COMPANY WELFARE PROGRAMMES AND INDUSTRIAL MODERNIZATION IN FINLAND

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Prior to the modern welfare state, many large companies provided extensive welfare programmes for their employees. In this article, such welfare programmes— or corporate welfarism—in Finnish manufacturing firms in the early 20th century are the focus of attention. I analyse the content of these programmes and how they changed over time as part of the modernization and professionalization of management and industrial and societal change. I also discuss how company managers perceived the role of welfare provisions in corporate development and what happened with these programmes when the first steps towards the modern welfare state were taken. I show that these programmes started as a necessity and part of industrial paternalism, but gradually became part of labour management, in particular for the creation of a loyal workforce and productivity improvements. These programmes often developed in collaboration with local municipalities, which led to intertwined relationships at the local level, marked by both trust and tension in local communities. Once general welfare reforms emerged, companies often abandoned their voluntary programmes, while some services were taken over by the municipalities. I also ask to what extent these programmes were managerial strategies to counteract growing state involvement in their affairs.

**Keywords** welfarism, welfare capitalism, industrial paternalism, modernization of management

**Introduction and background**

Employer associations’ and individual business owners’ attitudes towards, and influence on, the development of the welfare state are receiving an increasing amount of attention. Employer organizations have formed strong and influential interest groups, especially in the Nordic countries during the decades after WWII, with their elaborate corporatist and collaborative features. Nevertheless, also before this, big business owners and employer representatives formed an influential pressure group.

As a rule, Finnish employers and individual business managers objected to welfare reforms. They feared increasing labour costs and higher taxes. General reforms were assumed to promote ‘idleness’ and overuse of the system. Individual employers also often objected on ideological grounds, arguing that any welfare services and social security...
systems should be private, voluntary, and preferably take the form of insurance policies. As Swedish social scientist Walter Korpi discusses, as a rule, employers were to be considered antagonists or, at best, consenters to proposals for welfare reform.¹ Finnish employers do not seem to have been that different.

Nevertheless, in-depth empirical research shows that employers’ arguments varied depending on the reform and how it was to be implemented. Their views have also varied in different institutional, economic, and political contexts.² As Cathie Jo Martin and Duane Swank show, in countries with collaborative features, and in which business interests have been well-organized and hierarchical with high internal cohesion, employer and business interest organizations have been more positive towards social reforms than in countries with less-organized, more divided business interests.³ Even in the United States – a country with primarily ‘private’ welfare provision and non-unified employers – progressive business leaders could be proactive in social legislation for competitive reasons.⁴

Employers’ views also changed over time. When economic development progressed and welfare reforms were introduced in other industrialized countries, Finnish employers began to consider some general reforms to be acceptable. This more conciliatory stance was also connected to a changing society. After WWII, the political Left became more influential and, in the labour market, there was a shift towards achieving compromises between employers and employees. Employer organizations’ representatives realized that times were changing and they had to adapt to the new environment, especially if they were going to prevent alternatives that, from their perspective, were worse. By not being too confrontational, they could influence the development. Nevertheless, it was difficult for many individual employers to accept the employer organizations’ more conciliatory stance.⁵

**Goal of this article**

This article looks a little further back in history. An often-neglected factor when discussing employers’ (changing) attitudes towards welfare reform is the sometimes extensive welfare programmes that many private companies operated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This shows that, in fact, some employers could see some advantages in – even a need for – welfare services, especially to their own employees and their families, although they did not favour general reforms.

These welfare services, combined with investments in infrastructure, were, first and foremost, a necessity when starting a business, as a substantial proportion of early Finnish industry, especially in the forest industry, were established in remote mill communities. Companies had to build roads and railways, invest in supplying power to the mill, and build houses for the workers. They set up schools and health clinics and provided their employees with a range of other types of services, such as firewood and food deliveries in times of crisis. These welfare services were part of the prevailing Christian and moral values and a reflection of industrial paternalism, according to which the employer should care for the employee like a benevolent father from the cradle to the grave. Therefore, companies in large industrial cities often also had their own welfare programmes.
Nevertheless, these services also aimed to recruit and ensure a stable and loyal workforce and were part of containment strategies: by providing good employment conditions and fringe benefits, the company management hoped to maintain peaceful relations on the labour market.\(^6\) Although often considered an outdated, ‘pre-modern’ managerial model, we shall see below that these programmes also became an inherent part of industrial modernization.

In this article, the focus is on welfare programmes in Finnish big business in a period of rapid industrial progress and modernization. The overarching goal is to analyse how the employers perceived welfare provision and its role for the company, for the industrial process, and for social betterment. Although the programmes were, first and foremost, a managerial strategy, the debates and discussions concerning these programmes also shed light on which social problems the employers considered the most urgent and how society was to be improved. I outline the main features of these programmes, the main goals of the programmes, and how they changed over time. Another question is: to what extent were these private welfare provisions a response to pressures for public welfare reform? Or were they used as an argument against such reforms? According to Joseph Melling, welfare services in the UK were indeed part of containment strategies, but the system was also influenced by the changing relationship between industry and the state, and businesses used these services as a response to increasing state regulation of labour management and in the social area.\(^7\) Finally, I discuss briefly what happened to the private welfare programmes when public reforms were introduced. One point of departure is that the companies’ welfare services affected managers’ and employers’ views on, and strategies in relation to, general welfare reforms.

One core argument is that, while inherently a part of the paternal ideal, systematic and elaborate welfare schemes also became an expression of modernization ideologies. This development reflected the emergence of a new generation of professional managers and extensive economic and political transformations.

Another core argument is that, while these programmes covered only quite a small proportion of the population in the still predominantly agrarian part of the country, they were of larger significance than is commonly recognized. From the perspective of welfare state formation, they provided examples – perhaps even benchmarks – for the employer community once general welfare reforms were on the agenda. After WWII, the practices and traditions of these industrial communities were commonly referred to when welfare reforms were discussed. Such arguments can be found, in particular, in the discussions of the Social Committee, which the Confederation of Employers established in 1946.\(^8\) Furthermore, as these programmes were quite visible, gaining attention in the press and in public debates, and because they spread from pioneering companies to followers, they therefore also had an impact on people outside the industrial communities. Welfare provisions – mainly education and health care – ‘spilled over’ onto other inhabitants in the smaller rural mill communities (brukssamhällen), especially as companies often collaborated on these matters with the local municipal authorities. Public–private partnerships are indeed not new phenomena.
The Finnish case can provide some interesting aspects due to the rapid industrial transformations and modernization that occurred during the first decades of the 20th century. The contemporaneity between Finnish industrial development and nation-building (independence in 1917) affected how business managers perceived their role in this development.

**Empirical focus and concept of welfare capitalism**

Private companies’ voluntary welfare programmes, often called welfare capitalism or corporate welfarism, have been an international phenomenon. Nevertheless, these programmes included a great variety of services, took a variety of shapes, and changed over time, making the concept somewhat difficult to define. In a seminal work, Stuart Brandes defined it as ‘any service provided for the comfort or improvement of the employees, which was neither a necessity of the industry nor required by the law’. This is quite apt here. In addition, the concepts used have been different. Welfare capitalism is usually linked to the US scholarly tradition and the private, employer-centred welfare model, which has also remained the dominant model in the United States. In the Nordic context, more common concepts are industrial paternalism, private social welfare, or, earlier, social maintenance (in Finnish: huolto). These concepts reflect that, contrary to the United States, this welfare model did not take root as the dominant model, but rather as a ‘pre-modern’ model, often with local and or company-specific features. In other words, a phase that countries passed through on their way to becoming ‘modern’, tax-funded, and fundamentally universal welfare states.

The concept of ‘private welfare’ is equally complex. A first conclusion is that it is not provided by the public sector and/or tax-funded, although some public contributions can exist. Instead, it consists of welfare services or benefits provided by the employer, by an organization, or by private insurance. Nevertheless, there are difficulties in setting the boundaries. For example, are statutory services and benefits required by legislation, but provided by a company/employer, to be considered ‘private’? During the period of this investigation, we can in part disregard this issue, as there were few statutory services and benefits and they constituted only a small share of total labour costs. Another complex issue is to classify services (and infrastructure) that were partly funded by the public and partly by the public. This occurred often in health care were the costs were divided between the two parties, or one of them established a health care center or hospital, but the other paid for, for example, a number of beds. The focus in this paper is on company-provided and primarily voluntary welfare services, benefits, and insurance schemes. Occasionally, employers required individual contributions from the employees, to sickness funds or health care services, for example. Occasionally, these occurred in collaboration with the municipality, but to be considered here the company was the main producer.

Largely, this article builds on my previous research and therefore it takes primarily the form of a synthesizing review article. However, new research has also been carried out, in particular in order to combine discussions on modernization
with the changing perceptions and goals of welfare policies. Consequently, the analysis is also based on insights from archival documents, printed sources, and secondary sources.

Elaborate welfare employee programmes were especially a feature of large manufacturing companies, and this research focuses on big business.\(^1\) The archival material comes mainly from one large industrial company – G. A. Serlachius AB (hereafter GAS) – but also material from e.g. Oy Tampella Ab, which is available from the Central Archive of Finnish Business Archives, Elka, is used. GAS was a paper company in a traditional mill community, which, under the management of Gösta Serlachius, a legendary figure in Finnish industrial history, developed an elaborate welfare programme. The main mill and headquarters were situated in Mänttä (90 km from Tampere), but the company also had three other paper mills, one of which, Kangas, will be mentioned in what follows. Serlachius is considered a Finnish pioneer in workplace safety, but the company’s maternity and childcare programme was also considered quite highly developed in the Finnish context at the time.\(^2\) Tampella was situated in the industrial town of Tampere and operated several lines of business, but I use primarily material concerning the company’s textile production. Forestry and textiles were two industries that often had extensive welfare programmes.\(^3\)

Furthermore, materials from the Confederation of Employers (Suomen Työnantajien Keskusliitto or STK), contemporary investigations and reports, employers’ magazines, scholarly literature, and corporate histories are utilized. Material from Industritidningen and Social Tidsskrift has also been used. One important contemporary source is a series of articles in 1923 based on an investigation into private firms’ social welfare programmes, based on a sample of 150 industrial firms (222 factories) and carried out by Jenny Markelin-Svensson, published in Social Tidsskrift in 1923. I also often refer to other companies, as similar stories to GAS are found in many other big businesses, including Kymmene Ab, Rosenlew Ab, Oy Ahlström (Varkaus), and Kaukas Ab. One valuable source has been a book about the history of Kymmene Ab’s social policies, published in 1932 by Julius Polin.\(^4\) The book provides detailed information about Kymmene’s social policies and local community relations, but it also forms an interesting contemporary ‘window’ through which one can observe how company management wanted to present its social policy in contemporary society. This is complemented by the informative books by Veikko Talvi on Kymmene company and the Kymenlaakso area.\(^5\) Another important contemporary source was a volume edited by Keijo Keravuori on the history of welfare programmes in industry, published in the late 1940s. This book contains several articles written by company representatives, covering both the content and goals of industrial welfare schemes.

I will first briefly locate my research in its relevant scholarly contexts; primarily within debates concerning private welfare models in early industrial development and in the modernization process, but also debates on how these programmes were strategies to counterbalance threats from workers’ movements and to counteract state regulation. I will then provide a very brief overview of early Finnish initiatives for welfare reforms
and the social thinking of the period based on existing literature to provide an historical and societal context for companies’ welfare programmes. After that, I will move to the core of the article: private welfare provisions in Finnish big business and the various and changing objectives of these programmes and services. I will end with a brief discussion.

Scholarly context: the divide in welfare state research

There is a persistent preconception that some countries, especially the United States, have primarily followed a ‘private model’, while the Nordic and many other European countries have chosen another path with extensive, publicly provided welfare services often combined with generous transfer payments. It is also commonly held that private welfare systems have hindered larger state/public sector involvement. Nevertheless, this is based on oversimplifications. Most publicly funded systems have developed gradually over time and parallel systems have often existed. The United States does not have a purely private system either, but includes extensive public systems as well. Private and public solutions have complemented each other and the path towards a publicly provided system in Europe, for example, has by no means been straightforward, but marked by political tensions, compromises, and twists and turns. Finnish historian Pirjo Markkola uses the concept of mixed economy of welfare, which has been common particularly in European welfare state research, in which it refers to the complex relationship between the state, voluntary organizations, families, and market-based solutions in the evolution of the modern welfare states in Europe. Markkola has studied how this interplay developed in Finland in around 1900, when new responsibilities emerged, which affected the division of labour between these different agents. In her study, company welfare programmes were less to the fore, but, evidently, these formed part of the ‘market-based’ sphere.

The mixes between private and public can be very different. General welfare reforms based on public-sector provision and tax funding have not fully ‘crowded out’ private solutions either. In fact, Jennifer Klein shows that many corporations widened their own programmes when the public reforms were developed. According to Melling, British companies often aimed to counteract perceived threats from public reforms by expanding their own. Finally, we also need to question the idea that it is only where the public sector is taking a large share of the responsibility that extensive welfare states can exist.

There is extensive international literature on the attitudes and strategies of employers and business elites towards welfare reforms and their influence on the political process preceding such reforms. Private company welfarism has also been an important area of study. Nonetheless, James Hacker uses the concept of the ‘divided welfare state’ when discussing the battle between the private model and public social welfare model in the United States. One could argue that there has been something of a divide in welfare state research as well. There has been a focus either on private corporate welfarism or on the political process, especially the roles of the political Left, unions, and experts and social reformers in public welfare development. Especially in Finland and in the other Nordic countries, priority has been given to studying general (public) welfare reforms as outcomes of political processes. Private companies’ welfare activities and employer
Early social reforms as context for company welfare programmes

Although Finland is often considered a ‘latecomer’ with respect to the emergence of a ‘modern’ welfare state, protective legislation and social insurance were introduced quite early. For example, in 1895, a law on compulsory accident insurance in manufacturing industries was passed. Employers were responsible for taking action to prevent accidents and protecting workers against occupational hazards. The employers also had a responsibility for the workers and their families and an obligation to support their former long-term employees from legislation passed in 1879. Some forms of public social support existed; for example, the local municipalities had an obligation to care for orphans, the elderly, and those unable to support themselves. The municipalities were also responsible for basic health care, but the minimum requirements were low (e.g. epidemic prevention, midwives).

Social questions were increasingly on the political agenda at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Government agencies engaged workplace inspectors (yrkesinspektörer; ammattientarkastajia) to inspect factory work. These inspectors looked at working hours, working conditions and safety issues, future prospects of employment (possible lay-offs or new recruitments), and how physical workplaces had developed. Overall, the social conditions of industrial workers became a focus of investigations and reports, and statistics on social issues started being collected. New publications came into being, such as Social Tidskrift – Sosiaalinen Aikakauskirja and its predecessor Arbetsstatistisk Tidskrift.

After the parliamentary reform in 1906/1907, the Social Democratic Party gained more political influence, which stimulated discussions on social issues. However, liberal and conservative groups – especially the ‘old Finns’ (the Fennomans) – also discussed ‘the workers’ question’ and problems arising from Finland’s growing landless population. Many were acquainted with Bismarck’s reforms and were strong proponents of German social and economic thinking. Many feared social unrest, even socialist revolution, but many also held a genuine social pathos. Their view was strongly paternal, however, and they propagated primarily for protective legislation and private insurance schemes based on individual contributions. Nonetheless, within the elite, there was an eagerness to modernize the country and fighting social problems was one important element.

Social questions were increasingly being discussed in professional associations, for example within the Finnish Economic Association, and, in 1908, an Association for Worker Protection and Social Insurance (Suomen Työväensuojelu- ja Sosiaalivakuutusyhdistys – Föreningen för Arbetarskydd och Socialförsäkring i Finland) was established; later the Social Policy
Association. Finnish social reformers actively followed international debates, and participated in international social security conferences and organized lectures. As mentioned in the introduction, basic infrastructure and welfare services were often necessary to be able to start a business. Extensive company welfare provisions emerged primarily in big business, however. This was, in fact, an issue of growing concern among employers after WWII, when they wanted to achieve a united front to counteract demands for general welfare reforms. How could businesses claim they were doing their duty if some firms did not even fulfil their obligations?

The most urgent issue during early industrialization was usually workers’ housing. Worker accommodation was obviously necessary to be able to recruit employees, especially in rural areas, but in the early 20th century, the poor standard of worker housing became an issue that both social reformers and company managers considered problematic from other perspectives. Poor housing had adverse effects on morals and on health and sanitation. Cleanliness was thus important. Finnish historian Minna Harjula emphasizes that hygiene and sanitation were crucial to fight epidemics, especially tuberculosis, but also important as they were a sign of a healthy and morally sound lifestyle of virtuous individuals, who in turn deserved access to support and health care.

Health care was an early form of welfare service and many large industrial companies employed nurses and factory doctors, ran first aid stations, gradually opened health clinics, and employed midwives. In the early 1900s, the Kymmene company had three midwives on their payroll, and an infectious diseases hospital. In 1908, a small health clinic (sjukstuga) was established that ultimately developed into a full-scale hospital. According to Markelin-Svensson’s investigation, this was a very modern hospital with X-ray equipment and first-class surgical facilities. In the 1940s, it had 20 beds. In GAS too, health care was considered important and developed well. GAS management established in 1907 a small hospital and in the 1920s, in collaboration with a philanthropic organisation Säde Yhdistys (see below), a small maternity ward in Mänttä. Many companies also established primary schools
and some large firms, like GAS, Kymmene, A. Ahlström Oy, and Nokia Ab, ran ‘industrial schools’, which provided vocational training.

Social insurance funds (kassa) were common, especially for sickness benefits, but were also used for funerals and pensions. For example, the sickness benefit fund in Tampella was established when the company started its operations. The firms usually supported the sickness benefits funds financially, and where it was compulsory for workers to belong to them, the company was obliged to contribute to their funding. However, these were basically founded on the idea of self-help and workers contributed a certain percentage of their salary; for example, in Rosenlew, workers contributed 1% of their yearly salary. According to statistics in the 1930s, around 15% of the contributions came from the employers, but this differed between types of funds and from company to company. Funds also tied the workers to the companies, as they often were non-refundable in case they moved to another company. What were called service accounts offices (intressekontor; huoltokonttori) emerged in the 1910s and these became popular, although – according to employer representatives – the workers first regarded them with suspicion. The first one was, according to Talvi, established in Kymmene in 1915. Employees could deposit part of their wages in these accounts and the office personnel took care of the employee’s taxes, rent, mortgage, and insurance payments. Many companies encouraged workers to build their own houses and offered cheap loans for this purpose, and the service accounts were convenient for loan administration. Companies offered maternity guidance, gave household advice, organized sports activities, established daycare facilities, and organized holiday camps for children. In addition, community services were common. Companies supported fire brigades, funded the building of churches, and built sports facilities.

These services were not only a necessity but also an expression of industrial paternalism, according to which the manager cared for his workers with fatherly benevolence. Moreover, welfare capitalism was also an employer strategy. By providing good employment conditions and generous services, companies aimed to create an image of a benevolent employer. The goal was to recruit the best workers, secure a stable and loyal work force and decrease staff turnover. At the same time, the employers considered it their moral obligation to provide, in particular, decent housing.

The programmes were also used for marketing purposes. Polin’s book about the Kymmene company’s social activities provides a good example. In the introduction, Polin states that the goal of the book was to document this activity ‘for the archives’, but also to present ‘in words and pictures the significant social undertaking that the company has carried out’ for the general public. Tampella’s and GAS’s programmes were frequently presented in professional magazines, newspaper articles, and at various meetings and factory visits. The GAS social inspector travelled around and gave talks about its social work, and the company’s social welfare programme was presented with pride when prominent delegations visited Mänttä in the 1930s.

Fringe benefits and welfare services were also in the interests of the employees; workers in these large companies often had better employment conditions and better
access to health care and education than in other firms. This established labour relations based on mutual trust and interdependence. In fact, industrial paternalism has been seen as a tool for developing a feeling of being a ‘corporate family’, in which one task was to create a harmonious ‘household’ with a clear division of labour and of gendered roles.\(^{49}\) In the remote mill communities, an important goal was also to create a local identity, and this became especially important after the Civil War (see below), but this was already important during early industrialisation, as the new workers coming in were not looked upon favourably by all the local inhabitants.\(^{50}\) Similar sentiments were expressed in Pargas Kalkbergs Ab and the local community, where the aim was to increase the number of permanent residents.\(^{51}\)

Overall, employees often considered these programmes in a positive way. Even after WWII, when the paternal system finally started to disappear, employees seem to have held a positive attitude to such services. In an investigation carried out in two large industrial companies, a clear majority of the employees (64\% and 73\%, respectively) considered them positively and that these reforms were serving both the interest of the employers and the employees. Only a minority (2\% and 4\%, respectively) considered it as a tactic on the employers’ part and only a small fraction would have liked these services to have been replaced by a similar amount in salary.\(^{52}\)

These kinds of welfare programmes were obviously not unique to Finland and many companies took their models from abroad. In their insightful analysis of what role ‘models’ played in the history of welfare state analysis, Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen state that ‘social reformers, expert[s] and politicians have been thinking, working and arguing comparatively since the first piece of modern social political legislation’.\(^{53}\) Finnish managers were inspired by schemes outside of their own country. Gösta Serlachius, for example, visited the United States in the early 1920s and studied publications and books on many issues. Sweden was one important country of inspiration. For example, the Swedish journal *Arbetarskyddet – Tidskrift för arbetarskydd och socialförsäkring* became a source of inspiration on labour management issues to Serlachius. GAS’s maternity and childcare programme took inspiration from the elaborate welfare programme of the French Société Michelin Cie, often noted for its modernity.\(^{54}\) Serlachius also sent key employees on study trips. The secretary of the Säde association (see below), Helmi Särkkä, was given a travel grant to visit orphanages and children’s homes elsewhere in Finland and in Sweden. The GAS social inspector in the 1920s, Sisko Ania, went on study trips to other factories in Finland and to Sweden to study housing and occupational safety work.\(^{55}\) The Swedish home ownership movement (egnahemsrörelsen) inspired many companies in the development of their housing programmes.\(^{56}\)

*Welfare to enhance productivity*

Owners of big business were by no means philanthropists, however, but shrewd managers who put their companies’ interests first. As Gösta Serlachius stated in a speech:
None of these efforts [welfare work] is a question of charity, but instead of cooperation, progress and allocations of the fruits of labor.  

Another employer representative made similar statements: ‘The manufacturing industry was not and could not become a social security office’. Employers were well aware that welfare initiatives were often advantageous from an economic perspective. By attracting the best workers, and having a healthy, well-nourished, and skilled workforce, productivity would increase. At the time, this was increasingly stressed by contemporary thinkers in the field of management and, in Finland too, these ideas gained ground. When presenting the history and future of social work in the forestry industry in 1948, one employer representative from the Confederation of Employers, Akseli Kaskela, bluntly stated that ‘managers had early noted that sick and unhappy workers were poor workers’. In fact, he continued, social work was not an end in itself (Finnish: *itsetarkoitus*), but closely linked to productive work.

Safety at work played a key role in productivity improvements. Injuries and disabilities were not only a problem from an ethical and humane perspective, they were also costly for the firms. According to the legislation, employers were responsible for disabled workers and their families. Accident insurance premiums had increased due to the high risks involved in many industries. This gave rise to concerns. For example, in GAS, occupational safety work was especially important. In the 1920s, Gösta Serlachius had become acquainted with the *Safety First* movement in the United States and it was one of the key tasks of Sisko Ania to implement these methods in GAS. Apart from protective equipment and a safe working environment, good working conditions (ventilation, correct temperature, and lighting) were considered important for safety and higher productivity. Safety and production committees, in which workers, foremen, and engineers could bring up safety issues, became common. Overall, workers were encouraged to take an interest in and take initiative for the development of production processes and the prevention of injuries. Management sought to promote – or at least give the impression of promoting – the active participation of employees in developing production methods. This has been considered to have been especially important in family businesses, as this would make them committed to the firm. In the spirit of Nikki Mandell, it would promote a feeling of being part of a ‘corporate family’. In fact, good housing was also seen as a tool for productivity and improving safety. According to Gösta Serlachius, creating ‘spacious and pleasant homes where both soul and body can rest and develop’ was imperative for reducing injuries.

*Private–public collaboration: advance trust and local identity*

Investments in infrastructure and welfare services were often developed in collaboration with the municipality. This was especially the case in education and health care and, in particular, in smaller mill communities, in which neither the company nor the municipality needed a full-time doctor or a large hospital. Small rural municipalities often had weak finances, while housing programmes and health care demanded significant resources. The companies could see the advantage of having a steady
buyer of the services they produced and as the municipalities could receive state support for health care and education, especially in cases of expansions and/or new obligations, somebody else would bear the heavy costs. As a result of this collaboration, services originally established by the company for their own workers also ‘spilled over’ into care for the other inhabitants of the municipality.

Commonly, the company established a health clinic or a hospital and employed the factory doctors and nurses, while the local authorities shared some of the costs or paid for the use of these services. For example, the municipality participated from the beginning in GAS’s maternity ward by contributing to the midwives’ salaries. The midwife also worked part-time as the municipal midwife. In Kymmene Ab, the salaries for the nurses, doctor, and dentists were, in a similar way, divided between the company and the municipality. In bigger cities, the relationship could be the opposite, in which the companies rented beds in the municipal hospital.

Housing projects could also involve collaboration. In rural areas, the companies often had plenty of land, but the municipality could open up plots for housing in city areas too in order to encourage workers to build their own houses. This was common particularly in the forestry industry firms located in rural areas. Textiles and garment industries also had large numbers of workers’ houses and, in the Lapinniemi factory, for example, there was collaboration with the city. In general, both the company and the municipality had an interest in having stable residents and the collaboration strengthened local identity.

These collaborations could also include a third party, namely philanthropic organizations. In Mänttä, the early activities in the childcare and maternity programmes were organized within the formally independent association Säde Yhdistys, established in 1920. Säde’s activities were particularly focused on child and prenatal care and on welfare services to mothers with small children. Säde was, however, an extension of GAS in every respect. The association’s chairperson was Gösta Serlachius’ second wife, Ruth, and she was assisted by a welfare committee consisting of the wives of key white-collar employees and a number of middle-class, professional women. Gösta Serlachius took a personal interest in the activities of Säde and, every year, the company donated a considerable sum of money. In Kymmene, similar philanthropic organizations existed – mainly Gösta Bergenheims minnesfond and Föreningen för barnavårdens befrämjande – which in similar ways contributed to the welfare initiatives.

However, this ‘division of labour’ also led to a complex, intertwined, mutually dependent relationship, which was by no means easy to handle and often marked by friction. It was often unclear what was considered to be the role of the public and what the role of the private and therefore who should pay for what. Such tensions appear to have increased over time. This was often a result of new obligations that health care legislation placed on the municipalities, especially when it came to health care and maternity wards.

Gradually, the municipalities took over a larger share of the funding and organization of the hospitals. Instead, for example, Säde began to concentrate on providing prenatal and child welfare services and new activities such as a daycare centre for working mothers.
and summer camps for children were taken up. Leisure activities like sports, gardening, and scouting also became important.

Although relations between GAS and the municipality were occasionally strained, the company management continued to consider collaboration as something positive, in principle. In 1938, GAS’s head of social affairs, Ilkka Laurila, presented a positive outlook on the collaboration and its potential development and concluded that:

one would like to see that the two parties that are the main contributors to social welfare could come to an agreement about when it would be better to promote an increasing “division of labor” and when to advance intensified cooperation. Unfortunately, there is some kind of distrust on both sides, which has hampered such cooperation […] But it is positive to observe that these contradictions are beginning to fade away.

The head of social affairs in Kymmene, Åke Launikari, also emphasized the advantages of collaboration, which would enable more efficient use of resources and avoid overlapping activities. Moreover, the municipalities could take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of the private businesses. Collaboration would also increase mutual trust and remove prejudices against the other party. Nevertheless, the general welfare reforms after WWII profoundly changed the role of private firms in welfare and their collaborations in local communities. For example, in Mänttä, the entire operation of the hospital was taken over by the municipality in 1949.

Welfare as strategy for control and containment

Welfare work had strong elements of control, too. Employers were paternalistic and it was considered self-evident that they would control their workers both at work and in their spare time. Loyalty was particularly important, and investigations were carried out to achieve ‘better control over the employees’ trustworthiness’. Welfare capitalism was also used as a containment strategy; content and well-cared-for employees would refrain from confrontation. This became especially important after the devastating experiences of the Civil War (1918). Polin emphasized that economic and social goals should not be considered to be in conflict; even if an employer paid high wages, social unrest could not be prevented if the work environment was not healthy or enjoyable. Akseli Kaskela in turn noted that hungry and dissatisfied workers were a source of strikes and unrest and that those firms that had realized that social programmes could avoid this had more peaceful workers and also ‘higher production’. Productivity and content workers went hand-in-hand.

A specific concern among social reformers had been the poor housing situation among industrial workers; it had negative effects on the health and morals of the population and could induce social unrest. Housing was considered one of the most burning social issues after the Civil War and many companies invested extensively in housing. Housing programmes demanded significant resources, but, as the Tampella management stated, it was important ‘to create a stable, moderate and skilled worker...
As Julius Polin expressed it, good homes would promote ‘decent behavior’ (hyfsande verkan, p.172). In many textile factories, the large proportion of unmarried and female workers was also a reason for building workers’ houses. For example, in textile firms, specific ‘girls’ houses’ were erected. Company housing enabled control of the workers and this was especially important when it came to young and unmarried employees.

Good kitchens were considered especially important for social betterment. As was noted in investigations into workers’ housing, many families did not prepare proper food, often because, in the early 20th century, their homes lacked a well-equipped kitchen with storage facilities. The importance of kitchens was especially taken note of in GAS. Employers also encouraged workers with families to build their own houses. A home of their own, preferably with a small garden in which they could grow their own fruits and vegetables, would promote a healthy and morally upright lifestyle. It would also tie them tightly to the company and the local community, especially as the companies often provided plots of land, offered cheap loans, and helped with building materials and building plans. Companies’ encouragement of workers to build their own houses was also motivated by crude economic calculations. It was less costly for the companies to open up land plots and give workers cheap loans than to build their own workers’ tenements.

According to a housing census, the housing standard in manufacturing industries was still poor in the 1930s, but the standard gradually improved. Workers who lived in houses rented from the companies they worked for, or who had built their own houses, had a somewhat better housing standards than workers who rented in the free market. When a government housing programme was initiated in 1939, the management of GAS stated that they could not accept that their workers were to live in such inadequate dwellings. Immediately after the end of WWII, the GAS company management noted that the state’s efforts had remained unsatisfactory and that the ‘manufacturing industry again had to take initiatives to improve the employees’ housing situation’.

The welfare programmes also had an educational and fostering task: to bring up a new generation of healthy, loyal (and productive) employees with high moral standards and citizens loyal to the nation in the newly independent nation. It has often been emphasized that social programmes, and especially housing projects and health care, had strong nationalistic elements in Finland. As Harjula discusses, the idea of public health (folkhälsa) – to improve the health of the whole population – became dominant in the interwar period, and new health care reforms were passed. Similar ideas were present in many other countries. Falling birth rates worried decision-makers, and promoting maternity and childcare and improving the ‘quality’ of the population was considered urgent, occasionally with unfortunate consequences.

Employer representatives also emphasized the fostering aspects. Housing, education, maternity, and childcare were key tools in this effort, but, as Tampella’s head of social affairs, A. Tienari, noted, even the service accounts taught the workers ‘thrift, frugality and a regular life-style’. According to Kaskela, maternity and child care,
along with education, were a way to get the young generations to think in a morally healthy and patriotic way and foster a sense of ‘common belonging’ (fi: yhteenkuuluvuus). Home ownership programmes, in particular, were seen as an important tool in the creation of a ‘national feeling of brotherhood’ (fi: kansalaisveljeyden tunne).

In Kangas, the local management stated that social work should aim to foster a working population that supported the current social order (Swedish: samhällsbevarande arbetarstam). The far Left had stronger support in Kangas than in Mänttä and containment strategies were considered especially important. Nevertheless, Gösta Serlachius was known for an uncompromising attitude towards unions and confrontational attitudes. In other cases, like Varkaus, the municipality and the company (Ahlström) aimed to jointly build a sense of local identity. Social and political unrest had broken out in Varkaus in the early 1900s and the devastating experience of the Civil War had left deep wounds.

The paternal ideal was still prevalent and, for example, Serlachius managerial strategy aimed to preserve personal relationships between workers and the management to preserve the peace on the labour market. As Gösta Serlachius stated on several occasions, working together in a collaborative environment was important, and efforts to instigate discord between the employer and the employee and their activities to work together for better living standards (Swe: bereda bröd för flera munnar) were doomed to fail. The social workers emphasized the role of the social and personnel offices in containment. Sisko Ania concluded that ‘many had come to her office in a bad temper, but had left in a much more amicable mood’.

In the Kymmene company, an employment office was established after the Civil War to make staffing with workers more efficient and reduce staff turnover, but also to promote a peaceful working environment and remove possible troublemakers. Employees could also go there and discuss their concerns. Talvi emphasized that the social worker was from the local community and knew the situation and the people well. This improved the chances of smoothing over conflicts.

Company welfare programmes supporting the path to modern industrial society

Danish historian Ole Markussen has summed up modernism at the company level in Denmark as being marked by rapid technological development, a strong belief in scientific approaches to both technical and organizational problems, and the introduction of rationalization, standardization, and mass production, but also by new labour relations, in particular a more systematic selection and recruitment of workers. As I have discussed elsewhere, the modern manager who emerged during the first decades of the 20th century was to create the modern, efficient, and rational company, but the modernization of management also meant new attitudes towards workers and new ideas about the company’s role in the community at large. The modernization of management was marked by a new outlook on the managerial role. Although rooted in industrial paternalism, the goal of the welfare programmes and their content changed as a result of this process.

Contemporary managerial thinking, especially rationalization ideologies, also affected how social welfare was perceived. As Robert Fitzgerald concludes, welfare
work became an important part of labour management in the growing companies. \(^{103}\) It was also increasingly perceived that both social issues and managerial problems could be solved in a rational and systematic way. Aside from the rationalization issues and Frederick Winslow Taylor’s ideas, labour management and social issues were increasingly in focus among social scientists. Mary Parker Follett – a renowned management thinker of the 1920s – emphasized that the growing role of large companies gave them specific and new responsibilities. \(^{104}\) In her view, accepting and adopting such responsibilities was a significant element in the professionalization of managers. To be a professional manager required that you also took into account social betterment. Moreover, as Berkowitz and McQuaid discuss, welfare initiatives became an inherent part of modernization strategies and it also included the idea of ‘a new economic man’, i.e. that workers were individuals who also thought rationally. \(^{105}\) However, managers were still aiming to maintain control and these new ideas went hand-in-hand with containment strategies. Kettunen emphasizes that control in Pargas Kalkbergs Ab was important for keeping order, but this had a strong economic element, too. In the modernizing company, control was a way to adjust employees to new economic rationalities. \(^{106}\) As has been stated concerning France, the rationalization movement and the modernization of management were explicitly aimed at the elimination of conflict at the same time as it was an answer to the social problems. \(^{107}\) This was also stressed by contemporary Finnish thinkers in the field of management. In 1923, the head of the Finnish Technical University, B. Wuolle, stated that rationalization and organizational planning work had ‘social advantages’ (sociala fördelar), and that this was an important way to eradicate much of the tension between the employer and the employees. \(^{108}\) Another contemporary stressed that one could not eradicate the threat from communism through social legislation, but only through increasing skill levels and improving the organization of work. \(^{109}\)

In Finland, not every manager was impressed by the new and the modern, but, nevertheless, a vanguard troop emerged. They were eager to learn new things, they wrote about managerial and organizational issues, and they gave speeches to their colleagues on the reorganization of production, factory planning, and labour management. For instance, Gösta Serlachius urged his own colleagues to become acquainted with the foreign literature in the field, as there was no excuse for being ignorant. \(^{110}\) Finnish professional journals in the field of management, like Liiketaito-Affärspraxis and Industritidningen, published articles on managerial issues and issues concerning labour management and social problems. A good example of the interest in these questions was the opening of an industrial exhibition for occupational safety and welfare, and about ‘social and work hygiene’, at which progressive employers, and other interested persons, could learn about safety equipment and safe working methods. \(^{111}\) Social and personnel departments emerged in many companies and the increase in number of welfare personnel was swift, especially in big business. In the 1920s, the first heads of social affairs were employed, but by 1947, according to one investigation, there were around 40 heads of social affairs and about 70 social inspectors in member companies of the Confederation of Employers. \(^{112}\) Managers increasingly saw social work as essential in making the company grow and prosper. \(^{113}\) These developments were
reflections of labour management and welfare work as part of modernization. Serlachius noted in one of his speeches for a delegation of leading politicians that the company’s welfare programme was not an expression of paternalism from the ‘good old days’, but of up-to-date [Swedish: *tidsenlig*] labour management. Follet is often linked to the ‘human relations’ school, which recognized the importance of taking psychological and sociological factors into account in labour management. In Finland, the importance of the ‘human factor’ and professional labour management was also acknowledged. For instance, the plant manager in Kangas, Herbert Mäklin, explicitly stressed the importance of counteracting fatigue and boredom. Social activities would make workers less tired and less indifferent towards their own work, which would benefit the company: ‘A company that puts resources into social and recreational activities could without a doubt become the most competitive in the future’. In the introduction to the book on the history of welfare work in Finnish industries, Keijo Keravuori noted that the one-sided focus on production and technical matters among Finnish managers had been, in the interwar period, supplemented with the view that workers were feeling and thinking human beings.

Investments in health care, education and safety, good working conditions, better housing, extensive maternity and childcare, uplifting social activities, and good sports facilities also became symbols of a modern company led by a modern progressive manager.

**Discussion**

From the above, we can conclude that the content of companies’ welfare programmes changed over time, as did the rationale behind them. Social welfare services as both necessity and paternal strategy became less and less important and instead increasingly a tool in labour management and for modernization. However, the process was gradual and there were overlapping goals, while motivations varied from company to company.

At the outset, it was mentioned that employers indicated a preference for private models when general welfare reforms were discussed. Apart from ideological motivations and fear of increasing taxation and/or labour costs, one argument against general welfare reforms and for private programmes was the flexibility that private welfare models offered. As Kaskela stated, social security models cannot look the same in all companies. Instead, it should be considered a ‘natural’ phenomenon that they vary according to geographic location, the size of the firm, its economic situation, and gender distribution among the workers. Private solutions (possible in partnership with the municipality) were more adaptable to local circumstances. Moreover, company-specific solutions promoted labour relations based on mutual trust between owners and employees. In modern society, conflicts could be avoided through good management and personal, trustful relations. General reforms would splinter this relationship. Social programmes were considered important tools in this endeavour.

On the other hand, individual companies could – and should – cooperate. For instance, Kaskela proposed that the two textile factories, Lapinniemi in Tampella and
Finlayson, had much to gain from collaboration on social issues. Through collaborations, social work would become more efficient, as the available resources and skills would be better utilized. In fact, too much competition was ‘unhealthy’; it was not good to compete for the same workers. The forms for collaboration depended on the size of the firms, their geographical location, and the local situation. Moreover, the firms and other local actors had the best knowledge of the local circumstances and the most important issues to solve.

What happened to the private welfare programmes and the companies’ collaborations with municipalities when general welfare reforms were gradually instigated? It appears that relations between company and municipality became more strained over times as a result of the growing obligations on both municipalities and employers. From the perspective of the municipality, the new obligations were not easy to implement when a private actor was involved, especially if the company management considered these services to be their domain. From the company’s perspective, legislative reforms often meant that the companies lost power in social issues. Moreover, for example in GAS, management did not trust the state. The municipalities also grew and new employers emerged and, after WWII, a political shift occurred, when Left-wing parties gained more influence in local affairs. Some companies developed new strategies and new ways to influence municipal affairs, while other companies aimed to ultimately get rid of their voluntary services and activities. Although many companies continued to maintain some voluntary welfare services, their character changed. Overall, employers’ strategies in Finland were somewhat different from what Klein discussed concerning the US private welfare system, for example.

Moreover, this development reflected more profound changes in society. Paternalism faded away and companies lost their strong ties with the local community. As Ilkka Laurila observed, people were no longer necessarily living in the ‘shadow of the factory’.

Were private welfare services a strategy to counteract growing state involvement and state regulation? The Finnish business community obviously objected to state involvement and strongly promoted the self-regulation of business activities during this period. In the 1920s, the fear of large (or ‘big’) state, socialism, and growing taxation were discussed in more or less every issue of STK’s own magazine, Industritidningen. Polin sheds light on the views of the Kymmene management in early 1930s:

The worker-friendly legislation, which like a soft rain has drizzled over our country since independence, has been received with mixed feelings among employers; partly as it has given him new obligations, partly because he has not considered such legislation to be the correct solution. It has been positive according to social reformers, but from the economic and moral perspectives, it has been a disaster.
Later, employer representatives expressed similar sentiments strongly. For example, when the universal health insurance legislation was debated in 1949 (implemented only later), the forestry industry employers were extremely negative and considered that this could be seen as state dirigisme (Fi: valtionjohtoisuus). By providing private services of a high standard, they showed that they were doing their duty. Collaboration with the municipality can indeed be considered as also having been a way to counteract universal reforms. It was quite easy to join forces with the municipality in objecting to ‘top-down’ policies.

Nevertheless, the development was multifaceted. Pauli Kettunen argues that the employers’ strong objections to collective labour agreements in the interwar period in fact meant that, occasionally, they would favour legislation on labour issues, such as working hours. The institutionalization of labour relations occurred in Finland partly through the state. From the employer’s perspective, it was sometimes better to have legislation that would neutralize the unions than to live in fear of radicalization and collective action and demands. This was occasionally the case with social issues as well. After WWII, for example, employers considered that it was better to have the right to sickness benefits enshrined in legislation than to face the question every year at the negotiating table. Nevertheless, the private model, with company-level services and insurance-based social security, was still a ‘first-order’ preference of the employers, especially so in the interwar period. For many, this was a question of ideology, but also, as shown above, an important tool for generating trust at the company level. As Keravuori argued in 1947, social legislation was a ‘cold and official path to go’. Later, during the compromise era, employers sometimes preferred to have it at the negotiation table, as this ensured a certain power over and control of the development and also a freedom to settle issues away from meddling politicians.

Finally, it is difficult to draw any strict conclusions about the extent to which private welfare programmes formed some kind of ‘model’ for public reforms. This needs more in-depth investigations. Private welfare and the public reforms evolved in parallel, in touch with each other, and complementary to, or in collaboration with, the public sector. Nevertheless, as in many other countries, employers’ voluntary welfare services – especially schools, health clinics, and maternity wards and child care facilities – were gradually integrated into the public sector system. In Finland, many of the company hospitals and schools were gradually taken over by the municipalities. It is also safe to say that these welfare programmes did influence individual employers’ perceptions of how welfare reforms ought to be designed; they had few other models with which to compare.

The discussions about company welfarism also shed light on how managers at the time viewed social progress and how it was to be achieved. It was the duty of a modern company to provide a good and healthy work environment for its employees, which would lead to industrial progress and to higher living standards. The book on the history of industry’s social welfare stressed that social programmes had been
motivated by company managers’ feelings of a ‘societal responsibility’ (Fi: *yhteiskunnallinen vastuu*).\(^{128}\)

As a result of the growing role of the public sector in the provision of basic welfare, and of changes to the labour market, the role of private voluntary welfare services as a tool in labour management and for the success of the company changed inexorably. The transition from a primarily private welfare model towards a primarily public welfare model thus also sheds light on the changing relationship of companies in both local communities and in society at large. Along with many scholars, Melling concludes that welfare reforms were part of the ‘wider constitutional settlement between capitalism and the state’ and therefore important for the formation of modern capitalism.\(^{129}\) This would need more in-depth investigations, however.

### Notes

4. Carrol et al., *Corporate Responsibility*.
8. See Fellman, ‘Public or Private’.
9. For a discussion, see Fellman, ‘Aesthetics in Modern Management’.
17. Polin, *Kymmenen Aktiebolags kulturella*.
20. Markkola, ‘Changing Patterns’.


27. Vauhkonen, *Elatuksesta eläkkeeseen*.


29. Heikkinen et al., *The History of Finnish Economic Thought*, 94. This influence can also be observed from the lectures given by Föreningen för Arbetareskydd och Socialförsäkring. A good example is Hallsten, ‘Työkyvyttömyys- ja vanhuusvakuutuksen järjestämisestä’. For list of lectures, see ‘Föreningens för arbetareskydd och socialförsäkring berättelser’, 6–7.

30. Fear of socialism was especially on the agenda in early 1920s; e.g. ‘Den socialpolitiska situationen i Europa vid årsskiftet’.


33. See e.g. Polin, *Kymmene Aktiebolags kulturella*, 182.

34. STK, *Pöytäkirjat, sosiaalitoimikunta 9.12.1957*; for a longer discussion, see Fellman, ‘Private or Public’.


36. See e.g. Kaukovalta, Forssan Puuvillatehtaan historia, 17.


38. Keravuori, ‘Teollisuuden sosialinen toiminta’; Fellman, ‘Arbetarbostäder som modernitet’. Although situated in an urban region, Tampella invested considerable resources in housing for its employees. When the company had started, the local circumstance had been quite different and lack of housing a big problem. Heino, ‘Tampella työväkensä asuttajana’.


52. Walls, *Arbetstagarens inställning*, 16.
57. Experiences from Kymmene company, see Tavela, ‘Kymiyhtiön ja sen tehdasyhdistyksien’.
63. Fellman, *Family Company*.
64. ‘Gösta Serlachius, föredrag’, (undated), 5. GAS archive, Mänttä.
74. Fellman, ‘French Influences’.
75. ‘PM ang. ett tilltänkt barnhem i Mänttä’. Säde-yhdistys kotelo 1. GAS archive, Mänttä.
76. Ilkka Laurila, Esitelmä pidetty Mäntäin maakunnallisessa huoltoväen kokouksessa 3.10.1938. GAS archive, Mänttä.
77. Kaskela and Launikari, ‘Sosiaalisen toiminnan organisointi’.
79. Polin, Kymmene Aktiebolags kulturella, 252; Kaskela, ‘Sosiaalinen huolto puunjalostusteollisuudessa’.
81. Kaskela, ‘Sosiaalinen huolto puunjalostusteollisuudessa’.
84. Keravuori, Teollisuuden sosiaalinen toiminta, 7.
85. See Fellman, ‘Arbetarbostäder som modernitet’.
86. ‘Teollisuuslaitos och tyväärenhuolto’.
88. Bostadsförhållandena i städerna 1938; also Paukkunen, Sosiaalitoiminta ja sen kustannukset, 109.
89. Silfversparre, ‘Synpunkter berörande bostäder på landet’. 3.2.1939. Silfversparre, brevväxling 1922–42. 5022. GAS arkiv Elka.
90. Laurila, ‘Arvoisat kuulijat’ (speech, undated post WWII), GAS archive, Mänttä, 34; also Laurila, ‘Teollisuuden asuntokysymys’.
97. Itkonen, Varkaus and its People, 33.
99. ‘Moni on tullut kiihkeänä ja kiukkuisena ja jättänyt konttorin mitä sovinnollisimmassa äänilajissa’. ‘Huolto-osaston toimintakertomus vuonna 1929’ Huolto-osasto 3659. GAS archive, ELKA.
103. Fitzgerald, ‘Employment Relations’.
111. Markelin-Svensson, ‘Utställningen för arbetarskydd’.
112. ‘Sosiaaliosaston kiertokirje No 504/47’, STK archive, Elka.
113. See, on this, Kaskela, ‘Sosiaalinen huolto puunjalostusteollisuudessa’, 10.
GAS archive, Mänttä.
117. Kaskela, ‘Sosiaalisen työn edellytykset ja tehtävät nykyhetken puunjalostusteollis-


120. ‘G.A.Serlachius Oy:n Mäntän tehtaiden osastopäälliköille. R. Erik Serlachius.

121. See e.g. Paukkunen, *Sosialitoiminta ja sen kustannukset*.
122. Laurila, ‘Industrin och samhället’, 85; Fellman ‘Private or public’.
124. ‘Lausunto sosialivakuutuskomitean mietinnöstä sairausvakuutusjärjestelmän

125. Kettunen, ‘Hur legitimerades arbetsgivarnas politik’.
126. See, for a discussion, Fellman, ‘Private or Public’.

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