

# Welfare Capitalism and Americanization on the D&IR: Creating Unity in the Work Place and in the community

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During the latter part of the 1800s the “labor problem”, as it was labeled in its day, became an acute threat to the development of industrial capitalism and bourgeois society in America. The period from before the civil war and into the gilded age created increasing levels of social unrest. David Brody has explained the increasing strife between labor and capital during this period by increased mechanization, the increasingly large companies, the gradual systematization of administration, and finally the launching of scientific management. All these factors changed the conditions of the American work force and, to use David Brody’s words, “each in its way diminished the worker and cut him down to fit the productive system”.<sup>1</sup> One response to the increasingly visible conflict between labor and capital is constituted by welfare programs of many American companies.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the specific character of the welfare programs that were deployed on the Duluth & Iron Range Railroad between the late 1890s and the mid 1920s and what role the programs played in the political economy of Minnesota under Anglo-American leadership.

## **The Context**

The establishment of a railroad connecting the ore fields in Northern Minnesota and Lake Superior was started in 1882 when Eastern Capital interests in mining sought to transport Minnesotan Ore to steel mills in Pittsburg and Cleveland. Two Harbors was initially a small town of a few hundred railroad employees but grew steadily to more than 8 000 persons in the 1910s. The town held the railroad workshops and loading docks where railroad carts full of ore emptied into ships for further transport eastwards by Lake Superior. The railroad company put its imprint on the community from the very beginning and Two Harbors has many traits in common with American so-called company towns during the late 1800s.

The churches were also complemented by some “elite” societies during the 1890s. The fraternal orders and the churches were hence, together with the labor organizations for railroad men and a short period of Knights of Labor presence in the late 1880s along with the saloons what was constituting Two Harbor’s public life during the period before 1900. A number of newspapers were also established during the decade.

By the early 1900s, indications are that Two Harbors had achieved some degree of stability and that railroad workers had

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<sup>1</sup> Brody, David. *The American Worker in the Progressive Age*. p.13.

started settling on a more permanent basis. The population increase from 1,200 to over 4,600 persons illustrate this together with the marked expansion of the railroad that came under new management during the late 1880s and then again in 1902 when the D&IR became a subsidiary of US Steel Corp. The period after 1900 was characterized by increased political tensions in the community, but also by various schemes from the company to bridge class and cultural differences and maintain political control.

The establishment of a Socialist presence and the Welfare Capitalist program of the D&IR are the most marked expressions of the tensions that reached its zenith during the mid and late 1910s.

Culturally, the community of Two Harbors, with its major ethnic groups composed of Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, Canadians and Anglo-Americans was quite socially divided. The churches, most of which were established around 1890 suggest that ethnicity functioned as a visible and important component in the everyday life of the community. There was one Catholic, two Swedish, one Norwegian and three Anglo- Lutheran churches in Two Harbors by 1900. The fraternal lodges also became an important social component of the everyday fabric of the community.

### **Welfare Capitalism**

The practices of American companies to use a system generally referred to as welfare capitalism grew in importance at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The system of various welfare arrangements has been extensively researched regarding different branches of American industry. In the literature the heterogeneous character of this phenomenon makes itself evident, in that welfare programs both over time, to their programmatic extent and through their adaptation to and integration with specific company structures are so varied in character.<sup>2</sup>

Studies of the national level has regarded welfare work either as a phenomenon spawned by the conditions in one stage of the development of industrial capitalism, as in the work of Stuart Brandes, while others, like David Brody, have regarded welfare capitalism as an entity strategically deployed by employers in response to increasing class conflicts. Brody argues that the system was generally

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<sup>2</sup> A small selection of the literature; Brody, David. *The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism*. ; Brandes, Stuart. *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940*.; Zahavi, Gerald. *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*.; Korman, Gerd. *Industrialization, Immigrants and Americanizers*.

undermined by the economic crisis of the early 1930s, when the bottom went out of the American economy. Some later studies have argued for a perspective that does not regard welfare capitalism as specific to the period between 1900 and 1930, but instead emphasize continuity in the development of welfare work, with its roots in the period between 1790 and the 1820s.<sup>3</sup>

The *National Civic Federation* was one of the primary champions of the idea that labor policies needed to be changed. Around 1900 the organization became a hub of activity for industrialists, conservative trade unionists and philanthropic “middle class” reformers intent on reforming American industry by changing the framework for relations between labor and capital. The primary enemies of the federation were, according to its program, socialists and anti-union employers.<sup>4</sup> It embodied new ideas of industrial organization and championed a system characterized by a movement for consolidation in industry. The idea emphasized co-operation, harmony and “fair” competition and had its perhaps most visible expression in the steel industry, as proponents such as J.P. Morgan and E.H. Gary worked to restore order to “demoralized” industries by combining warring firms to a dominant concern and then imposing “fair competition” on the industry.

This course of action also demanded a more “enlightened treatment of labor”, and the new mode of thinking gradually put its mark on labor policies.

The reasons that industrialists gave for involving themselves should consequently be seen in a specific ideological context characterized by important changes in the structure of industry. In justifying welfare work, most managers seem to have had a vague idea that they were getting a profitable return on their investments. In the late 1910s, however, the scientific language of the “school of industrial relations” became increasingly frequent in motivating welfare work. This school of thought was derived from the emerging science of industrial psychology, which emphasized the performance of workers not as a fixed item, but as a “prime point for improving industrial operations”. Thus, the welfare programs of the 1920s were more closely connected with management teachings of the day. In line with this process, where labor relations became

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<sup>3</sup> Licht, Walter. *Fringe Benefits: A review Essay on the American Workplace*. pp.164,165. Later works on welfare capitalism have emphasized the gendered dimension of welfare programs and the connection to progressive era politics that helped shape welfare capitalism. Yet others have discussed the Americanization element that was to some degree inherent in welfare capitalism, and the more outspoken expressions of this work as language and Americanization classes were arranged by some employers. Betten, Neil. *Polish-American Steel Workers; Americanization through Industry and Labor*. pp.31-42.

<sup>4</sup> Brody, David. *The American Worker in the Progressive Age*. p.2

science, the companies themselves gradually internalized the welfare work guided by this school. Organizations such as the YMCA became increasingly regarded as too unscientific and too unreliable to carry out the welfare work.

One way of encouraging labor's loyalty was via increasingly systematic programs that would free workers from anxiety over accidents, illness, unemployment and old age. Many companies had group insurance and pension plans for their employees. Many employers also sought to motivate their workers via stock ownership programs that would imbue a sense of proprietorship in the worker. This was also accomplished via savings plans and home ownership plans that provided employees with technical and financial aid. Apart from these different schemes, companies also engaged in safety work, provided medical services, underwrote sports and classes and distributed land for gardening. The cost of this work ran high, but expenses continued throughout the 1920s. The idea of employee representation was a prominent trait in many welfare schemes after 1914.<sup>5</sup>

That the welfare programs were so unevenly spread and developed bears more testimony to the flexibility of the idea and its practices than the idea that it should not be considered a common response from the business community to the same set of structural factors. This is furthermore underlined by empirical studies of specific social settings and specific companies that implemented welfare programs.<sup>6</sup>

Studies have shown how more formalized economic schemes were wedded to informal networks established between the workers and management. Many of them also seem to fall well in line with how Gerald Zahavi has characterized the welfare work of a shoe manufacturer between 1890 and the Depression, in that it became part system, part personality, part ideology and part informal practice.<sup>7</sup>

The specific mix of implemented welfare systems, dreams of increasing levels of mutuality, recognition of the role of workers and the notion of a bond between the company and the workers gave the concept its content. Welfare capitalism can therefore not easily be boiled down to merely a catalogue of inadequate efforts on the part of capital largely generated by outside structural changes. The interesting question is instead how the

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<sup>5</sup> Brody, David. *The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism*. p.49-55

<sup>6</sup> Zahavi, Gerald. *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism.*; Hillard, Michael. *Labor at "Mother Warren": Paternalism, Welfarism, and Dissent at S.D. Warren 1854-1967.*

<sup>7</sup> Zahavi, Gerald. *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*. p.40

results of these changes generated by outside forces were arranged into a coherent system in specific social settings and how they were used by industrialists in those settings to claim control over workers' lives. The ideological component is therefore crucial.<sup>8</sup>

### **Early Welfare Arrangements on the D&IR, 1885 to 1900**

Walter Licht has called the period of expanding industrial capitalism and ongoing migration in the late 1800s a blending of Laissez-Faire and paternalism in the policy of many railroad companies. The paternalistic tendencies on the D&IR had an outcome in the building of a boarding house, a system for rudimentary health care and later the construction of a hospital. In time, however, the management also got rid of all company facilities except for the railroad and the mining, leaving hospitals, stores and boarding houses into other hands in Two Harbors. The idea of Laissez-Faire of the management on the D&IR was expressed as a disinterest in the workers as the existing reserve labor force of cheap immigrant workers during the 1880s did not create an incentive for more elaborate systems for labor relations. Furthermore, the management of the railroad lacked control functions and economic means to enforce any more comprehensive labor policy, even if it had wanted to do so during the early years of the railroad.<sup>9</sup>

During the period from the late 1880s to the late 1890s, the churches in Two Harbors seem to have been the most important vehicles for welfare work in the city. The ethnic churches, not least, took on a supporting and fostering role for many workers, who became, even if not members of a parish, exposed to the social control of their clerical countrymen. Of particular importance to the Swedish workers in the 1880s and 1890s was the Lutheran congregation.

The earliest recollections of the role of the churches in Two Harbors is from a Swedish minister that helped establish a Swedish American denomination of the Augustana Synod, a Lutheran church with strong resemblance to the state church of

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<sup>8</sup> see e.g. William Littman that discusses cultural spaces and how the middle class forms of leisure tended to attract managers and white collar workers, whereas most blue collar workers were only drawn to the sports facilities and continued to spend their social life in their working class neighborhoods. Littmann, William. *Designing Obedience: The Architecture and Landscape of Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1930*. pp.89ff.

<sup>9</sup> Charlemagne Tower Papers. Letter written by Charlemagne Tower to George C. Stone April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1884.

Sweden. The reverend recalls the difficulty he had experienced with the recruitment of members among the early Swedish railroad workers in the area. The reverend, C.N. Collin, recollects in quite poetic Swedish how the Swedish workers were “scattered and without guidance” and that they followed “the ways of sin and carnal lust”. He stated that he commonly encountered Swedish workers under the influence or in “bad company”, but that they behaved such as boys when he surprised them during his regular visits to seek them out in the local saloons. Collin says that only a smaller portion of the Swedish workers attended service which was initially held at a boarding house<sup>10</sup> and describes his missionary work in Two Harbors and Lake County as typical for his fields of mission among the Swedish immigrants in America. Some of the workers had carried with them the heritage from the Swedish state church, but most of them regarded him with suspicion, as the word of God seemed “sown in a stone desert or a thorn shrubbery”. He regarded his work as first and foremost concentrated on disciplining the Swedish immigrants, “to clear the ground in order to be able to sow”.<sup>11</sup> Consequently he worked against the bar, drinking and crime as well as dancing, card playing and generally bad behavior but also opposed secular organizations like the orders. As the town grew, and the local economy diversified, some of the Scandinavians, much to the dismay of the priest, opened bars. Even worse, according to Collin, a good many Swedish immigrant workers also visited them!

But times changed and as the town moved out of its frontier phase increasing numbers of Swedes arrived. In time, enough money was raised to construct a Church building for the Swedish population of Two Harbors. The church stood ready in 1890. The railroad company donated half of the land necessary, but otherwise did not involve itself in the project.<sup>12</sup> The company support for church activity was not particularly outspoken during the 1880s and the 1890s, and it did not seem to have gone beyond helping churches to establish themselves and through personal initiative from a handful of employees.

Apart from the role of the church of guarding traditional moral values Collin was also quite active in organizing sick relief for the parishioners. He regularly carried out visits to Swedish families

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<sup>10</sup> *Minnen från anläggning av Svensk evangeliska Lutherska Immanuelsförsamlingen i Two Harbors, Minn., tioårsfest.* p.9-10. (Recollections of the establishment of the Immanuel Lutheran Congregation of Two Harbors).

<sup>11</sup> *Minnen från anläggning av Svensk evangeliska Lutherska Immanuelsförsamlingen i Two Harbors, Minn., tioårsfest.* pp.11

<sup>12</sup> *Minnen från anläggning av Svensk evangeliska Lutherska Immanuelsförsamlingen i Two Harbors, Minn., tioårsfest.* pp.14,15.

struck by ill health and organized poor relief when needed.<sup>13</sup>

As in many other parts of the United States, the Swedish- American church, seem to have played an important role for the Swedish workers residing in Two Harbors, even though many of the Swedes did not attend the sermons themselves. Pastors made sick calls, created networks for poor relief and tried to discipline and foster the Swedish workers.

But towards the end of the 1890s during a period of intense settlement in the community and in a context where political opposition to company control over the community becomes increasingly loud, there are tendencies underlining a growing interest from the company to increase its influence over the workers and to assume some functions previously carried out by the ethnic parishes. These tendencies become obvious in 1898 as a new as a branch of the railroad YMCA was opened in Two Harbors.

### **The YMCA on the D&IR**

The first step towards a Railroad YMCA presence in Two Harbors was a meeting held at the Presbyterian Church in March, 1897. The YMCA building was finished on January 1, 1898, less than a year after the first meeting. The basement contained bathing facilities, a small gymnasium and the beginnings of a bowling alley. The house also held kitchen facilities, a library, a small parlor and an assembly hall, which was soon turned into a gymnasium.<sup>14</sup> The building was financed by the workers of the D&IR, who collected \$2,000, while the railroad company contributed \$4,000 of company funding for the construction.<sup>15</sup>

In 1913 Mr. McGonagle, gave a speech before railroad workers at Gary, Indiana. There McGonagle presented the results of the work of the railroad YMCA of the D&IR in Two Harbors. Mr. McGonagle emphasized the idea of the railroad man as a self-regulating moral agent and claimed that the specific identity of railroad workers made the YMCA idea a perfect match.<sup>16</sup>

McGonagle continued:

*The Railroad Men of Two Harbors used this building at its*

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<sup>13</sup> Protocol from meeting of the church council of the Immanuel Lutheran Church. 1/2, 1897. p.43

<sup>14</sup> *The Transportation of Iron Ore*. p.51

<sup>15</sup> *The Necessity of The Young Men's Christian Association to the Railroad Men of the United States*. Speech held by WA MCGonagle before the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway Company, Gary Indiana, Nov. 25, 1913. Chicago, 1913. p.1,2.

<sup>16</sup> *The Necessity of The Young Men's Christian Association to the Railroad Men of the United States*. Speech held by WA MCGonagle before the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway Company, Gary Indiana, Nov. 25, 1913. Chicago, 1913.



*completion, and they use it now in much greater numbers; it has accomplished everything that was intended and has furnished a safe shelter for the men from the saloon and the brothel and has been the means of leading many men ... into the better life. Homes that were neglected are now beautiful and adorned, wives whose faces bore traces of sorrow are now happy ... children who were ill fed and poorly clothed, now show ... happiness and prosperity. It has paid the Duluth & Iron Range Company in hard dollars to make the investment it did in the building of the Young Men's Christian Association; its employes are of better character and of much higher efficiency and take a greater interest in the Company's welfare than they did.*<sup>17</sup>

The speech summarizes well how the D&IR officials perceived of the role of the work in Two Harbors in that it aimed at changing the face of the community. McGonagle emphasized that before 1898 the saloon was the only meeting-ground for the railroad workers on the D&IR outside of their small living quarters.

The annual reports of the Minnesota division of YMCA (1899-1926) indicate that the YMCA of Two Harbors had good attendance by the workers in the city, as membership figures rose sharply between 1899 and 1910, when they peak at over 1,000. This is quite remarkable in a city with a population of about 5,000 settled inhabitants and indicates strong support from large groups. The YMCA appear to have remained important throughout the 1910s.

An official overview of the D&IR from 1927 describes the work of the Two Harbors railroad YMCA as divided into three phases.

The first was characterized by a focus on purely religious matters, as the YMCA worked in conjunction with the churches “throughout the village on helping to foster a more wholesome spirit among the railroad men”. The second and third phases consisted of an increasing focus on physical education and a refined educational organization directed towards the whole community rather than towards the railroad men only.<sup>18</sup> Particularly the program for physical education increased in importance. The organized committees give us some insight into what work was done by the YMCA at the beginning of the 1900s and, as there was one

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<sup>17</sup> *The Necessity of The Young Men's Christian Association to the Railroad Men of the United States.* Speech held by WA McGonagle before the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway Company, Gary Indiana, Nov. 25, 1913. Chicago, 1913.

<sup>18</sup> *Transportation of Iron Ore.* pp.51-56.

religious, one social, one physical, and one educational committee as well as a women's auxiliary, the work of the YMCA at that time was evidently more diversified than is implied by the company overview.<sup>19</sup> However, the emphasis during the earlier period had more of a religious character, as is indicated by the high number of sermons held in railroad shops in 1898, and the attention in the local newspaper to the men's meetings and various sermons under the auspices of the churches of Two Harbors and the YMCA.

The most important forums for the religious work seem to have been Bible study classes and "Men's meetings". The meetings involved pastors or railroad officials giving weekly talks on diverse subjects. In 1901 the meetings were, among other things, devoted to the use of liquor and on how to increase the moral standards among railroad men. Some of the speakers represented the Anti-Saloon League.<sup>20</sup>

The leading officers such as the Superintendent was heavily involved in this work both in the capacity of holding meetings and on the board of the railroad YMCA. Some of the meetings were also held in the railroad shops during regular working hours.<sup>21</sup> The "secular" character of these shop meetings increases during the 1910s and 1920s and underlines how the company, through the work of the YMCA, wanted to tie in the workers into a company culture. The work place became one platform for this during the YMCA-era of labor relation organization on the D&IR.

In time, the work of the YMCA became increasingly community oriented. The men's meetings are gradually replaced during the 1910 by meetings open to the whole community.

One part of this increasing focus on the working class community is displayed in the fact that the YMCA also took over some of the functions previously carried out by local churches. Sick visits became a task of the local YMCA-secretary which strengthened the employer control-function and increased the patriarchal character of the YMCA-work.

The more community-oriented work was especially manifest after the American entry into World War 1. In July 1917 an open outdoor meeting was held, which consisted of a religious sermon focused on the stress brought about by the war. A captain of a military force stationed in Two Harbors talked on "The necessity

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<sup>19</sup> *The Iron Trade Journal*, 10/1, 1901. p.1.

<sup>20</sup> *The Iron Trade Journal*, 10/1, 1901. p.1.

<sup>21</sup> *The Iron Trade Journal* 21/3, 1901. P.1. and 1/1 1903. p.5. 8/1, 1903. p.5. One of the regular speakers was G.E Pickard of the local Methodist Episcopal church. In 25/1, 1907, the title of onelecture at the men's meetings was "The pursuit of happiness". To this meeting was invited all the men of the village.

of a clean life in the Army”, while an evangelistic preacher held a sermon with a clear focus on supporting the American war effort.<sup>22</sup> The religious work of the YMCA, hence, did not disappear during the 1910s and give way to a sole focus on athletics, but found new more community-oriented forms, where the whole population of Two Harbors could participate. This became especially important in the late 1910s as the YMCA war work involved both fund raising and sermons which were aimed at raising popular support for the American war effort and strengthening patriotism in the community.<sup>23</sup>

The YMCA of Two Harbors also ran evening classes on diverse subjects. Much of the work seems to have been in the form of night school, where education was carried out in English for foreign workers. In 1899 classes in arithmetic, social studies, spelling and penmanship were organized, while one class provided language training for the foreign-born men. The classes were held annually and from their inception attracted workers. The English language classes were important, since these are the most advertised in the local newspaper up to 1910.<sup>24</sup> The importance of the classes for the foreign non-English-speaking population is further emphasized in the book *Two Harbors in 1910*, which only mentions these classes when describing the educational work of the YMCA.

585 The YMCA classes, hence, became both a meeting ground where American-born English-speaking teachers and YMCA officials met immigrant workers. For the immigrant workers the meeting thus became both language training, an opportunity to get an American education and to get general information about the American society in the social studies class.

The increase in community orientation in the 1910s and early 1920s resulted in a program directed towards the youth and children in Two Harbors. In 1910 one of the local newspapers discussed the *Survey Club*, which was a weekly debating forum organized by the YMCA and “a number of young men” in the city. This is but one of many expressions of company community orientation. In 1927 the official company policy stated that

*it is the plan of the local YMCA, besides taking care of the transient railroad men, to help mold the lives of the youth of this city so*

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<sup>22</sup> *The Journal News*, 26/7, 1917. p.1.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. *The Iron Trade Journal*, 1/1, 1903. p.5.

<sup>24</sup> *Two Harbors in 1910*. p.36

that they may become better fitted physically, as well as spiritu- ally, to meet life's various problems.<sup>25</sup>

The work of the local railroad YMCA was hence directed both towards the employees and the community with the wives and children of the workers in the city. In order to secure a reliable work force in the next generation, the company thus used the YMCA as a platform to organize the leisure time of the workers, and, as Horace Johnson put it, to “go beyond the railroad and into the workers’ homes” by carrying out its task of fostering the workers and their children both physically and spiritually.<sup>26</sup>

The boys of the community became an increasingly important group to attract, as the number of children of the immigrants turned into an increasingly large group of employees on the D&IR. The work included a young men’s shop association in the work place and leisure activities such as youth sports teams and summer camps.<sup>27</sup>

The community work was, however, not limited to the boys of the city. The female membership was in the 1920s organized into a women’s department and a women’s committee under the direction of the general secretary of the YMCA. A Ladies’ auxiliary was organized already in 1900, and held monthly meetings. The work was initially focused on aiding the organization with practical matters. During the late 1910s and early 1920s the increased focus on community work outside the railroad spawned a new perception of the role of women. Instead of being an auxiliary providing the YMCA with unpaid work, women became an important focus group.

The women and girls were given permission to use the gymnasium and swimming pool during one day and one evening of the week and classes for married women, junior girls, high school girls and young ladies were given.<sup>28</sup>

The tendency towards a new role for women in this community orientation seems evident. Their role seems to have changed significantly after the company had begun to define the community work as increasingly important. During the 1910s, when

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<sup>25</sup> *The transportation of Iron Ore*. p.52.

<sup>26</sup> *The Safety Spirit*. Printed Speech held by D&IR President Horace Johnson before the National Safety Council, Wednesday September 28, 1927. p.4

<sup>27</sup> A survey of the census of 1910 and that of 1920 illustrates this point as most children of immigrants and settlers reach maturity during the 1910s and are too young in 1910 to participate on the labor market to any great extent; *Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, Employes Safety Magazine*, June, 1923, pp.25-26.

*Transportation of Iron Ore*. p.53-55

Scrap books from the YMCA Duluth located at the St. Louis Historical Society. The advert is for July and August 1923.

<sup>28</sup> *Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, Employes Safety Magazine*, March 1921, p.21

this program was gradually developed, women- due to their raising children- became a key group.

The close relationship between the YMCA and the management of the company is evident in that a number of key officials were active in the organization and the board of the local YMCA is an indicator of the partisanship in its organizing and running. The YMCA movement was firmly connected with a high stratum of the company consisting primarily of Anglo-Americans.

To get yet another perspective on the role of the YMCA in Two Harbors I will put this institution into a broader welfare context of United States Steel's community orientation. The relation between the local churches and the D&IR seems to have changed during the early 1910s, as there is documentation for rather large donations made to various community institutions. In 1911, the D&IR spent \$8,000 on donations to "hospitals, churches and charitable institutions". In 1913, roughly \$2,400 was spent.<sup>29</sup> To get an explanation for this newfound generosity we need to go to the official policy of the United States Steel subsidiaries in the area during the period after the first big labor uprising in 1907. The Oliver Iron Mining Company, a mining company housed in the same general office as the D&IR in Duluth, has in their archives some letter correspondence that details the work of the companies active on the range, including the railroad companies.

The correspondence shows us how the mining companies donate money to parishes in the Iron Range Mining Communities, some of them to Swedish ethnic parishes, from 1916 and through the war years.<sup>30</sup>

In a letter, written by the Swedish pastor Andrew Anderson of the Northern Swedish Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1918 he asks for company support for missionary work among Scandinavian workers. The mining president granted his request and labeled it: "subscription- Swedish Methodist Missionary Work, Lake Superior District".<sup>31</sup>

In yet another letter a mining official writes to the President on a donation:

*I believe anything we can do at this opportune time to help crush the germ of I-W-W-ism and other kindred socialistic conspiracies,*

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<sup>29</sup> D&IR Consolidated auditor's statements, 1890- sept 1916.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Superintendent to J.H. Mclean, General Manager, of the Oliver Iron Mining Company, Duluth 16/8, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Reverend Andrew Anderson to John H Mclean, General Manager of the Oliver Iron Mining Company, Duluth, MN. 2/7, 1918. Letter sent from Marinette Wisconsin.. Letter from Olcott, president of the Oliver Iron Mining Company to the Auditor. 7/7, 1919.

*will now and subsequently prove to be of great benefit.*<sup>32</sup>

Another letter that deals with the church as a bastion for anti socialism is a plea for help with constructing a new Presbyterian church in Virginia Minnesota :

*I am writing... to ask if you [can] bring this matter before the United States Steel Corporation. We appeal to them for a liberal contribution. There is no force in Virginia and on the Mesaba Range that is so effective against the socialistic spirit and I.W.W.ism as the aggressive missionary work and Americanization program that the First Presbyterian Church of this city is working out.*<sup>33</sup>

So, the evidence at hand indicate the importance of the co-operation between local church congregations and the mining companies in keeping Socialism out of the range communities. The community orientation of the YMCA, and the company donations to local churches seem to have been initiated much for the same reason.

Judging by the quite sharp political tensions that had periodically characterized the political scene in Two Harbors and the attraction of the progressive/populist movement on the workers in the village during the 1890s, the establishment of the YMCA in the city seems to be a result of the success of an alternative to company dominance in local politics. The mid-1890 elections are also the first indications of a Socialist presence in the community, which might have added to the decision of establishing the YMCA.

After the establishment of an organization and the construction of a building the membership rose steadily. No particular adjustment seems to have been made during the period up to 1908, however. In 1908, another surge of activity is visible in the local railroad YMCA, as both bible and educational classes grew larger and the beginnings of both a sports and an amusement program are visible. This may again be interpreted as a result of an increasingly visible political alternative to the dominance the railroad company. The increased activity and the construction of additional sports facilities can in this respect be regarded as a response to the success of the local socialist movement in electing a mayor in Two Harbors in the first city elections in 1907.

The activities of the local YMCA appears to have intensified in that year and seems to underline a political and cultural polarization that occurred during the years when the Socialists grew

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from General Superintendent Mitchell to WJ Olcott President of the Oliver Iron Mining Company. 14/9, 1918.

<sup>33</sup> Letter written by L.H. Gade to Mr. C.L. Close, letter is undated.

in importance on the local arena, as some workers chose to oppose company dominance while others embraced the distinctly progressive YMCA program for self-improvement and careful reform and became more heavily integrated into the sphere of Anglo-American bourgeois influence.

The interest in sports and the improvements made on the YMCA building in those years constituted one aspect of an increasingly community-oriented organization between the early 1900s and the early 1920s. The YMCA building was used as a community center at the end of the 1910s, where activities such as sports classes, swimming, speeches and local forums were held. The YMCA building was also used for different types of community activities such as concerts, evening socials, and banquets. My conclusion is that the YMCA gradually became a hub of leisure activity in the community. The company, through the YMCA, gradually reshaped the leisure time of the workers. Many workers' leisure time during the 1910s came to be spent in an environment acceptable to and in line with the interests of the railroad company. The increased focus on the community during the 1910s also illustrates the company's interest in reshaping social relations in the community, which at the time had a long history of strong ethnic networks among the various Scandinavian groups, the Anglos, the French Canadians and the Finnish populations. The community program of the YMCA was, in my interpretation an effort to integrate these networks into a company sphere of influence.

Through the educational work, the company reached non-English speaking workers in their night classes and workers more generally by its reading room and its library. All these became important platforms, where immigrants and American-born employees could meet. The reading room was popular among the workers and hundreds of distinct visitors, including Swedes, came there every day around 1910. The reading material provided by the YMCA had a distinct connection with the underlying ideology of self-improvement and with bourgeois individualism. In this respect the Railroad YMCA was one possible and highly efficient carrier of the ideological stuff to shape class relations in the new western towns that emerged during the period when eastern Anglo-American investors were at least partially successful in shaping and reshaping the political economy of Minnesota according to its demands.

Judging by the character of the work, it seems as if the YMCA tried to enroll all workers on the road and, given the high membership numbers, the organization in Two Harbors enjoyed the support of broad layers of working men.

As no membership listings are preserved, it is difficult to assess the character of the membership, but the role of the Railroad YMCA was primarily directed at “transient railroad men”, to quote documents published by the national railroad branch. This leads us to the conclusion that the YMCA is likely to have made an effort towards the largely Scandinavian and Finnish group of transient track workers engaged on the road around 1920. What we know is that immigrant workers were to some extent attracted to the YMCA through its classes in English and social sciences, its sports program and its role as a hub for the leisure time in the city.

Through my analysis of the 1910 and 1920 censuses<sup>34</sup>, it is safe to say that the group of railroad officials, skilled workers and office workers with a higher degree of authority was almost solely made up of American-born, English-speaking Canadians and immigrants from the British Isles and Ireland. The American-born and Anglo immigrant workers and railroad officials were overrepresented in the work of the YMCA. Through this connection with railroad officials and the Anglo-American workers, the YMCA in Two Harbors became to some extent ethnically coded and was characterized by the involvement of skilled groups on the D&IR.

Another indication of this ethnic and skill coding of the YMCA are the teams that participated in the baseball leagues arranged in 1917. The switchmen, the clerks, a team from the machine shops and one from the general office participated. Some of these departments, primarily the clerks and the staff at the general office, represented occupational groups with an overrepresentation of American-born. On the other hand, no team represents the ore dock or the track workers, even though we know that by 1917 parts of the track force and the ore dock force lived permanently in Two Harbors, and that many of them were of Swedish, Norwegian or Finnish heritage. All the departments participating were to some extent more mixed in terms of native-born and immigrants. This might have been especially true for the shops that included a large number of different trades and a mix of American-born, Canadians and, to some extent, Scandinavian immigrants already in 1910.

It is, however, striking that the ethnically Scandinavian and, to some extent, Finnish departments were not represented. The transient railroad men appear to have played a rather marginal role in the Two Harbors YMCA and, in view of the Socialist affiliation of the Scandinavians and the Finns in the community; it seems as if the ethnic Socialists were, most probably, not integrated into the

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<sup>34</sup> See Engren, Jimmy *Railroading and Labor Migration*. Växjö, 2007



company project. The ethnic coding of the YMCA is obvious.

The community orientation and the large number of people involved in cultural activities, discussion forums and athletics did, however, hold at least some appeal to the Swedish immigrants as indicated by the participation of a Swedish immigrant Clarence Hillman who was the editor of the quite labor-friendly local newspaper "Lake County Chronicle".

The community work in Two Harbors became an important ideological and cultural factor in the community during the 1910s, as the leisure activities of the (immigrant) workers in Two Harbors were to some extent organized by the local YMCA. The organization can, in this respect represent an effort of the D&IR to quote one of the D&IR presidents to "go beyond the railroad and into the workers' homes", or at least to be a platform to influence the community of Two Harbors with its strong ethnic character, the Scandinavian population being its most important expression. Despite the failure of reaching all workers, the organization had by the mid-1910s built a long-term credibility among some workers.

## The Program for Labor Relations at United States Steel Corporation

Despite the many examples of the good results of the YMCA movement in the railroad industry, the attitude towards the welfare work of the YMCA changed in the national business community during the first and second decades of the 1900s. One of the most severe critics of the work of the YMCA was the National Civic Federation (NCF) that claimed that employers themselves should have control of the labor management functions. The NCF arranged a conference on welfare work in 1904 where welfare experts challenged the YMCA's claims of impartiality. According to Thomas Winter the "organizational matrix" of welfare capitalism had started to change.<sup>35</sup> This change was, however, quite slow, both on the national level and on the D&IR, and the Railroad YMCA was to play an important role for many railroad men in the United States well into the 1920s and were active, but declining, beyond that decade.<sup>627</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the U.S. Steel launched a series of reforms under the label of welfare work to counter the bad working conditions and the many accidents suffered in its plants. The program was launched as a response to critique against the corporation and has been called a "smoke screen" to obscure harsh working conditions and anti-unionism. Despite these probably justified claims, the corporation dedicated 8% of its profits between 1912 and 1922 to welfare work. In 1914 a study was carried out on welfare arrangements in the iron and steel industry and estimated the number of arrangements to 32, which in turn could be broken down into distinct activities. United States Steel was hence one of the companies in the United States during the 1910s that was most influenced by ideas of welfare capitalism.<sup>36</sup>

In line with the national development, and as a result of becoming one part of U.S. Steel in 1902, the D&IR gradually launched an internal program that functioned parallel to the YMCA work from the beginning of the 1900s. The increasingly community-oriented work of the YMCA, hence, was gradually complemented by welfare work controlled directly and solely by the company, as the committees at least in some degree had

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<sup>35</sup> Winter, Thomas. *Making Men, Making Class*, p.45,46

<sup>36</sup> Elfenbein, Jessica. *I Want my Funeral Held in the Lunch Rooms*, The Industrial Work of the YMCA, 1879-1933.

ensured worker influence. The company's own welfare work then gradually replaced the functions of the YMCA during the 1920s. Workers thus to an increasing degree became parts of institutional welfare arrangements with an even stronger connection to the company, especially from the late 1910s. Let us turn to the U.S. Steel program, its implementation on the D&IR and the role that officials and workers had in the various welfare arrangements. Class and ethnicity are again important concepts for pinpointing which groups were active in the program. The program itself I regard as one way of assessing different groups of workers' relationship to the company.

The health care for workers was the sole responsibility of the company in the 1920s and a modern and professional organization had been perfected with hospitals, chief surgeon and several doctors and even an eye specialist readily available for the workers. More than 90% of the workers participated in the health care plan as the cost was low. The company also made sick visits and employed thirteen visiting nurses.<sup>37</sup> This "benefit" can be perceived of as a company control mechanism. The work had, prior to the company taking control of it, been carried out first in a more informal way by the local churches, then by the sick committee and the secretary of the local YMCA and from the late 1910s, by nurses directly employed by the company. By this time, ethnicity and religion seem to have played out its part as regulating agents and the responsibility had been gradually taken over by the management of the D&IR.

A second welfare feature was the Stock Subscription plan which was active between 1902 and the early 1930s. It tended to attract more well off workers in parts of the labor market dominated by American-born: officers, white-collar workers, foremen or workers in the running trades. Hence, not that many Swedish-born workers were attracted. In general, only fleeting support of the plan was given by the workers.

From 1915 the YMCA and the D&IR launched a third welfare program for increased safety for the railroad workers. The program was massive and included the launching of a company magazine, the employing of a safety secretary, monthly safety meetings, a program involving workers in company safety committees and the spreading of the idea of safety in a number of

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<sup>37</sup> The transportation of Iron Ore. pp.32-33.

other ways. Safety work became, from its inception, the most important part of the welfare work of the company, which spent large sums of money on it. The work, according to one of the presidents involved going “beyond the railroad and into the worker’s home”. The leisure time was, according to the President in many ways more important than the time spent at work because there the state of mind - the mentality of the worker - was molded. The thought is well in line with many of the managerial teachings of the school of human resource management of the 1920s and 1930s and the ways that ideas of how to imbue workers’ thinking with the ideas of the management were à la mode at the time.

A company of the D&IR type had important interests in this tradition, since it depended heavily on creating structures within the company to be able to find a stable and loyal work force. Also, not only the class barrier ran between the employer and the employee as many workers on the D&IR during the 1910 were immigrants or children of immigrants. It was therefore of the utmost importance for the management to create forums like the safety work to encourage the feeling of belonging to the company, especially since other welfare capitalist schemes had proven somewhat inefficient for this purpose.

The safety-first idea also gave the company an important opportunity to tighten the relationship between different levels of the company. With safety first, the company could delegate some of the formal responsibility for the work place and the organization of labor to the workers without actually losing control of the labor process. The issue of workers’ safety had actually been raised in other places of the country long before and had been the target of some legislation. It became especially important as the federal authorities formally ran the railroads during the First World War. Evidence indicate that the integration of the safety first movement into company welfare arrangements became increasingly important. Through the 1920s it became in effect both a bulwark to influence from labor organizations and a goodwill institution aimed at creating a new basis for welfare capitalism, as other arrangements, apart perhaps from the YMCA movement, had limited support among unskilled immigrant workers.

Based on the character of the safety work on the D&IR, “The safety spirit” can hence be connected both to the class interests of the Anglo- American bourgeoisie in that the economic

responsibility for injured workers, and economic self interest became an argument for mutuality (even though the economic responsibilities of the company had already been established by law in 1907 and 1912). The work also held an ethnic dimension since the formulation of the program for the safety work ensured that the company management also found a platform with which to reach the immigrant workers, both on the job and off as the community was defined as an interesting arena.

In this process of “molding the worker’s minds” important functions were upheld by the YMCA as a center for leisure activities. The workers were invited to Safety Meetings where safety messages from the railroad officials was mixed with the playing of Chaplin movies and the displaying of stereopticons of railroad accidents.<sup>38</sup>

And, perhaps most importantly in an ideological sense, the safety spirit was connected to other aspects of the employer-employee relation on the D&IR. The company magazine was not only a platform for the company safety work but also functioned as a way of reaching into the community. One part of this work aimed at creating a sense of solidarity between the company and the D&IR workers and the community. Part of this work was to connect the safety work to the world outside the work place which was realized in the company magazine. One major component was to publish a lush picture material aimed at underlining and strengthening the connection between company welfare systems and the community. In every issue there was one photo section entitled “D&IR kiddies”, where children of railroad workers posed, sometimes with their railroading parents or grandparents. In some issues the photo page was entitled “safety boosters”, to make the connection between the company’s safety work and the world outside the workplace even more obvious. Hence, workers and the children of workers were presented with name and, sometimes, occupation, so that readers were able to recognize those pictured. Apart from workers and their children and families, the reader could also find pictures from different departments of the company, from company leisure activities such as picnics, and from sports events.<sup>39</sup>

Intermingled with the recount of leisure activities and pictures of children and skilled workers, the company magazine also portrayed a couple of company officials in each issue.<sup>40</sup> The presentation allowed workers to at least put a face to the names on

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<sup>38</sup> The Journal News, 18/5, 1916. p.1

<sup>39</sup> *Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, Employes Safety Magazine*, September 1920, pp.35. 36; October 1923. p.38.

<sup>40</sup> *Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, Employes Safety Magazine*, September 1920, pp.35. 36; October 1923. p.4.

their paychecks, or the official company documents that they encountered, of people that they otherwise seldom or never met in their daily toil. The purpose seems to have been to emphasize the company as a unit consisting of different equally important cogs and to counter the increasingly anonymous existence of the individual. In line with this “corporate identity building”, one department of either company is also introduced with pictures and names of the employees. In the March 1921 issue the Telephone Operators of the D&IR were presented, 23 women in all.<sup>41</sup>

In general, all pictures and cartoons printed in the company paper were connected with the company or the local context in some way, and they all seem to have as their main purpose to conjure up a feeling for the company through workers’ and officers’ private pictures, not seldom of workers carrying out leisure activities. The emphasis put on the leisure time activities of the workers is a continuation of the community-oriented work of the YMCA, which during the early 1920s was increasingly taken over by various D&IR arrangements. The photos of children, fellow workers and articles on safety outside work all try to conjure up a feeling of the workers being included in a company family that cared about the workers and about the workers’ families. In this company family, women, both wagedworkers and housewives, played a large role. In line with this there is a standing column in the magazine called “Women’s department” that deals with home making and the plight of the railroad wife. In this column, American female identity and home-safety in the modern American home was important themes. So it was at least partially directed towards immigrant women.<sup>42</sup>

The combination of the intimate tone, the focus on the community, the way that the company program for safety transcended the boundaries of the workplace, the inclusion of women in the company family and the emphasis put on mutual-ity, religion and work ethics is in my interpretation a way of reshaping class relations by strengthening the bond between the workers, many among them immigrants from non-English speaking countries, and the company, whose officials were still largely dominated by men of Anglo-American descent or by immigrants from English-speaking countries.

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<sup>41</sup> *Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, Employes Safety Magazine*, March 1921. p.17

<sup>42</sup> *Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, Employes Safety Magazine* September 1920. p.29,30

In the early 1920s, the D&IR internalized much of the work that had previously been executed by the Railroad YMCA. This work included a very active Employees association started in 1926, but there had been various associations organized under the auspices of the company during the 1910s too. During the 1910s and under the auspices of the YMCA, teams from different departments of the company became more important and company leagues for baseball and basketball were organized.<sup>43</sup> The focus on distinctly American sports might also be claimed to be a result of the dominance of the American-born in the running of the YMCA but is a pattern that repeated itself elsewhere<sup>44</sup>. In this respect, sports, the construction of a YMCA and the company construction of an athletic field all in their ways contributed to the Americanization of the largely Scandinavian immigrant work force on the D&IR during the 1920s. So, sports was a quite subtle means of controlling the leisure time of activity and to place the leisure time under company control in a larger framework based on the idea of a mutual interest between immigrant workers and Anglo-American bourgeoisie. This might have been especially true for Two Harbors in the 1920s, where company influence and World War I had changed social and cultural relations to the extent that the radical movement had practically withdrawn from the public sphere of the city.

So, to sum up, the welfare systems on the D&IR were, despite some of its quite flawed performance, a distinct success. The work of the YMCA was one important component in the work, and so was the increasingly visible work of the company during the period from World War I, when a number of company clubs and additional institutions were founded and used to complement and diversify the work of the YMCA, which was still strong and vibrant in the 1920s. The company hence seems to have taken an increasingly active direct interest in its relation to the workers. It seems clear however, that a process of secularization and professionalization of labor relations seem to have occurred as the company takes a responsibility that the YMCA had taken previously.

The D&IR had by the end of the 1920s drawn a larger number of workers, both skilled and unskilled, into its welfare capitalist schemes through the broad and community-oriented

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<sup>43</sup> Duluth, Missabe & Northern Railway, Duluth & Iron Range Railroad, *Employes Safety Magazine*, March 1922, p.32,33.

<sup>44</sup> Gems, Gerald. *Welfare Capitalism and Blue Collar Sports. The Legacy of Labor Unrest.* p.45

program of the employees' club and the YMCA.

Most of the attraction seems to have come from the athletic facilities where many workers chose to spend their leisure time, but the reading room also appears to have been quite well attended. In some sense, the YMCA has apparently been a very successful transitional phase between the Laissez-Faire period into the 1890s and the company-controlled welfare capitalism schemes directed towards the community that were launched from the late 1910s. The mutual character as a mediator might have been preferred to company-sponsored activities by the radical immigrant workers, and many workers attended not only sports sessions, but also used other facilities.

At the same time many railroad officials were very active in the YMCA movement, and the superintendent on the railroad was a strong champion of it. When the United States entered the war in the spring of 1917, the YMCA had created credibility for itself among the workers and had achieved the type of cross-class connections that the organization basically strived for. During the war the YMCA movement became an important part in promoting and supporting the American war effort, for instance as a platform for selling liberty bonds.

Another function was to promote Americanization among the largely Scandinavian workers on the railroad up to 1915. Hence, YMCA must be regarded, at bottom, as connected with the interests of the railroad company.

The YMCA was thus to some extent used as a platform for the railroad to create the kind of cross-class identity that was later used to construct a company identity and a bond between workers and officials on the railroad.

The personal relationship played a crucial role in the railroad company magazine from 1918 to 1930, as the employer clearly wanted to build further on the cross-class identity founded in the YMCA movement. This indicates that the situation on the D&IR was characterized not only by welfare schemes of a more formalized character, but that it was based in a more complex and long-term work of molding a company identity among the immigrant workers on the D&IR, an identity that contained both American markers and that strove to play down class conflict through a message of mutuality based on religious ethics, co-operation, self-discipline and a strong work ethic. Much of this work of molding the mind of the worker was carried out in the company magazine's strong focus on



safety matters, a program which in effect became a bridge between the work place and the community. This in turn offered the opportunity that the company capitalized upon during the 1920s in expanding its reach and fulfilling the vision of company officials of reshaping a community that had prior to this decade been characterized by the emergence of radical ethnic identity formation among immigrants and Anglo-American workers.

In this respect the work on the D&IR to some extent resembled the situation encountered by Gerald Zahavi at shoe manufacturer Endicott, Lester and Johnson in that the practiced Welfare Capitalist ideas became part system, part personality, part ideology and part informal practice.<sup>713</sup> The ideology that controlled this work clearly had its roots in Anglo-American bourgeois interests in the de-radicalizing and the Americanizing of workers to cut them out to fit the economic, political and social systems and the cultural context of which they were now one part.

The company program to promote worker loyalty, primarily through the program directed towards the community, entered a new phase in the late 1910s, when the Great War erupted in Europe, spawning a lively debate about the role of the United States in the conflict and how to get the culturally diverse largely immigrant population in Lake County to support an American entry into the conflict. This discussion meant an increased focus on the work of Americanizing the population and on the character of the American national project, which entered an intense phase during the war years. This came to affect the large Swedish immigrant population in Lake County, too. So, to conclude: as the class component of integrating the dissenting workers happened through the welfare arrangements of the YMCA and the US Steel program, the American war effort became an important opportunity to reshape American working class identity and push for a monoculture based on a white racial identity with a base in Anglo-American culture. Also in this work, the welfare schemes of the company and its relationship to its immigrant work force became crucial.

To this end, welfare capitalism on the D&IR was one expression of the power wielded by a dominant cultural and economic group in American society with the power to define societal problems and to channel immigrant entry into American society.

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