The film "Modern Times" is an indictment of industrial production under Free market capitalism. Like other assembly-line workers of that time Charlie Chaplin's character is a victim of the "science" of mass production. In the early 1900s, Frederick Taylor introduced Timeand-Motion studies into industry, examining the repetitive motions of the industrial labor process. The aim was to increase output and efficiency by subdividing each task and reducing each worker's movements to mimic the mechanical motions of a machine.

While the social division of labor subdivides society, the detailed division of labor subdivides humans, and while the subdivision of society may enhance the individual and the species, the subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capacities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity. This tends to assume the reduction of the required skill levels, primarily to justify a reduction of the related wage level. It also extracts the problem solving process into positions which tend to be occupied by individuals who do not have the motivation, the related skills, nor the problem solving capacities.

While all societies have historically featured various divisions of labor, some people fanning, others hunting, etc., the atomisation of work into repetitive mechanical motions within occupational divisions was something new, as was the "tyranny of the clock" and the dehumanisation of rigid work schedules that are enforced 8-12 hours per day 50 weeks a year, which leave little time for people to have a life, ushered in an entirely new period within capitalism often associated with the "industrial revolution."

During the 1920s and early 1930s, labor organizing in heavy industry and the mines led to increasingly bold sit-down strikes at auto plants, sparking the dry grass of the Great Depression. The more "advanced" industrialists found it important to offset workplace tensions caused by their application of Taylor's atomization of the production process. They began to experiment with different work related conditions. They explored whether it was possible to lessen workers' resistance to the grueling routines by introducing different styles of management. Even so, their goal was to squeeze even more production per labor-hour out of workers, while projecting a more humane image.

In 1924, Harvard University psychologists Elton Mayo and Frits Roethlisberger began a series of psychological experiments on workers at the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric in Chicago to examine tensions at the workplace, with an eye towards easing them without hindering productivity. A new school of "industrial psychology" originated from these studies, which. promoted "human relations in industry."

Mayo and Roethlisberger were precursors of today's liberal sociologists. Their Hawthorne studies became required reading for academics throughout the country. They won support from corporate capitalists who were desperate to win the support of labor in their conflicts with the entrenched reactionary strata of the corporate capitalists. The wing of corporatist capital that F.D. Roosevelt represented helped to shape the assumptions, set-up, and outcome of the Hawthorne experiments.

Mayo and Roethlisberger claimed to be studying the industrial labor process free from bias, by wrapping themselves in the cloak of the "objectivity" of their data. The assumptions underlying and predefining their conclusions remained unexamined. These assumptions included the acceptance of the corporate capitalist framework of owners and workers. They also included the view that what was beneficial for the owners, notably the expansion of industrial production and the increase in the return on the related investment, was also held to be in the best interests of the workers. Further, these assumptions were based upon the expectation that some of the more abusive and conflict prone aspects could be lessened by the "science" applied.

Mayo and Roethlisberger promoted their Hawthorne techniques as being more profitable to industry, because the techniques were supposed to ease resistance to the alienation, unnatural rhythms, and dangers of corporate industrial production.

The odd result not noticed until far after the actual experiments is that the mere act of studying the production process caused the workers to increase their productivity. This improvement may have been as much to invalidate conventional management as it was to perform while under observation. It is also clear from re-examining the original data that the workers they studied had indeed resisted, contrary to Mayo's claim. But their resistance took new forms which did not fit neatly into the provided categories understood as "resistance." These discrepancies were ignored to not jeopardize the emerging liberal capitalist consensus being promoted as "The New Deal."

The new "science" of the industrial labor process held that workers and "advanced" bosses had equal stakes in the system. The main thing

wrong with corporate capitalist management, the new liberal ideology asserted, was the harshness of some individual bosses, the lack of proper governmental regulation of industry, hostile managers who were unschooled in the latest management techniques, unnecessarily bleak workplace environments and the lack of social safety nets.

These liberal management techniques were designed to support the illusion of a social hannony based upon supposed common interests in a "partnership" between labor and capital. The premise was that these techniques offered a "democratic" solution, that was and is clearly neither. This "liberal" approach does nothing to address basic issues ,of exploitation nor the structures that intensify exploitation for profit. It also does not direct any attention to the costs of managerial incompetence. In this can be included the blurring of the distinction between management as a position contrasted with management as the performance of certain functions.

In their 1081 re-examination of Hawthorne, SUNY Stony Brook social-psychologists Dana Bramel and Ron Friend exposed the hidden ideological nature of the Hawthorne approach. Their analysis has important implications for the way we look at working class history and for developing a critique of corporate capitalism. It also challenges the glorification of the "work ethic" and other assertions about what constitutes "progress," "the good life," and "the public good."

First, Bramel and Friend show that "the Hawthorne effect," in which workers are assumed to be happier and more productive under a different and supposedly more humane managing style, "did not arise as simply and spontaneously from the 'revolutionised supervision' as we have been led to believe." Indeed, workers' resistance to exploitation continued, in some cases increased, and took quite a few novel and often unrecognised forms. Bramel and Friend write:

"This illustrates a constant theme in Mayo's industrial work: Conflict between workers and management was always said to be due to something other than a basic antagonism of interests in the exploitative corporatist relations of production. In one case the workers' rebelliousness is "due" to a medical condition that produces "paranoid preoccupations." In other cases, it is represented as a misunderstanding, a lack of communication. As Mayo said repeatedly, the "complaint only rarely, if ever, gave any logical clue to the grievance in which it had its origin." Resistance and objection to violence as structured into the workplace, was personalized as a strategy of subversion and deflection.

It was absolutely essential, from the point of view of an expanding U.S.-based industrial corporatism, that all resistance to exploitation be framed as individual problems. This enabled Mayo and others to co-opt workers' sense of meaninglessness and anger which rose from their increasingly robot-like work, before it could erupt into a reaction against the underlying assumptions. Mayo's and Roethlisberger's misinterpretations and false portrayals of their data filled that important ideological function. They aided the rationalization of an exploitative system, laying the ideological basis for corporate liberalism. This includes the attempts to co-opt unionization in the years to follow

The Hawthorne Experiments and Liberal Corporatism

Re-Imagining Economics