

[397] While the propaganda of the patent professions, and the popular stories, not to say mythology, of invention are full of oldtime tales of unlearned and poor outsiders, who thought up great inventions, developed them personally, forced them into use, and for the happy ending made much money, nonetheless today's main truth can be got at much better by today's statistics; statistics which reflect present conditions, and remember the million failures as well as the rare, delightfully memorable successes. Some statistics are provided in a report of the subcommittee.³¹²

[398] Schmookler (ftN 99, p 31) starting from patents, found 20-30% of his inventor respondents claiming that their invention was not part of their job. But we have shown that patents are such a minor motive for modern inventing (§ 139, 140), and so often bogus (§ 403), or unworked (36%, § 405), that patents are evidently a very unreliable measure of modern inventing, and offer no assurance that outsiders' inventions are as good as laboratories', nor that they bear any particular proportion to the latter. But for what patent statistics may yield, we shall use Sanders' below (§ 400-409).

[399] The Institute of Inventive Research at Southwest Research Institute offered help to inventors. In 100,000 inventive projects evaluated they found one really good one (a lift-slab method of concrete construction), four that reached the market, and so little return for a million dollars of help that they gave up the program.³⁹⁴ An authority estimates that 1 in 2,000 unsolicited ideas has merit.³⁹⁴ When the Sinclair Oil Co. recently offered to evaluate anyone's schemes for petroleum products and to develop the promising ones in their big laboratory, the result was a flood of projects and practically no success.³⁹⁵ It is common report, confirmed by Sanders' statistics,³⁹⁶ and Van Deusen's,²⁰⁴ that the greatest corporations buy almost no outside ideas, particularly in the auto industry, and in carpet sweepers never.³⁹⁷ GE is interested in less than a thousandth of the 2,500 ideas submitted to them yearly, although they have 3 men at work screening them.³⁹⁸ In the First World War government boards were set up in England, France, and America to receive and judge proffered war inventions; 233,000 were received, 1.1% were found "useful", and practically none used.³⁹⁹ In the Second World War the boards tried harder, and found useful 0.25% in Britain and 4.1% in America, where 0.051% were put in production. At present our National Inventors Council is handling about 900 "inventions" per month, but has brought into use only 1 or 2 in the last 5 years.³⁹⁴

[400] These statistics of almost invariable failure today do not mean that unorganized invention is that bad. Doubtless part of the rejections are due to snootiness, the feeling of the inside professionals, military and civil, that outsiders with merely nascent ideas cannot know what the score is, especially in the face of military secrecy. Even the corporate inventor who gets ideas outside his department or his assigned task is said to meet similar rebuffs.³⁹⁴ Another trouble is the outsider's inability to follow up and improve his ideas, and to advocate them through informal channels. Still other troubles are perfunctory handling, and complete uncertainty of reward in the Government case, and mutual suspicion in dealings between corporations and outside inventors; hence able men with good ideas are inhibited or deflected elsewhere.³⁹⁴ Whatever the causes, the result is that the un-