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## Reform: The Struggle for Control of Hibbing

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# The Struggle for Control of Hibbing: The People's Perspective

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Paul Lubotina

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the small mining town of Hibbing, Minnesota gained a reputation as a hotbed for radicalism caused by the large numbers of immigrants who belonged to organizations such as the United Mine Workers (UMW) and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). These disgruntled miners staged a series of unsuccessful strikes in 1905, 1907, and 1916 that mine owners representing United States Steel Corporation and its local subsidiary, the Oliver Mining Company, repressed with a great deal of violence. Hired deputies, local police, soldiers, vigilantes, and Ku Klux Klan members clashed with striking miners in several bloody encounters. However, there were also other reformers in Hibbing, who sought to change conditions in the mines and the community through less confrontational means. These middle-class progressive reformers modeled themselves after Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party at the national level, while also emulating governors John Lind (1899-1901), John A. Johnson (1905-1909), and Joseph Burnquist (1915-1921), who won election based on reformist platforms.

In 1899, Minnesotans elected John Lind during a period of extreme hostility toward the established political and religious authorities in the state. Governor Lind won the election with the support of middle-class Americans and Scandinavian immigrants who shared a desire to improve living conditions across the state. During the late nineteenth century, these Scandinavians generally embraced the Republican Party. In contrast, German and Irish Catholic immigrants tended to support the Democrat Party. Many Scandinavians objected to Catholics' use of alcohol, which conflicted with the conservative Protestant values.

At the time, Scandinavian Immigrants sought to demonstrate their equality with Americans by placing one of their fellow countrymen in the state's highest office. Both the Scandinavians and Americans felt that eastern industrialists abused the people of Minnesota through illicit business tactics and their domination of state and local politics. The middle-class progressives sought to rectify the abuses through increased suffrage rights, reduced tariffs, expanded railroad regulation, enforcing anti-trust laws, and enacting temperance legislation. The state's working-class population also supported the progressive movement, which advocated workers' compensation programs, child labor restrictions, and strengthened factory inspections. These progressive reformers initiated comprehensive political and social reform programs that sought to achieve the unrequited promises of American life.

Governor Johnson continued the reform work of Governor Lind throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1912, animosity between Republicans and progressive reformers in Minnesota intensified when, on the national level, Theodore Roosevelt broke away from Republican President Howard Taft and formed the Progressive or Bull Moose Party as a third-party alternative to established politics. By the early twentieth century, third-party politics began to drain American and immigrant support for the Republican Party in Minnesota politics. In Minnesota, the Progressive Party attracted large numbers of middle-class immigrants and Americans, who worked together to expand the political strength of the organization. The trend continued when Joseph Burnquist gained the governorship in 1915, on a progressive platform. However, Burnquist's support of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety's repression of Socialists and immigrants during the First World War and the ensuing Red Scare brought an

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end to Minnesota's Progressive Era, along with reform activities in Hibbing.

Unbeknownst to the people who founded the city, Hibbing sat atop one of the largest ore deposits on the Mesabi Iron Range. The riches buried under the streets of Hibbing would ignite a power struggle for the political and financial control of the city. The possibility of taxing nearly one million acres of iron-bearing lands along the Mesabi Range, including Hibbing, led the Minnesota state legislature to enact a series of laws beginning in 1889, to stimulate mineral exploration and excavation. State land commissioners executed leases and contracts for mining ore on state lands at the rate of twenty-five dollars per quarter section of land a year; for an additional hundred dollars the lease could be extended for fifty years. The state levied an additional twenty-five cent tax per ton of ore extracted. By 1901 the state had issued 3,272 one-year prospecting leases and 550 fifty-year mining leases that collected nearly eleven million dollars in revenue from the forty-three million tons of ore shipped from the region. During the next two decades, the Mesabi mining companies increased production and contributed nearly one hundred million dollars to the state's coffers each year.

The substantial corporate profits and state tax revenue generated by the mines in Hibbing and other communities on the Mesabi Range created a caustic environment as state officials, mining companies, and the people living in the mining towns sought to increase their share of wealth. The Oliver Iron Mining Company ensured its continued domination of the city through support of political candidates who advanced the company's agenda. State officials usually supported the mining companies in any disagreement with local citizens to protect their revenue stream. Meanwhile, opposition formed among a coalition of middle-class Americans and naturalized immigrants, who had obtained voting rights. Between 1900 and 1920, Hibbing's population had grown to approximately 15,000 residents, comprised of 3,300 native-born, or naturalized Americans, 5,500 Scandinavians, and 6,150 Slavic and Italian immigrants.

The political will to oppose the might of the United States Steel Corporation grew out of the independent political development of Hibbing. From the foundation of the city in 1893 to 1907, when the Oliver Mining Company finally consolidated control over the region, the townspeople elected their own governments and established numerous businesses to support the burgeoning population of miners. When the Oliver Mining Company brought in additional workers they began to build numerous company towns or "locations" near the new mines. The region evolved into a two-tiered community with middle-class Americans and immigrants living in Hibbing, while working-class immigrants dominated the surrounding locations. The population of Hibbing enjoyed both legal and taxation rights available to any Minnesota town, whereas the locations remained under the authority of the mining companies and lacked legislative representation. Thus, Hibbing's government operated independently and provided leadership for many working-class immigrants living in the "locations" of the region.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Hibbing's government included a complex web of formal and informal bodies. Officially, the town council consisted of an annually elected mayor, two or three trustees, a recorder, a treasurer, and a municipal judge. Once in office the president and city council appointed the police and fire chiefs along with special committees that oversaw particular construction projects or other civic developments. In preparation for general elections, Americans and naturalized immigrants held caucuses every March to appoint popular candidates for office. Since voting regulations allowed people to choose any candidate for office, regardless of political affiliation, the elections often resulted in unique administrations made up of members from several different political parties. As a result, the city council represented diverse political ideologies.

Hibbing's prominent businessmen also created a Commercial Club that acted unofficially to promote economic expansion in the town. Although a private organization, the Commercial Club worked closely with elected and appointed officials. Members often rotated between seats in the club and city

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offices, resulting in a small cadre of individuals dominating local politics. Between 1893 and 1913, the same group of American, English, Irish, Finnish, Swedish, and Italian officials dominated Hibbing's government. Political differences, usually between supporters and detractors of mining policies, often split Hibbing's administrations. The situation also resulted in protracted political battles that prevented effective government.

Additionally, two organizations of middle-class American women worked with both the civic administration and the Commercial Club. The women, often the wives or daughters of city administrators, initiated a series of educational, temperance, suffrage, and social reform programs. While primarily advisory, the Saturday Club and the Hibbing American Association of University Women provided women their first seats in the city government.

On January 23, 1904 women from the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches founded the Saturday Club. The organization's charter stated, "The object of this club shall be to stimulate intellectual development, to make thorough study of current events and literature and to promote a higher acquaintance of women." One of the founding members, Vida Brugger Adams, an 1898 graduate of the University of Minnesota, soon became a leading female figure in the reform movement that swept through Hibbing in the early part of the twentieth century. Vida Adams played an instrumental role in the Saturday Club and helped found the Hibbing American Association of University Women, which organized approximately 120 of the city's college educated women. The association promoted educational development and supported economic development in Hibbing by writing travel brochures. Both organizations worked on special committees to build a public library and other civic improvements such as parks and schools.

The Saturday Club became involved with local politics in 1904, when members decided to build a public library. The women realized they could not collect sufficient funds locally, and lacking any political clout, they asked the local School District Superintendent to contact the Carnegie Foundation to see if the financier would pay for a library. The Carnegie representative agreed to build the library if the town provided a lot and appropriated funds to support the project. When the Town Council agreed to finance the library's upkeep and furnish land for the building site, they also appointed a Library Commission to oversee construction and maintenance of the facility. Village President Wierick created a nine-person board to oversee the project and appointed Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Corey, and Mrs. Jewitt to serve with the men. The Library Commission became a part of Hibbing's political structure and provided women with administrative positions in local government.

### **Progressive Mayors**

Between 1904 and 1906, John Power, Peter McHardy, and Frank Ansley led a succession of progressive governments with the support of immigrant voters. In 1904, nearly six hundred miners swung the mayoral election in favor of John Power who promised an inclusive government that supported both business and workers' interests. In order to address the primary voter complaint of excessive utility prices, the Power administration formed the Power and Light Board to oversee all aspects in the production and distribution of water and electricity in the village. The board regulated prices for power and water in Hibbing and helped to expand services to outlying communities.

Progressive reform continued in 1905, when Mayor Peter McHardy led the first city government to include immigrants. Voters elected two Finns, Trustee John Maki and Justice of the Peace John Ollila, plus an Italian Village Recorder, Peter Bardessonno, and a Swede named John Sundquist as the Village Financial Officer. Of the newly elected officials, Peter Bardessonno had developed portions of South Hibbing and operated the town's first railroad telegraph. John Maki owned and operated the Finnish immigrant store,

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while John Ollila was a Finnish temperance movement leader, and John Sunquist worked as a common laborer. Nonetheless, Peter McHardy's administration faced a serious racial problem. The election of Peter Bardesonno resulted in a storm of protests as "white" citizens rejected the election of a "black" Italian to public office. Only a recount of the votes quelled the controversy and allowed Bardesonno to assume his rightful responsibilities as village recorder.

The election of Italian, Finnish, and Swedish officials illustrated the growing political power of immigrants in the town. After 1905, each of Hibbing's immigrant groups began to create formal political organizations. In 1910, Peter Bardesonno and Herman Antonelli formed the Italian Political Club to register voters, plan political platforms, and increase the political power of Hibbing's large Italian population. In 1914, Swedish and Finnish immigrants created The Scandinavian Political Club to achieve similar goals. Even though club membership produced only a few hundred voters, they immediately began to influence local elections. The city averaged approximately twelve hundred voters annually, with candidates usually winning by a small majority. By voting collectively, the immigrants represented the crucial swing votes, which each party courted to win a close election. The American and immigrant reformers increasingly collaborated to effect change.

Immigrants and Americans continued to cooperate during 1906, when they elected another progressive mayor, Frank Ansley. He increased government spending on utilities to extend electric and sewer services throughout Hibbing and surrounding locations. The Ansley administration passed the first pure food ordinance after Dr. Rood, a local physician, treated dozens of people stricken with tuberculosis from eating tainted beef. Dr. Rood successfully lobbied for legislation that allowed inspectors to check all cows in the city for tuberculosis. If inspectors found any infected animal, it would be killed to prevent any possibility of sale to the town's population. The new law alienated many of the poorest people in the city, who relied on beef sales to supplement their income or feed their families. Ansley's increased government spending also angered the village's conservative faction. Ansley lost his re-election bid and Dr. H.R. Weirick, an Oliver Mining Company employee, won the 1907 election.

During his term in office, Mayor Weirick came under increased criticism from progressive reformers who believed he supported mining interests over the needs of the town's population. In 1902, the Oliver Mining Company initially hired Dr. Weirick to provide pre-paid medical services to miners at the local Rood Hospital. By 1907, he had moved into politics and won his first of six consecutive terms as Hibbing's mayor. In the years between 1907 and 1912, Hibbing's population became increasingly dissatisfied with Dr. Weirick. The problems began during the 1909 election, when city officials cancelled the caucus and presented only one ticket headed by Mayor H. R. Weirick and his council choices for office. Progressive voters immediately objected to the single ticket and held their own caucus, which nominated a complete list of opposition candidates for city offices. Despite the uproar of public discontent, Weirick still won the election along with William Wearne, the superintendent of Hibbing's Inland Steel holdings as Village Trustee. The concentration of mining officials in the city's government only fueled the fears of the progressive reformers who believed that eastern corporate interests sought to seize political control of Hibbing. After the election, Weirick's authoritarian behavior and acquiescence to abuses perpetrated by the Oliver Mining Company reinvigorated the city's progressive movement.

The situation worsened after mining officials located a large body of ore directly under Hibbing's business district. The Oliver Mining Company wanted to move out all the buildings in North Hibbing to access to this "mother lode" of ore. After citizens opposed the town's relocation, the Oliver Company began a widespread harassment campaign to force the population out of the area. It began to dig up city streets and destroy power lines to isolate portions of Hibbing. The demolition made movement in and out of the business district exceptionally difficult and dangerous for citizens. With dynamite explosions along

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public roads and near the edge of town, the nearby population feared for their lives as large rocks and debris rained down and caused numerous injuries. The mining companies moved large earth-moving equipment along streets resulting in damaged surfaces and the severing of overhead power lines. Citizens complained that when the mining companies destroyed roads, bridges, sewers, or power lines the city had to pay for the repair costs out of its own budget. Mayor Weirick's refusal to check the industrial abuses fueled support for progressive reformers to gain control of Hibbing.

During this period of political strife, an Irish immigrant named John Power and his son, Victor Power grew in prominence among the progressive reformers in the city. In 1863, John Power had emigrated to the United States where he soon joined the Union Army and fought in several battles, only to be wounded in Virginia. After the war ended, Power deserted the army, then reenlisted under an assumed name and spent several years guarding a frontier post in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. By 1867, Power confessed to his earlier desertion, but managed to negotiate a settlement with the army to retain both his real name and rank. After successfully completing his tour guarding copper miners in Northern Michigan, Power attended law school and was later elected to Michigan's House of Representatives. His son, Victor Power, soon followed in his father's footsteps and also attended law school. The pair moved to Hibbing around 1900, where they established a law firm that represented people with grievances against local mining companies. Victor Power's success in numerous suits furthered his popularity and earned him a reputation as "guardian of the people," which furthered his political career.

#### **Mayor Power**

The political crisis peaked in late 1912, when a series of grievances propelled Victor Power and his Progressive Party into office. Citizens demanded that the Weirick government replace a bridge, already destroyed during the intimidation campaign, that provided laborers in Hibbing access to the nearby Seller's Mine. When citizens attended the subsequent budget allocation hearing, they found representatives of not only the town council and Commercial Club, but the Oliver Mining Company as well. When the triumvirate of local and corporate authority rejected the citizens' plan for a bridge, many of Weirick's supporters became angry. At the same time as the bridge crisis, a Swedish immigrant named Iver Lein hired Victor Power to stop mining operations near his boarding house in North Hibbing. Lein complained that explosions flung rocks into his yard and endangered both his family and tenants, who had been repeatedly struck by flying debris. Power succeeded in obtaining an injunction that prohibited mining operations near Lein's property. In early 1913, the Oliver Company retaliated by also closing down the Hull-Rust and Burt-Poole mines adjacent to North Hibbing. This action forced several hundred of the city's miners out of work.

The timing of the lockout completely disrupted the Weirick administration's 1913 reelection bid. With most of Hibbing unemployed by the Oliver Company's capricious actions, Mayor Weirick's popularity faded as Power's rose. Victor Power rode a wave of grass-roots immigrant support, just as his father John Power had in the 1904 election, based on the Progressive Party's platform of civic reform and fair government.

Victor Power modeled his Progressive Party after Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 Bull Moose Party platform. Power pledged honesty, economy, and efficiency in the administration of the affairs of the village. He promised to pave and expand road networks, bury overhead wires, and build both municipal parks and playgrounds for the population. Power also wanted to turn the local isolation hospital into a municipal hospital, improve fire and police departments, reduce phone and electric rates, inspect meat and produce, purchase all possible supplies locally, extend streetcar service in town, and install a comprehensive sewer system. The Progressive Party platform resonated with Hibbing's voters, especially the immigrants and merchants who suffered under the oppression of the Oliver Mining Company. Of

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eleven hundred registered voters, approximately seven hundred men chose Power for mayor over Weirick's three hundred supporters.

While the broad-based administration gained office with the support of immigrant voters, it also addressed the concerns of the town's female population. The women wanted the new mayor to curb alcohol consumption, gambling, and prostitution. Women began to expand their administrative positions from the board of the city library to school administration. Saturday Club members made curriculum recommendations to the school board that called for expanded educational opportunities for immigrants, along with the erection of a new high-school building. Women also wanted the city to build parks to beautify the town. Mining operations left the region surrounding Hibbing a moonscape of muddy open pits, treeless hills of recently removed cover soil, and large tracts of land nearly devoid of vegetation. By building parks, the women hoped to create safe areas where children could play, while their parents could enjoy concerts or baseball games.

Since both men and women sought to modernize their city, they entrusted Victor Power to obtain the funds needed to achieve their common goals. Victor Power levied a series of new taxes based on laws established before the arrival of corporate mining on the Mesabi Range. In 1907, the Minnesota State Legislature enacted a law that allowed municipalities on the Mesabi Range to tax up to two percent of the value of ore located within their borders. During the Weirick administration the taxes collected amounted to less than one percent and remained low at the request of mining companies. Since Hibbing's environs had an assessed ore value exceeding eighty million dollars, the taxable portion amounted to approximately two million dollars a year. As a lawyer, Victor Power understood the amount of money legally available to Hibbing's government. He began to increase tax levies on the mining companies. Over the next few years the Oliver Company continually complained about paying Hibbing's taxes, which had risen from \$285,000 in 1912 to nearly \$1,700,000 in 1916, not including educational expenses.

The enhanced revenues financed a comprehensive building program that not only improved living conditions but also alleviated unemployment problems. Miners released during the winter season or those unable to obtain summer employment found work with the city. Using excess laborers from the mines, Victor Power extended electric and sewer service throughout Hibbing and nearby locations. New buildings included a city hall, schools, courthouse, and fire stations. Power also paved roads and sidewalks, in addition to the constructing of alleyways that helped to expedite garbage collection. The projects employed numerous destitute men unable to find employment in the mines, including four hundred men hired to extend sewer service to the Alice location. Moreover, Power paid the city employees competitive wages, equal to that of the miners, even though he could have spent much less because of the surplus of laborers in the region. Power's decision to offer fair wages buoyed his support among immigrants while simultaneously alienating the city's mining executives for not cutting wages. Mining officials complained that Power's faulty business practices reduced job competition among miners and drove up wages in the region.

Hibbing's tax requests occurred as the state legislature began to press for more revenues from mining operations on the Mesabi, Vermilion, and Cayuna Iron Ranges. In 1907, Governor Johnson appointed tax commissioners to assess the value of ore in Northern Minnesota. They concluded that nearly two hundred million dollars of taxable ore existed in the region. By 1914, the mines annually produced over twenty-three million dollars' worth of ore. Legislators wanted to establish a heritage fund so that the entire state could benefit from the wealth generated by mining operations. They proposed to use the money to create a general revenue account, along with an endowment to finance public schools and universities. Legislators increased the mining companies' state taxes each year so that by 1923, the rate exceeded twenty percent of annual mining revenues, which in turn amounted to over three million

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dollars each year for Minnesota. Thus from 1913 to 1923, the mining companies faced massive tax increases at the state and local level. The city of Hibbing asked for nearly two million dollars, while state assessors demanded three million dollars each year. The mining companies saw these steps as extortion. They fought the tax movement with an extensive propaganda campaign, legislative action, criminal charges, and a refusal to pay taxes.

### **Community Support and the Tax Crisis**

The struggle over taxation sparked a ten-year battle between Hibbing's government, the mining companies, and the state legislature that helped to integrate the middle-class immigrants and Americans in the city. Throughout the ordeal a majority of Hibbing's multi-ethnic, middle-class men and women stood behind the mayor in his David-and-Goliath battle between one small community and the United States Steel Corporation. Power's long history as "defender of the people" and his early legal victories over the Oliver Mining Company help to solidify community support for the mayor. Furthermore, his public works projects, educational reforms, and campaigns against vice garnered additional support from destitute immigrants and female reformers in the community.

Hibbing's diverse population united in opposition to the Oliver Company's attempt to curb ore levies across the Mesabi Range. The mining companies first organized the Lake Superior Tax Association in Duluth to curtail taxation throughout St. Louis County. The Oliver Mining Company sent representatives to every Mesabi community and reached satisfactory tax agreements with all the towns in the region, except Hibbing. When mining officials arrived in Hibbing, Mayor Powers tried to negotiate with Oliver Mining to settle their disagreements but failed to achieve an equitable compromise. Rather than continuing to negotiate, the steel companies and the Lake Superior Tax Association made a concerted effort to remove Power from office and return control of the town to mining representatives.

The Oliver Company's attempted coup began in 1915, with an extensive propaganda campaign played out in local newspapers. Its main point was to illustrate the extravagance of the Power administration. The Lake Superior Tax Association paid for several full-page advertisements in Mesabi newspapers denouncing the spending by Hibbing's government. They depicted Mayor Power as a corrupt politician who used money from the mining companies for his personal aggrandizement. The corporate propaganda called on patriotic citizens to vote for more sensible leadership in Hibbing.

The Oliver Company also sent several officials to a special meeting of the Minnesota House of Representatives to outline excessive expenditures of Mesabi communities. They emphasized that Hibbing's fifteen thousand residents had more electric lights than the entire city of Cincinnati, Ohio. Further, Hibbing hired too many expensive laborers, who worked on extensive construction projects. Mining officials also claimed that numerous Mesabi high schools had better indoor pools than the exclusive Minneapolis Men's Club, while the students grew expensive experimental tomatoes, sat in oak desks, and enjoyed cut glass windows in their classrooms. They compared Hibbing's spending of one hundred thirty-three dollars per-capita to Virginia's thirty-six dollars or Chisholm's eleven dollars. As a result of these expenditures, the Oliver Company called on state legislators to curb Mayor Power's reckless policies.

Legislators responded with the Harrison Bill that proposed a twenty-five dollar per-capita limit on local taxation rather than the two percent assessed value of ore within city limits. As the bill gained support in the state house of representatives, Victor Power devised a plan to stop the legislative action. The mayor and the Commercial Club agreed to demand the highest legally possible levy of 1.6 million dollars. The city council voted unanimously to approve the maximum tax levy and even began an internal investigation of Hibbing's expenditures to demonstrate the community's fiscal responsibility. Rather than cave in to corporate pressure to limit spending, the city accepted nearly fifteen hundred job applications



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to work on building projects and called for bids to begin construction on a new court house in South Hibbing. In the short term, as citizens rallied in opposition to the possible return of Weirick's collaborationist government, Mayor Power continued the civic projects unabated.

Despite the Oliver Company's propaganda campaign, Hibbing's non-mining businessmen pledged to support Mayor Power in the tax crisis. They understood that the city needed every enhancement built thus far. The Oliver Company's long history of economic neglect and authoritarian tactics in their attempts to move North Hibbing caused the population to reject the claims of extravagant spending. In order to continue the civic improvements, Hibbing's business community accepted interest-bearing warrants for building supplies issued by the city in lieu of cash payments. Thus, the population financed city expenditures while they waited for another Power legal victory.

Mayor Power viewed the tax crisis as just one of the many personal attacks perpetrated by the mining companies, a situation he thought would likely continue into the foreseeable future. Despite the risks, he publicly proclaimed the city's right to collect taxes and then departed for the capital to stop the passage of the proposed Harrison Bill. Upon arrival at the state capital he began an exhaustive lobbying effort to kill the bill. Soon, he gained headway among progressive legislators and the bill lost support. Power's successful exhortations forced the mining lobbyists to attempt to suspend normal voting procedures and lower the number of ballots needed to pass the bill. The attempted usurpation of congressional protocol cost the Oliver Company numerous supporters, leading to the death of the bill. Power's victory increased his popular support among Hibbing's diverse population.

When Mayor Power returned to Hibbing, more than a thousand citizens greeted him with a torchlight parade and a carnival. The celebration lasted only a short time before the mining companies retaliated by refusing to pay any taxes at all in Hibbing. As the city raised only approximately \$50,000 dollars a year in civic taxes, but needed nearly \$800,000 to continue building projects, Mayor Power recognized the impending financial crisis. The mining companies' actions effectively shut down Hibbing's government by starving them of funds needed to conduct daily business. Within a few weeks Mayor Power met with the city council to discuss the impending financial disaster. The government found no other recourse but to dismiss all village employees including both the police and fire departments, then call in the National Guard to protect the citizens.

On July 28, 1915, Mayor Power sent Governor Hammond a request for the state militia to take over police and fire duties in the city. Power also called on the governor to enact special legislation to force the mining companies to pay their taxes. Governor Hammond stated that he would neither send out the militia nor call a special legislative session, because he was unhappy with the amount of money spent in Hibbing compared with similar sized communities throughout the state. After the rejection, Mayor Power presented the governor with a compromise budget of 750,000 dollars for the mining companies. Governor Hammond responded by consulting with the mining companies at a conference held in Duluth, although Mayor Power was excluded from the negotiations. The governor and the mining companies worked out a settlement where each United States Steel subsidiary company never paid more than fifty thousand dollars a year in Hibbing taxes. Thus in 1916, Hibbing received 750,000 dollars for civic projects, but had only an annual 25,000 dollar operating budget. The amount equaled the figures that Mayor Powers had initially presented to the Oliver Company in 1915, resulting in another victory for the people of Hibbing.

Throughout the First World War era and into the early 1920s, Hibbing's population continued to enjoy heavily subsidized support for its building projects. By 1921, the massive wartime profits declined as European steel suppliers gradually switched back to peacetime production. As wartime orders subsided, Hibbing's importance to the Oliver Company waned. Unemployment rose in the city, just as the city

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announced the completion of a nearly 4,000,000 dollar high school and technical college. The figure represented a cost four to six times greater than any other school on the Mesabi Range. As a result of the obvious extravagance of the building, state legislators finally decided to stop the corporate funding of Hibbing's civic improvements. They passed a bill limiting city tax levies to a 160 dollar per-capita tax limit for all individuals and companies in the community. The figure superseded the earlier tax compromise, which provided 50,000 dollars from each United States Steel subsidiary. As a result, the progressive reformers in Hibbing lost the financial ability to enact meaningful change. By 1923, as economic conditions declined with the end of public works, a majority of the voting population turned against the progressive reformers. Mayor Power's popularity also declined and he lost a final bid for reelection to city government.

In an attempt to revive his political career, in 1922 Victor Power ran for a seat in the Senate and he received extensive support from immigrants along the Mesabi Range. Unfortunately, this did not translate into enough state-wide votes and he lost the election. One final campaign for Congress in 1924 also resulted in failure. Without popular support, Power retired from public life, and then died unexpectedly in 1926, of heart failure. Close friends burned many of his personal papers, which left collections of limited use at the Minnesota Historical Society and the Iron Range Research Center. The information that remained provides little insight into the critical decision making process during the tax crisis. Thus, local newspaper reports, often propagandistic reports by Mayor Power and the Oliver Mining Company, remain the only source of information. The lack of papers implies that most key individuals in Hibbing did not want to disclose any background of controversial decisions taken during the Progressive Era.

### **The Progressive Power Legacy**

Nevertheless, during the years of Power's Hibbing administration, the mayor enjoyed the popular support of both the American and immigrant populations in the city. His legal victories over the Oliver Mining Company ensured a steady supply of money to fund the transformation of a backward mining town into a modern community with many of the amenities of a big city. The Progressive Party provided Hibbing with electricity, clean water, paved streets, modern schools, parks, and an electric rail line. Further, Mayor Power employed excess labor from the mines and paid them equitable wages. As a result of these policies, the community backed the mayor during his protracted battles with the mining companies. The political and economic pressures placed on Hibbing helped to weld the diverse population together as the entire community shared in the trials of economic hardships and the elation of building a beautiful city. The extravagance of a four million dollar high school attracted the attention of state officials who responded by cutting off corporate funding of further civic projects. The end of corporate support heralded the end of Hibbing's progressive movement and the public career of Victor Power.

Throughout the Power administration, new patterns of multi-ethnic cooperation developed among the city's populations. Between 1913 and 1923, Hibbing's American and immigrant communities built stronger ties with each other, as they sought tax concessions from the Oliver Mining Company. During the struggles to finance civic improvements, Hibbing's middle-class American, Swedish, Finnish, and Italian reformers' cooperated with each other to achieve a common goal. By working together, Hibbing's reformers built a powerful political party that emerged victorious in several encounters with the Oliver Mining Company. These victories helped to instill a sense of confidence and solidarity among reformers, who then went on to initiate the largest building projects in Hibbing's history.

The battle over financial control of the city was not the only struggle to unite Hibbing's diverse populations. Women created independent reform movements, which they used to integrate into local and state politics.

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This extensive list of reforms clearly illustrates the effectiveness of middle-class political cooperation, including immigrant populations, in Hibbing. As a united community, citizens won significant victories over both the mining companies and state officials. While the events lacked the internecine violence and public exposure of the 1907 and 1916 labor strikes, they demonstrate the growing political power of immigrants as they integrated into American society. Rather than fighting in the streets, the middle-class reformers employed legal and legislative methods to obtain their victories. In the process, immigrants conformed to American social and political norms, thereby demonstrating their acceptance of political rules. This contrasts sharply with working-class attempts at forced changes that the mining companies and state officials successfully eluded by repressing the strikes.

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## NOTES

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<sup>3</sup>John Syramaki, "Iron Range Communities." PhD diss., Yale University, 194040.

<sup>4</sup>John Syramaki, 41.

<sup>5</sup>Francis M. Carroll, *The Minnesota Arrowhead Country* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>6</sup>Syramaki, 125.

<sup>7</sup>*The Saturday Club Minutes*, Hibbing Historical Society, 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Hibbing American Association of University Women Minutes*. Hibbing Historical Society, 1-12.

<sup>9</sup>*The Saturday Club Minutes*, Hibbing Historical Society, 2-48.

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<sup>11</sup>"Village Report," *The Mesaba Ore and the Hibbing News*, February 18, 1905.

<sup>12</sup>"Peter McHardy the New Mayor," *The Hibbing Tribune*, March 16, 1905.

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