Taylorism and Fordism

The development of Taylorism and Fordism in the early 1900’s yielded the primary components of “New Capitalism” and contributed to the growth of new industrial unionism. These primary components shaped the organization of the production and labor processes for several growing capitalist enterprises. Taylorism and Fordism both provided a means of increasing the capitalists’ control over the worker and increasing production. There are several significant features of Taylorism and Fordism that contribute to their success in the industrial workplace. The dissociation of the labor process, the complete separation of conception and execution, and the use of the monopoly of knowledge to control the execution of each workers task are the three principles of Taylorism. The manufacturing division of labor, the scientific management of labor, and the moving line are the three components of Fordism.

The primary focus of Taylorism is to control the worker by controlling the decisions that are made throughout the course of work. Taylorism benefits the capitalist as they are provided with yet another way to control the worker and increase production substantially without increasing wages comparably. Taylorism or the scientific management of labor developed because it was believed that the foremen were not obtaining the maximum amount of production from the workers. The first component of Taylorism, the disassociation of the labor process, begins the process of controlling the worker as management systematically studies the worker to obtain the traditional knowledge that in the past was held solely by the worker. The management then takes the knowledge that is gained from studying the worker and formats the information into rules and formulas for work.

The second component of Taylorism, the complete separation of conception from execution further perpetuates the capitalists’ control over the worker. According to the idea of
separation of conception from execution there should be a division of mental work and manual work. “Mental workers” or management and engineers should be the sole planners of work and should hold the monopoly of knowledge. Taylorism sees the knowledge that management takes from the workers to be property of management because it is management who provided for the systematic study of the labor process. The knowledge that is gained from the workers through the studies by management are then used by management to fulfill the Babbage Principle by deskilling the worker, increasing output, and lowering the costs of labor.

The third component of Taylorism, the use of the monopoly of knowledge to control the execution of each workers task leads to the development of a “job plan” and the scientific piece wage. The “job plan” provides a systematically preplanned way to carry out each step of the labor process. The scientific piece wage is developed to increase the output of workers and to set a minimum standard of how much each worker should be outputting. An issue that commonly arises with the attempt to develop a scientific piece wage is soldiering or loafing. According to Taylor soldiering is a natural instinct and all men have the tendency to loaf, however, Taylor’s larger concern is how soldiering is maintained by relations with other men. This social impact on soldiering is known as systematic soldiering where as a group the worker attempt to keep management ignorant to just how much they are in fact capable of outputting. Workers systematically soldier because they have learned that even if they increase their productivity by 50% that their wage will not in fact follow with a comparable increase, instead others will begin to work at that rate, and the wage will actually be lowered. Workers also soldier because they fear layoffs so they in turn spread out the work to ensure there will be jobs. To overcome the issue of scientific soldiering Taylor systematically chose a workman to observe and had this workman perform set tasks for an exact period of time. By eliminating loafing and dictating a
“job plan” Taylor developed the “carrot stick “scientific piece wage which led to a further increase in output. In addition, the worker also earned more money if he maintained this rate, however, if he soldiered at the previous rate he would learn less. The scientific piece wage led to a worker producing 375% more while only receiving a 60% increase in wages.

While Taylorism made revolutionary changes in the way that capitalists controlled workers and increased productivity, Taylorism did lead to an uprising of strikes. Workers became enraged about the wages they were receiving and the fact that craft knowledge was now separated from skill. The worker no longer was a craftsman but was just another animated tool. In Taylorism the productivity of workers began to reach a maximum and the only way to increase productivity was to in turn increase the workforce.

Fordism proved to be especially revolutionary as capitalists controlled the labor and production process. Fordism proposed a way to fix in a sense the issues that were caused by deskilling the worker and decreasing wages. Workers’ feelings about being driven to higher productivity and submission to a “job plan” and piece wages not only led to several strikes but to high craft based turnover. Fordism provided a solution to increase the workforce and also to overcome the growing disproportion that was leading to not enough production to meet demand.

Fordism, in summary combines the manufacturing division of labor with Taylorism and adds the moving line. The first component of Fordism is the manufacturing division of labor. The manufacturing division of labor seeks to divide the tasks of work and assign these tasks to different laborers as a means of increasing productivity and deskilling the worker. The second component of Fordism is scientific management or Taylorism, the scientific study of work processes that is dictated by management. Through scientific management Fordism created a “job plan” or the set of simplest movements in which the job could be done.
The most revolutionary component of Fordism is the moving line or the automatic movement of work between workers. The moving line provided a way of controlling the workforce to insure each worker spends the same time on tasks. Management could control the pace of the work and rid the manufacturing plant of loafing by speeding up the line causing workers to move faster. Management was able to control workers as they were set up in a serial arrangement. The moving line also made the omissions of those who were not doing their job properly evident as each worker at the moving line influenced the other workers.

Secondly, the moving line also led to almost total deskillling of the worker which led to equalization of the wage rates. Fordism got rid of the Babbage Principle, the idea of paying workers different wages based on the amount of skill they had or their task required because no skill was required with the moving line. Also, because wage rates were equal and management controlled the rate at which the workers worked there was no need for piece wages or incentive wages. To overcome the issue of high worker turnover and to also increase productivity Fordism proposed an unusual wage of $5 a day, which was double the average wage.

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Lastly, the moving line and the $5 a day wage led to control outside the factory. As expected worker turnover came to a halt and people were applying to Ford like crazy. The workers that held a job at Ford were pleased to have a job with a wage of $5 a day so to keep their jobs they were willing to work hard. The high wage led to social innovation in which workers would submit to work organizations.
The effects of Taylorism and Fordism on the industrial workplace were widespread and powerful. Between the time period of 1919-1929 industrial output in the United States doubles as the number of industrial workers decreases. There is a large increase in the number of unskilled workers as skill is removed from the worker and placed into the mechanisms of the machines. Taylorism and Fordism also led to an undermining of the workers ability to bargain on the basis of skills but also increased the workers ability to bargain on the basis of control over the workplace. The increase in workplace bargaining power came from the nature of the system of production in which workers were dependent on one another to complete the task. If one worker didn’t do their job he would be fired, however, if many workers didn’t do their job as was the case in the sit in strike in GM, management will be at a loss with no way to control the workers. In addition, Fordism and Taylorism led to a vulnerability of the production process as workers could break equipment, resulting in the closing of an industrial plant for a period of time. Workers also would take part in product sabotage because the work was being done by many there was great indifference to the quality of the product.

There are several significant features of Taylorism and Fordism that led to the increase in productivity and decrease in skilled workers between 1919 and 1929. Taylorism and Fordism both provide a means of increasing the capitalists’ control over the worker and a means of increasing production. The development of Taylorism and Fordism led to “New Capitalism” and also contributed to the growth of new industrial unionism.