective than its American original. By and large, Soviet workers still compete for the bare necessities of life. This in itself tends to make the competition much more brutal than that to which a working class living in a capitalist country but enjoying a higher standard of living would be willing to lend itself. The fact that the Soviet trade unions, or the bodies that exist under that name, far from curbing the competition, do their utmost to spur it on, works in the same direction. Too fierce competition between workers is by no means conducive to scientific organization. Nor does the customary Soviet emphasis on quantity production, so often harmful to quality, agree with either sci-

entific management or the rational planning of labor processes.

On the other hand, Soviet industry derives certain exceptional advantages from the circumstance that it is publicly owned and centralized. It is not encumbered by vested interests and restrictive practices. It is—or, at any rate, it should be—easy for any successful innovation in scientific organization of labor to spread, without undue friction or delay, over any sector of industry where it can be applied. Whatever other sorts of secrecy may be characteristic for the Soviets, internal commercial secrecy is not one of them. No Soviet concern or trust can have any solid motive for withholding its experience and achievements from other concerns; and the central pooling of technological and organizational experience is a decisive advantage.

In one further respect does the climate of Soviet industry favor Soviet Taylorism. The fear of unemployment never haunts the Soviet worker, whatever other fears may prey upon his mind. Restrictive craft practices are virtually unknown to him. Vertical mobility, to use the American term, is extremely high. In a society relentlessly forging ahead with its industrial revolution, to which it sets no limits, the chances of promotion open to workers are practically unlimited, or limited only by the fear of responsibility that goes with promotion. Nothing deters the skilled worker from imparting his skill to the novice and the junior at the bench; and there is much to induce and even to compel him to do so. It is one of the characteristic obligations which figure prominently in all the contracts for Socialist emulation that experience in more efficient management and use of labor should be unstintingly turned into common property.

It is rather difficult to gauge the effect of the non-material incentives and deterrents which are widely employed in “Socialist competition.” The rewards of the efficient worker include official decorations, flattering publicity, social standing. The inefficient finds his name on the blackboard over the bench. Whether favorable distinction or blacklisting has the intended effect depends largely on the morale of the environment in which the worker finds himself. Among a discontented or sullen factory crew, official praise and honors are most likely to isolate the Stakhanovite. But it is impossible to say what is the prevailing mood at the bottom of the industrial pyramid. As a rule, the moral prizes go to the Stakhanovite together with the material ones; and both mutually enhance their respective effectiveness.

Finally, one more aspect of this problem, a purely political one, should be considered. We have quoted Marx as saying that "competition makes individuals, not only the bourgeois, but even more so the workers, mutually hostile." Marx goes on to say: "Hence it is a long time before these individuals can unite. . . . Every organized power confronting these isolated individuals, who live in relationships daily reproducing their isolation, can be overcome only after long struggles. To demand the opposite would be tantamount to demanding that competition should not exist in this epoch of history, or that the individuals should banish from their minds relationships over which, in their isolation, they have no control." Competition, in other words, tends politically to atomize the working class and to prevent it from organizing and using its strength for its own ends. Here is perhaps a clue—to be sure, only one of many—to the political amorphousness of the Soviet working class in the last decades, an amorphousness contrasting sharply with the political initiative, vitality and organizing ability of the Russian workers under Tsardom. The new generation of Soviet workers has brought with it from the countryside a residual but still strong peasant individualism, upon which "Socialist competition" superimposes a new brand of individualism. Because most often the Soviet worker must fiercely compete for the bare necessities of life, his competitive individualism has certainly assumed extreme forms, making it difficult for him to develop his own political personality. Primitive economic individualism in the worker is, paradoxically, one of the essential preconditions for Stalinist collectivist uniformity, as essential as political terror, if not more so. Socialist emulation, because it is only competition under a new name—the struggle of all against all—makes the workers mutually hostile and "isolated from one another." They live in relationships which daily reproduce their isolation. Their energy, politically shapeless and undifferentiated, is therefore easily made to flow into molds operated by a single party. They work and build new cities and open up deserts and fight world-shaking battles; but, like most of mankind, they are still merely the object of history. They may become something more only after long struggles. "To demand the opposite would be tantamount to demanding that competition should not exist in this epoch of history." Or, that the Soviet workers should "banish from their minds relationships over which in their isolation they have no control."