The diffusion and political content of scientific management during the first half of the twentieth century has long interested scholars. Originally preoccupied with work processes and labor discipline, scientific management ultimately informed the international development of several fields. Education, public administration, industrial psychology, and personnel management, among others, absorbed in different ways the Taylorist ethos of organizational efficiency through expert research and functional prescription. As for its political thrust, most scholars have viewed Taylorism, for good or ill, as an important part of modern capitalist ideology, or as a vehicle for the promotion of new classes standing above or between capital and labor. More recently, the gender politics of Taylorism’s spread have come under review, if often only implicitly, in studies of women’s work and the home.¹

Critical to both the appeal and the development of Taylorism were the “scientizing” and utopian impulses at its core. The “mental revolution” Taylor demanded of labor and management was to produce both a more rational and productive workplace and, by extension, a more abundant and harmonious society. This sensibility only increased after Taylor’s death in 1915; his notoriety, the proselytizing of his associates, and wartime lessons in cooperative planning, would liberate scientific management from the shop floor. And during the postwar years, an international search for new mechanisms of social integration increasingly turned scientific management into an ideology of broad social transformation.²
Visions of a world made rational and abundant through the planning of technical elites now animated the thinking of novelists and revolutionaries, as well as engineers and businessmen. H. G. Wells, V. I. Lenin, and Herbert Hoover, in different ways, subscribed to the new faith, made plain its political ambitions, and thus helped to advance its pretensions and values. From approximately 1915 through the 1930s, then, serious people believed and promoted the view that scientific management’s proven ability to raise productivity within the firm could become the basis for a new utopia. One of these was the Russell Sage Foundation executive, social worker, and industrial sociologist, Mary Abby Van Kleeck.3

“The archetypal social feminist,” Van Kleeck (1883–1972) was one of the network of women reformers and social investigators active in New York’s labor and social justice causes early in the century. Her studies of women workers led to her appointment as director of the Sage Foundation’s Department of Industrial Studies, a post she would hold from 1916 to her retirement in 1948. In that capacity, she led the development of a program of labor and economic planning research, and almost singlehandedly turned the foundation into an institute for advanced social study. During the interwar period she emerged as the leader of the left wing of American social work, a radical defender of labor and civil rights. And there, too, she joined the worldwide planning debate through her leading role in Herbert Hoover’s macroeconomic planning initiatives, in the International Industrial Relations Institute (IRI), and in the Taylor Society, the chief American organization for the promotion of scientific management.4

Van Kleeck was not the only Taylorite concerned with scientific management’s wider social applications. Morris Cooke and Harlow Person, among others, shared this interest. Nor was she the only woman. Lillian Gilbreth and Ida Tarbell, like Van Kleeck, were members of the Taylor Society, and worked to apply the movement’s principles to the home. But perhaps more than any Taylorite, Mary Van Kleeck worked to bring scientific management to bear on social welfare. She saw scientific management’s emphasis on research into the factors of production as the key to achieving social work’s goal of raised living standards. Scientific management, Van Kleeck believed, its standard of rationality informed by social work’s concern for the common weal, could
determine the proper coordination of all aspects of modern economies, from industrial relations within firms to the balancing of national production and consumption. And she pursued this belief over a career that traversed the difficult terrain from liberal reform through Hooverian corporatism to Soviet fellow traveling.\(^5\) Largely ignored by scholars, Van Kleeck's activities illuminate the appeal of Taylorism to professions and professionals seeking wider public influence, the meaning and place of scientific management in the interwar movement toward macroeconomic planning, and the ironies of one woman's very large role in these matters.\(^6\)

Mary Van Kleeck's commitment to social work antedated her discovery of scientific management. Her vocation took shape while she was a student at Smith College from 1900 to 1904. There, her leading role in the Smith College Association for Christian Work and exposure to the early industrial work of the YWCA drew her into a wider world of woman-led reform. Upon graduation, and with a postgraduate fellowship in hand, she joined the College Settlement on New York's lower east side and began graduate work in social economy with Edward T. Devine and Henry R. Seager at Columbia University. The College Settlement had already served as a training ground for such other women reformers as Mary Simkhovitch, Frances Kellor, and Eleanor Roosevelt. And there, Lilian Brandt, Florence Kelley, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York introduced the young social worker to a women's network of industrial investigation and reform. From 1905 through 1907, she studied child labor and overtime in women's work in New York City and soon came to the attention of the then-new Russell Sage Foundation.\(^7\)

Inaugurated in 1907, the Sage Foundation reflected the scientizing currents then running strongly through philanthropic circles, and the determination to move beyond charity and relief into the systematic study of poverty's causes. To this end the foundation sponsored, among other things, the Pittsburgh Survey, the first social survey of an American city, dedicated itself to professionalizing social work, and would function for the next forty years as Mary Van Kleeck's institutional base.\(^8\)

Initially, the new foundation sponsored the continuation of Van Kleeck's early researches, operating now under the auspices of an independent Committee on Women's Work chaired by Henry
Seager, and in 1910 brought this committee formally into the foundation. Between 1910 and 1917, Van Kleeck's department launched investigations of the poor conditions, night work, and unemployment suffered by New York City's women workers in the artificial flowers, millinery, and bookbinding trades. "Intensive in method, dealing with a concrete, limited subject of inquiry," these studies, she explained, produced "not theories but evidence gathered slowly from those who know the facts through experience—the workers and the employers." 9

Van Kleeck's investigations emphasized the disorganization and irregularity of business operations. She called, among other things, for worker-management wage boards and employment exchanges to address these problems. In 1910 and again in 1915, she was instrumental in the establishment of state prohibitions against night work for women workers. Reflecting later upon the value of her early projects, she remarked that for "a view of the industrial system which comprehends not only the factory but the homes of the people . . . , the best subject of study is the status of women in industry." By 1914, however, convinced by her work "that distress and poverty among women workers are but phases of" larger "industrial and social conditions," Van Kleeck welcomed the foundation's decision to enlarge her department's scope to include study of men's as well as women's work. This broadened mandate was made formal in 1916 with the creation of a new Division of Industrial Studies under her leadership. 10

These projects revealed a stubborn faith in the potential of social science to provide both the vision and the means necessary for social transformation. They were, Van Kleeck noted in 1915, "carried on in the faith that a well-informed community will develop, step by step, a new order, the outgrowth of a new philosophy pressing toward the control of the industrial causes of poverty and misery. . . ." Management and labor, in other words, would be brought to a more balanced and just accommodation through a public opinion informed by social research. And because her studies also indicated that poor business management lay behind unemployment, Van Kleeck soon would be among those encouraging the fusion of scientific management and social work in the assault on economic instability. 11

By 1915 and Taylor's death, scientific management had been moving for some time toward just such a wider application of its
principles. Taylor's later writings and pronouncements, together
with the popularization of his ideas by Louis Brandeis, Ida Tar-
bell, and others, strongly suggested the movement's applicability
to the cause of national reform and renewal. Under Harlow
Person's presidency, the Taylor Society from 1914 through 1919
was increasingly receptive to the consideration of social ideals and
to the participation of social scientists and reformers. 12

Van Kleeck surely was aware of this ferment; while the origins
of her association with the Taylor Society remain unclear, her first
reference to Taylorism, so the available evidence indicates, came in
a syllabus for a course on industrial problems at the New York
School of Philanthropy, where she taught from 1914 to 1917.
There, in 1915, she introduced students of social work to the
proposition that scientific management's "big contribution" to
their field lay in its "expert study of working conditions." Such
study, she argued early in 1917, had already led some management
engineers to recognize the inefficiencies of unemployment and
haphazard personnel policies. Here she pointed approvingly to the
ideas of Richard Feiss and Ordway Tead, and to the efforts of
Robert Valentine to promote an "Industrial Audit," in which the
management of human relations within firms would be subject to
the scrutiny accorded the management of production. Taylorites,
it seemed to Van Kleeck, were beginning to share social work's
preoccupation with the "human element"; in order to further
these merging tendencies, she urged the adoption of the industrial
audit as the first step in training social workers to assume person­
el management positions in industry. 13

As they developed from 1915 to 1924, Van Kleeck's views on the
relations between social work and scientific management were
complex and contradictory. Convinced that both social workers
and scientific managers had much to teach each other, she encour­
aged their merger and welcomed their contributions to the new
field of personnel management. At the same time, she resisted the
tendency of Taylorites and others to view the growing emphasis
on human relations in industry as an improvement upon and
departure from the ideas of Frederick W. Taylor. Occasionally, she
seemed to suggest that scientific management needed no lessons
in wider social vision from anyone. Because an unreconstructed
Taylorism's scientific, and thus disinterested, approach to indus­
Mary Van Kleeck and Scientific Management

trial management could help to rationalize the firm, she reasoned, it could not help but rationalize and make just the firm's relationship with its workers and community. Scientific management, for Van Kleeck, was thus a social science of utopian potential. With its pretensions to transcendent authority, moreover, such a fundamentalist scientism likely held an additional appeal: it could enable insecure professionals, social workers as well as management engineers, to cast themselves as social arbiters with important and independent roles to play in stabilizing the industrial system.

Van Kleeck was acutely conscious of social work's uncertain professional status. With its attention split between the results and the causes of human suffering, between casework and social reform, and lacking an esoteric technique and independent source of income, social work's identity was unclear, its disinterestedness in question. Since it functioned best as a "mediating" contact among various groups, Van Kleeck argued, it should view its professional mission as one of encouraging other groups and professions to think in terms of the community, the social ideal. "Only as social workers are prepared consciously to formulate their experience as a guide for the practice of others . . . can they lay claim to the possession of technique." Recent "experience seems also to show," she noted, "that the more socialized the other professions become, the more they turn to social workers for light." The best evidence for this proposition, Van Kleeck felt, lay in the warming relations between social workers and management engineers.14

The first world war's demand for labor management intensified the linkages between these groups, encouraging both the development of the personnel management movement and fresh opportunities to illustrate scientific management's importance to women workers. Together with Morris Cooke, for example, Van Kleeck sought to advance the interests of wartime women workers by establishing labor standards through the Storage Committee and Industrial Service Section of the Ordnance Department. With the trade unionist, Mary Anderson, she expanded upon this work in the Woman in Industry Service of the Labor Department, forerunner of the U.S. Women's Bureau. Despite employer resistance, exploitation, and discrimination, women workers, she found, often succeeded in men's work. "Hundreds of jobs," Van
Kleeck noted proudly, "became sexless." Such success, however, depended mostly upon intelligent and efficient business management. "The war record," she wrote in The Atlantic Monthly, "... is clear. Management in industry, and not feminism, opened the way to novel work for women." Nonetheless, Van Kleeck suggested, feminism and scientific management shared ultimate goals. "Efficiency," she averred elsewhere, "is not the ultimate aim. ... The goal is the establishment of just relationships."\(^15\)

It is the method of industry to attach the individual to his limited, specified place in the whole scheme of production; while the aim of feminism is to make the whole recognize a hitherto unrealized obligation to the individual ... it busies itself with the issues that the times create.

The economic issues of the time, as they are reflected in women's industrial status, were never more baffling. She must win a more secure place in the shop as a skilled worker. She has as yet only a limited ... recognition in the labor movement. ... She is accused of aiming to undermine the home, just when she may be working hardest at uncongenial tasks to support it. So discouraging is the outlook ... that one is almost inclined to agree with certain anti-feminists about the effects of industrialism on all our social institutions, including the family as a whole and women individually. Not feminism, however, but industrial organization, uncontrolled in the common service, has done the damage.\(^16\)

Scientific management, Van Kleeck was certain, could help undo the damage. And while in the immediate postwar years, she would continue to work on behalf of women workers through her association with the U.S. Women's Bureau, by far the bulk of her energies would be devoted to furthering the merger of social work and Taylorite perspectives. Here, her own ties to scientific management would intensify, as she would be elected to the Nominating Committee and the Board of Directors of the Taylor Society.\(^17\)

"The management engineer and the social worker," she concluded in 1922, "have found cooperation necessary." "The management engineer has discovered ... that the efficiency and cooperative attitude of a labor force is directly affected by the organization of life in the community." The social worker, "ap-
proaching from a different direction has also arrived at the place where recognition of the relations of these two groups . . . become highly desirable for the success of each . . .” Van Kleeck was probably right, although in more ways than she admitted. During the years just before and after the world war, elements within each group were interested in securing greater influence and autonomy, both within and without the corporation: engineers by claiming possession of a scientifically informed social vision, social workers by establishing a new professional authority resting on the research and skills they could bring to bear on the economic sources of social distress. “Industry,” she proclaimed, “is being invaded by social workers, who are bringing their experience to bear upon problems of personnel and research as they affect human relations.” For a social worker like Van Kleeck, eager to see her profession take up an important role in social reconstruction, the assault was providential. 18

Closer ties to scientific management, Van Kleeck seemed to think, would help to “scientize,” and thus make more effective, social work’s claim to a place in the larger postwar debate over capitalist instability and unemployment. Personnel management already had emerged, in part, from this linkage, and Van Kleeck looked forward to further developments along these lines, toward an entirely new profession for industrial sociologists like herself. For a time in 1921 and 1922, she worked with Lucy Carner, Frances Perkins, Molly Dewson, Louise Odencrantz, and George Soule attempting to organize a field of “industrial social work,” but nothing came of this effort. Still, as she reminded her friend, Morris Cooke, “the analogy is close between social work and engineering.” “We wish,” she continued, “that we could find a more inclusive title than social work which has been so strongly associated with case workers.” Briefly, she considered the term “social engineering,” but regarded it as inaccurate and confusing. Still, “a term of that kind which denotes our interest in constructive social problems and in research would give us the broader basis necessary for . . . professional organization.” 19

While Van Kleeck welcomed the development of mutually informing links between social work and scientific management, ties that would alter each profession, she resisted any suggestion that Taylor’s thought had ignored the “human element.” “My own experience,” she would tell the Taylor Society in 1924,
Those answers did not relate merely to what is called the human element in industry, conceived as a separate problem in a different compartment of the manager's desk. My interest in the contribution of scientific management . . . was not solely in its emphasis upon personnel relations, but in the technical organization of industry as it affects wage-earners. The constructive imagination which can spend seventeen years studying the art of cutting metals is the imagination which can make industry and all its results in human lives harmonize with our ideals for the community. That kind of constructive imagination, though it may deal with one technical problem, will not fail to envisage the whole significance of industrial management. Nor will it be content merely to increase profits. The philosophy and the procedure which it represents will ultimately build a shop whose influence in the community will be social in the best sense, because the shop and all its human relations are built on sound principles.

Therefore, my interest in the Taylor Society is not directed toward challenging the technical engineer to give attention to problems of human relations. I am not worried about that, because if he is a good engineer he cannot fail to contribute to human relations. I am concerned rather with the other end of the story. I am eager to have those people who see the present disastrous results of industrial organization in the community realize how the art of management in the shop can fundamentally change those social conditions in the community.

By the early 1920s, Van Kleeck's efforts to merge social work and scientific management had led her irrevocably from the world of women's reform to the heart of the management reform movement. While she would maintain some contacts among the women's network of social reformers, she would not be central to their progress through the interwar years. Instead, her commit-
ment to scientific management as social science would lead her into a range of new activities, international associations, and political commitments. Postwar economic turmoil and industrial conflict already had prompted her to reorient her Department of Industrial Studies toward systematic analysis of employee-management plans within several industries. More importantly, in terms of our story, her efforts would take her now into the developing arenas of national and international planning.22

These, in the most immediate sense, were the product of the first world war's various national planning experiments. Against the backdrop of postwar dislocations, some of those who had played the largest roles in the wartime mobilization of the economy—management engineers, social scientists, a few businessmen, and labor leaders—struggled to build new national managerial capabilities. The chief figure in this story was the new Commerce Secretary, Herbert Hoover. But around him, from 1921 through the early 1930s, would gather an array of planners, and among these was Mary Van Kleeck.23

Van Kleeck saw Hooverian planning, at least at its outset, as an opportunity to further the rationalization of business and its relation to the community, and to do so now on a national scale. Early in 1921, Hoover sponsored the Federated American Engineering Societies' study, Waste in Industry. While criticizing the report as vague, Van Kleeck nonetheless found valuable its emphasis on managerial responsibility for social as well as industrial welfare. Still, she was skeptical when in the fall of 1921, amidst a severe depression, Hoover presided over the President's Conference on Unemployment. Van Kleeck doubted Hoover's grasp of labor issues and unemployment. And with both the Labor Department and its Women's Bureau excluded, she feared the Conference would promote the Commerce Department at their expense. Still, she retained some hope. "Perhaps," she wrote to her Sage Foundation associate, Shelby Harrison, "this means that the main objective will be to emphasize the responsibility of employers for avoiding unemployment, and, if so, the results may be worthwhile."24

This was precisely Hoover's emphasis in the conference. To institutionalize it, he invited Mary Van Kleeck and others to join a continuing committee to supervise an unprecedented investigation into the nature of business cycles and the utility of scientific
management in their prevention. A key vehicle of Hooverian planning, the committee reflected Hoover's desire to construct a better ordered and balanced society through the application of technical expertise to economic problems. It reflected, too, Hoover's antistatism, and his determination to achieve these goals through a corporatist arrangement in which private bodies were encouraged by the Commerce Department to assume larger public responsibilities.  

Such planning, while sponsored by the Commerce Department, would be funded by the major foundations and built upon the investigations of social scientists affiliated with them, universities, and public policy research organizations such as the National Bureau of Economic Research. The idea was that the new knowledge developed about the business cycle and the countercyclical benefits of scientific management would be broadcast to the nation's businessmen by a Commerce Department eager to see them stabilize their operations and tailor their investment decisions to the cycle's swings. And to the extent that they did so, the argument ran, then the sum of their individual actions would add up to a national economy of greater stability and less unemployment.

Still skeptical, Van Kleeck was willing to give Hooverian macroeconomic planning a chance. With the economist, Wesley C. Mitchell, and the chairman of General Electric, Owen D. Young, she played a leading role in the Cycle Committee's deliberations, and authored one chapter of the committee's final report, *Business Cycles and Unemployment*. Published amidst wide publicity in 1923, the report seemed at the time to have helped to moderate both the upward swing and subsequent decline in business activity at mid-decade, thus vindicating, apparently, Hoover's approach to the economy. But the story of Hooverian planning would not end well, and turned out to be more a story of tentative efforts soon to be overwhelmed by the economy's deeper structural dilemmas and the coming of the Great Depression.

By the late 1920s, in any case, Van Kleeck had become increasingly impatient with Hoover's approach. Her impatience prompted a reassessment. The evidence of rising unemployment amidst general prosperity had mounted; neither social work's "invasion" of industry nor scientific management, it seemed, were strong enough to compel capitalism's reorganization of work and wel-
fare. Thus the time had come, she now argued, to ask whether the problem of stabilizing employment and raising living standards could any longer be left to business management alone.28

Scientific management was as important as ever to addressing these problems, she maintained, but without greater public and worker control of the economy it would never fulfill its promise of rational production and social abundance. “It is not enough,” she insisted as early as 1927, “to leave the problem of employment and unemployment to leaders of business.” The “scientific method of approach to social and economic problems needs to be utilized by unions.” This was a theme she carried even into the Taylor Society, where she urged consideration of the “claim of the public upon the social uses of the science of management.” It was a theme, too, that would only intensify, as the coming of the Great Depression accelerated her commitment to socialism.29

Insisting that Van Kleeck was “one of the best-fitted women in the country for a Cabinet position,” Alice Hamilton spoke for those early in the 1930s who regarded Mary Van Kleeck, in Lillian Gilbreth’s words, “as the best research woman I know.” Van Kleeck’s militant and newfound socialism, however, made a New Deal cabinet appointment unlikely. She was offered a post on the Federal Advisory Council of the U.S. Employment Service, but resigned it abruptly to dramatize her opposition to the NRA’s insufficient support for collective bargaining and the labor movement. “I find myself forced to stand outside and criticize,” she told her good friend Morris Cooke. “I have to work out in my own mind the right direction for my present activities.” Her activities since the late 1920s increasingly had involved her in the worldwide search for a new international economic order, a search that had originated more than a decade before in her first efforts to “internationalize” the merger of social reform and scientific management in the work of the International Industrial Relations Institute (IRI).30

The IRI arose early in the 1920s as the result of international efforts by a group of mostly women personnel specialists to address the postwar debate over scientific management’s place in industrial relations. While corporate welfare and personnel work had been developing both in Europe and the United States since early in the century, the war’s labor demands created openings in many firms for women interested in managing the “human
factor." And, in a chateau in Normandy in July, 1922, a small group of such women, representing eleven countries, came together in the First International Welfare Conference.  

Louise Odencrantz, the wartime personnel manager for the New York ribbon-making firm, Smith & Kaufmann, and Van Kleeck's former associate at the Sage Foundation, was the American representative to the conference. Mary Fledderus, the personnel manager of the Leerdam Glassworks, just outside Rotterdam, Holland, and soon to become, together with Van Kleeck, the motive force behind the IRI, also attended.  

Appointed by the conference to organize a larger and more permanent organization, Fledderus was responsible in June 1925 for convening in Holland the new International Association for the Study and Improvement of Human Relations in Industry. More than fifty delegates, most of them women, representing twenty-one countries, attended the conference. Among them were sympathetic employers, such as Dorothy Cadbury, a managing director of England's Cadbury chocolate empire, and Cees van der Leeuw, a partner in Rotterdam's Van Nelle coffee operation and longtime friend of Fledderus. Sweden's chief Inspector of Factories, Kersten Hesselgren, was elected president, and three American members, Odencrantz, Lillian Gilbreth, and Van Kleeck, were elected to the organization's permanent Council.  

"Though the principles of Scientific Management and Efficiency are in themselves to be hailed with enthusiasm," Fledderus wrote in the introduction to the congress's report, "unless they are applied with a corresponding study of their effect upon humanity serving in Industry, they hide within their depths the possibility of a great and subtle cruelty." Here, in another form and place, was Van Kleeck's linkage of industrial social work and scientific management. The new congress envisioned its role as one of collaboration with such established bodies as the International Management Institute (IMI) and the International Labor Organization (ILO). As such it could be a forum for the frank discussion of contending schemes for the "promotion of satisfactory human relations and conditions in industry."  

The Association met regularly in summer sessions during 1926 and 1927 in order to prepare for its first triennial conference, one that was to test this self-appointed function. The "Fundamental Relationships Between All Sectors of the Industrial Community"
was the theme, then, in June 1928, when more than one hundred delegates from twenty countries met for a week at Girton College, the women's college of Cambridge University. There, Paul Devinat of the ILO, the British scientific management enthusiast, Lyndall Urwick, former Principal Woman Inspector of Factories, Dame Adelaide Anderson, and Paul Kellogg, editor of the Survey magazine, were in attendance. Both Holland's and Britain's progressive employers were represented by Cees van der Leeuw and by the Rowntrees and Cadburys.  

Their discussions, Van Kleeck noted in her remarks to the congress's closing session, had ranged over the philosophies of individualism and collectivism, differences in national experiences, workers' education, and the contributions of scientific management to improved human relations. "Now if anyone complains that there are not enough 'brass tacks' . . . in our discussions," she admonished, "I think we have to ask, is there anything more tangible or more concrete . . .," than "bringing together the points of view of labour, of employers, of managers, and of those who are students of industry?"

This seemed to be the view of many, both in the conference and among the attentive public, who in the late 1920s looked upon the IRI as an interesting, if modest, "factory of ideas." The organization was all the more remarkable, Van Kleeck was to note later, because it did not have a formal staff, instead relying upon carefully developed triennial conferences, themselves arising out of previous summer meetings and reports. These materials and conference proceedings, then, would be published, usually in book form, as the favored method of bringing the organization's work to a wider and international public.

In truth, the IRI by the late 1920s relied almost exclusively upon Fledderus and Van Kleeck. As director and associate director, respectively, they ran the organization from its office in The Hague and from Van Kleeck's offices in the Sage Foundation, relying for funds on membership dues, a few guardian angels, and the Sage Foundation. And when early in the 1930s the coming of the Depression, the emergence of fascist parties in Europe, and the Soviet Union's turn toward central planning brought a new urgency to world affairs, they turned the IRI's next triennial conference into an opportunity to investigate the implications of these new developments. The result was the Amsterdam World Social
Economic Congress of 1931, the high water mark of the IRI’s influence.38

“The situation in Europe is indescribably serious,” Van Kleeck warned Morris Cooke in the fall of 1930. And “modest as is the I.R.I., it seems to find itself in the position of being the only organization able to offer a platform at this moment to labor, employers, scientific managers, and economists. . . .” The platform’s strength, Van Kleeck felt, would depend upon turning the Amsterdam Congress into an international version of the President’s Unemployment Conference of 1921. Then, “Mr. Hoover . . . was trying to lift the subject of unemployment to a higher plane of industrial statesmanship, getting leaders of business to use the results of economic research to enlarge the judgment of businessmen.” With unemployment now worsening, she argued, “international economic co-operation . . . toward a planned development of productive capacity and standards of living,” was necessary. Van Kleeck envisioned nothing less than the fusion of scientific management and social welfare in an international “Social-Economic Planning.”39

Returning to a favorite theme, Van Kleeck insisted that social economic planning “traces directly back to the scientific management movement,” and asks “whether the mastery of knowledge which is slowly being accepted in the workshops can be transferred to the community as a whole. . . .” Planning, she later wrote, “will soon be another commonplace expression,” meaning everything and nothing. “But rarely is the expression ‘economic planning’ used in combination with the word ‘social’ as denoting the common welfare—the one word from which it should never be severed.” Social-economic planning, she asserted in Amsterdam, “is the name for a definite procedure.” It had yet to be fairly tested, “but its underlying principles have been developed in the scientific management movement . . . ,” and its central task is to utilize the world’s productive capacities “to raise the standards of living.”40

This was the theme that appealed to the Taylorites, scholars, socialists, and trade unionists who assembled in Amsterdam’s Koloniaal Institute in late August of that year. Delegates from the United States included Harlow Person, Edward A. Filene of the Boston department store and 20th Century Fund, and Lewis Lorwin of the Brookings Institution. But drawing the most
attention was a delegation of the State Planning Commission of the Soviet Union (Gosplan).

The Soviet delegation's presence alone was news, as they were among the first Soviet officials to travel to the west to discuss the Five Year plans. More than this, they were representatives of the world's first society attempting comprehensive and socialized planning, and thus "their coming did not merely add one nation to the list," Van Kleeck noted, "but brought to the discussion the record of experience with social economic planning under communism, as it is actually in effect." Led by the Gosplan economist, Valery V. Obolensky-Ossinsky, the Soviet delegation even presented their chief discussion of Russia under the plans as "The Nature and Forms of Social Economic Planning." Their presentations were eagerly attended by a congress and international press curious to learn more about the details of central administration, goal setting, the role of scientific management in labor relations, and the allegedly democratic and collaborative ethos underlying the Soviet administration of industry, agriculture, and trade. But of these matters, the Soviets really had little new to say, preferring instead to emphasize, sometimes angrily, the contrast between a Soviet Union enjoying planned and democratic full employment and a prostrate western capitalism.41

Following the Amsterdam Congress, Van Kleeck and her allies in the IRI worked to establish a World Commission for the Study of Social Economic Planning, one capable of developing statistics and other materials necessary for the construction of world plans. "But is not this world task too big for us?" she asked rhetorically. It was, of course. The IRI never attained direct and continuous influence in the planning debates of the 1930s. Unable to generate additional funds for their ambitious plans amidst the Depression, Van Kleeck, Fledderus, and a few associates continued their work, coming together in IRI conferences every year until war in Europe effectively brought their enterprise to an end.42

While the Amsterdam Congress marked the height of the IRI's career, it marked only the beginning of the final stage of Mary Van Kleeck's efforts to merge social work and scientific management for the planned raising of living standards. During the Great Depression, she advocated a greater role for both in the construction of social economic planning. "The Amsterdam Congress
convinced me,” she said in a speech early in 1932, “that the place to begin planning is to study the production and distribution of raw materials” as the first step toward a “better social plan for economic life.” To this end, she turned the Department of Industrial Studies and the IRI to new studies of natural resource industries, technological change, and living standards, and urged the creation of a National Economic Council to promote such planning.43

Increasingly, too, she pointed to the Soviet Union as a source for comparative study in these matters. “If we can be objective and scientific in our attitude, what an opportunity this is for our generation to observe two systems—capitalist and communist—and to compare their results.” And by 1933, she had little doubt where such comparison would lead.44

It is impossible to discuss a planned economy without calling attention to the actual example of it in the Soviet Union. There all of the branches of economic life are planned as an integrated whole. It would be worthwhile for us to study its actual technique . . . as examples of the way in which the whole range of managerial problems is studied in their interrelationships. I am frank to say that I believe that the planned economy of the Soviet Union brings us face to face with the real issue . . . [of] whether capitalism as we know it now . . . must claim our permanent allegiance, or whether we are ready with entirely open minds to consider the fundamental questions of economic organization which the present crisis of unemployment presents us.45

Van Kleeck, like other curious engineers and observers, had visited the Soviet Union in 1932, studying its efforts toward social economic planning under the Five Year Plans. And upon her return she presented her findings to the Taylor Society.

The universality of the principles of scientific management emerges as one observes their applicability in the new economic system of the Soviet Union. The outstanding difference is that in the United States limits are set to the application of knowledge because the area of control through ownership is not comprehensive enough to plan and control the relationship of factors which are essentially interrelated. . . . [T]he Soviet
Union has given to scientific management in that country a scope which is new in the history of modern industry. It will take time to perfect its application. . . . But meanwhile . . . this large-scale integration of industries reaches far beyond the widest stretch of the management engineer in America. Here scientific management is tied to a hitchingpost, when it should be free to follow as far as electricity can carry it.\textsuperscript{46}

To untie scientific management so that it could assume its rightful social role, Van Kleeck advocated public trusteeship over corporate use of national resources. For a time during the mid 1930s she attained national prominence promoting this vision, especially among social workers, leading them and other professionals as national chairman of the Inter-Professional Association for Social Insurance, an organization designed to forge cross-class alliances between workers and professionals. But it would be her growing identification with the Soviet Union that most marked these latter years of her career.\textsuperscript{47}

An advocate of closer U.S.–Soviet trade and diplomatic recognition, she soon became a staunch advocate of the Soviet state, linking the prospects for social economic planning to the fate of the Soviet Union. She defended its persecution of Trotsky, its purge trials, its invasion of Finland, and its short-lived pact with Hitler. She became, in other words, a fellow traveler, apparently never joining the Communist Party, but lending the Soviet Union and American Communists her energies and the support of her intellectual authority. Having dedicated her life to the scientific construction of social welfare, she was tired of capitalism's continuing imbalances. And like many reformers of her generation, she looked upon the Soviet Union as the single, courageous alternative, trying to build the planned society but beset on all sides by enemies, thus requiring her help and defense. For these reasons, she joined or worked with various pro-Soviet organizations during the 1930s and 1940s, leading to her surveillance by the FBI, and to an appearance before Senator Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in 1953, at the age of sixty-nine.\textsuperscript{48}

Mary Van Kleeck's Taylorism reveals much, but at the same time poses questions beyond the immediate scope of this essay.
Her career emphasizes the point that Taylorism, whatever else it may have been, was a utopian project, one that sought through technocratic direction to produce a rational industrial order and a liberating abundance. Its attractions to reformers thus are not hard to understand. But until now there has been little interest in the question of women reformers’ relation to Taylorism. Nor has there been sufficient recognition that one such woman played an unusually large role in the story of scientific management after Taylor.

There has been little recognition, in other words, of Mary Van Kleeck’s efforts to merge Taylorism and social work following World War I, to bring to scientific management the social feminist concern for living standards while bringing to the professionalization of social work Taylorism’s scientism. But why did so few women join her in this quest? Why was Mary Van Kleeck, virtually alone among the women’s reform network of her day, so powerfully attracted to Taylorism and its utopianism? What part did the Russell Sage Foundation play in encouraging or enabling her to set out on this independent path? And on what terms, at what cost, did she leave the worlds of woman-led reform to enter the male-dominated worlds of Taylorism and planning?

Van Kleeck would play a large part in Taylorism’s contribution to the interwar debate over national and international planning. Here, especially, few pursued scientific management’s utopian implications as far as she did and at such cost. Together with Morris Cooke, Harlow Person, and Henry Dennison, Van Kleeck in the 1920s helped to make the Taylor Society an imaginative forum for the discussion of scientific management’s relation to problems of macroeconomic coordination. But why did few if any Taylorites in the 1930s follow Van Kleeck into an uncritical admiration of Stalinist central planning? How, in the absence of personal papers and autobiographical statements, can we account for her increasingly inflexible fellow traveling?

Blinded as well as guided by faith and conviction, Van Kleeck seemed unable to grasp the political implications of her Taylorism. Generous and sincerely committed to advancing human welfare, she nonetheless promoted the antidemocratic tendencies of technocratic direction and centralized control, never appreciating the paradox at the heart of her ambitions. Simultaneously unusual and representative, finally, Mary Van Kleeck still informs
us about the fate of scientific management and the history of a generation and its hard-edged confrontation with capitalism, expertise, and utopian hope.

NOTES


2. Georges Friedmann, Industrial Society (Glencoe, 1955), chap. 1; Merkle, Management and Ideology, chap. 8; Charles S. Maier, “Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity


9. See, for example, Van Kleeck, "The Artificial Flower Trade in New York City," November 30, 1909, Box 13, Folder 3; Van Kleeck to John M. Glenn, Russell Sage Foundation, March 31, 1910, Box 13, Folder 4; Van Kleeck, "A Program for a Committee on Women’s Work," April 25, 1910, Box 13, Folder 6, all in MVK/R. See, too, Van Kleeck, "Memorandum Regarding Investigations for the Winter of 1910–1911"; and the several letters from Van Kleeck to John Glenn, all in Box 15, Folder 132, Russell Sage Foundation Papers, Rockefeller Archive Center (hereafter cited as RSF Papers). Several of these studies were published under Van Kleeck’s name: *Artificial Flower Makers* (New York, 1913); *Women in the Bookbinding Trade* (New York, 1913); *A Seasonal Industry* (New York, 1917). See also Louise Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry* (New York, 1919). The quotation is from Van Kleeck, "Industrial Investigations of the Russell Sage Foundation," September 17, 1915, p. 4, Box 13, Folder 28, MVK/R Papers.


17. On Van Kleeck and the Women's Bureau, see Winslow, *Woman at Work*; reports and correspondence in Box 71, MVK Papers, and Box 1 of the Mary Anderson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. For Van Kleeck's positions in the Taylor Society, see *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 5, no. 1 (February 1920), p. 9; H. S. Person to J. H. Williams, Mary Van Kleeck, et al., September 8, 1927.


20. Van Kleeck to Person, July 4, 1922, Box 117, Folder 344; "Remarks of Mary Van Kleeck at Annual Business Meeting of the Taylor Society, December 4, 1924," Box 24, Folder 488, both in MVK Papers.


22. Van Kleeck would not be among the women's network surveyed in Susan Ware's *Beyond Suffrage*. For an example of the contacts Van Kleeck would maintain, see her congratulatory letter to Frances Perkins upon the latter's appointment as Secretary of Labor, Van Kleeck to Perkins, March 7, 1933, Box 17, Folder 343, MVK Papers. On changes within the Sage Foundation, see Glenn et al., *Russell Sage Foundation*, chap. 27; and Van Kleeck, "Industrial Studies of the Russell Sage Foundation," pp. 56–73. On Van Kleeck's postwar plans for her department, see "Memorandum," to John M. Glenn, unsigned, October 25, 1919, Box 23, Folder 456, MVK Papers.


31. Jacoby, Employing Bureaucracy, chaps. 2, 5; and Mary Drake McFeely, Lady Inspectors (New York, 1988), offer some background to this story.

32. There is little surviving record of the conference, save for a few pieces in the Odencrantz Papers, including a copy of the program, the papers she presented (“Personnel Work in America”), and a report of her impressions. See especially Folder 1, Louise Odencrantz Papers, Schlesinger Library (hereafter cited as Odencrantz Papers).

33. “Report of the Interim Committee Appointed at the First International Conference on Industrial Welfare,” Folder 8, Odencrantz Papers; and “Officers and Members of Council,” in Report of the Proceedings of the International Industrial Welfare (Personnel) Congress (Zurich, 1925), p. 486. Organized initially as an Association, the IRI would reorganize and rename itself the International Industrial Relations Institute in March, 1932, but even from its earliest days was known by the letters IRI.


37. The quoted phrase appears in Van Kleeck’s remarks in the “Report of the IRI Summer Meeting, Schloss-Elmau, June–July, 1929,” p. 7, Box 83, Folder 1311; on the IRI’s methodology, see Van Kleeck, “Comments on Work of Mary L. Fledderus: Addendum,” February 17, 1945, Box 1, Folder 19, both in MVK Papers. See, too, the “Informal Notes of a meeting,” October 27, 1928, Folder 8, Odencrantz Papers. The IRI, from its inception, was able to function as a truly international organization due to the linguistic abilities of
Mary Fledderus, who was capable of simultaneous translations in Dutch, French, English, and German. These skills carried over into the IRI's major publications during the 1920s and 1930s, with English, French, and German versions appearing within each single volume.

38. The IRI material in the two main Van Kleeck collections, and the IRI papers at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, are revealing of most of these points.


