A pyramid, in which the best, as he considers them, get to the top, and which is the sole chance of rising to their very best, is, I think, a fair statement of the advantages claimed for a competitive society. Let us see how far these are realised, and with what attendant evils.

First, then, who is it that gets to the top, and in what way are they the best? Evidently they are best at getting for themselves, either money, position, or honour; and it by no means follows that they do their best for the community in order to do their best for themselves.

For their first aim being to make money, they will only make good articles so long as these pay them best; if they can make more money by selling shoddy clothes, the good of society will weig very little in their balance of considerations. In order to be successful their best energies must be used, not to make really good and beautiful articles, but to get the better of their fellow competitors in the market—any device must be resorted to in order to get the advantage. It is true that one of the devices by which they hope to do this is, to the benefit of the community, that the pressure of competition may lead to the discovery of useful labour-saving machinery; but I fear it more often leads to the discovery of adulterations and shams. The greater the number of competitors the greater will be the number of shams and rubbish which are to be found everywhere at the present time, are proof enough that competition does not tend to produce good articles, granted that it does being plenty of them.

But even if this were less evident, there is still to my mind a more serious objection to competition as a system upon which to base society—namely, its influence on the production of something more important than commodities, in the result of the character of the race of men that are set to compete one with another. Each to the best of his ability. Surely they must become selvedge, for that is the most selfish and ungracious thing that thinks most of his own interest and least of the interests of others.

Where would the modern business man be, who, when selling out shares which he believes will go down, should stop to think of the other fellow to whose share capitalist family? Again, it may not be become a by-law that a certain amount of dishonesty is necessary in all trades! To get up the pyramid of a competitive society it is before all things necessary to have no regard for the feelings of those who must be trodden on in mounting. Only a few can mount at best; the many must always be the down-trodden. And this process is grasped nowadays by the title of the survival of the fittest! Christ would have said the fittest for hell!

As modern society embodies this principle of competition, so would a Socialist society embody the opposing principle of cooperation, under which men would join together and each contribute to the thing they wanted. It is manifestly to the interest of all to have really good serviceable articles and to the pleasure of all to have them beautify and comfort us when needed. No, they do not want to take care not to waste their labour on bad material, for they would see that it was to no one’s advantage to have more labour to do than was necessary; and the best way to economise labour is to use it only on the best materials, which last long when once made, and to make them up in such a way that they will not need much repair. Hence we see that cooperation would take away all interest in bad work or shoddy goods, and so would abolish at once all the dishonesty of trade as at present carried on. A useful emulation in the doing of good work would be enough to ensure steady progress, and the desire of leisure to follow various studies or pastimes which must always be the end of the inventions of labour-saving machinery.

Quite a different side of man’s character would be drawn out by such a system; his selfish side would find little encouragement; there would be no rising on the backs of his fellows, but love to the other one’s interests in place of his own; he would be proud to be received as an equal by all around, and would get to hate to be cringed to as a superior. Were he a Christian he would feel it more honour to walk arm in arm with an uneducated fisherman than to be knelt to by the wisest.

I have only touched on a few points of contrast between these two processes. I have said nothing of the killing of all happiness and mirth by the scramble which competition invariably becomes; or of the crushing out of all love for, and so of all knowledge of, what is beautiful; nor have I shown how cooperation, by taking away the scramble, would less this peace to enjoy the productions which they wanted to do, and find us leisure for art and mirth. But enough has been said, I think, to show that we must get rid of this competitive system if we desire to live in a place where our lives or many lives are not the blessings of cooperation.

Raymond Unwin.