

2021-05-27

Protective Labor Legislation: How Oregon Attached Motherhood to Working Women

Chloe Miller
cjmill16@mail.wou.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/aes>

Recommended Citation

Miller, Chloe, "Protective Labor Legislation: How Oregon Attached Motherhood to Working Women" (2021). *Academic Excellence Showcase Proceedings*. 292.
<https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/aes/292>

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Excellence Showcase Proceedings by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu, kundas@mail.wou.edu, bakersc@mail.wou.edu.

Protective Labor Legislation: How Oregon Attached Motherhood to Working Women

Chloe Miller

Dr. Kim Jensen and Dr. Ricardo Pelegrin
Department of History, Western Oregon University

Introduction

This research focuses on the protective labor legislation that aimed to aid women laborers in working conditions and wages reform during the Progressive Era. While the protective labor legislation in Oregon between 1900 and 1913 aimed to help protect women in industry work, it subsequently isolated them within the workforce by attaching motherhood to the definition of what a working woman was.

The questions given to women workers on a card for data collection.

(CLO Report, 19)

MINIMUM WAGE INVESTIGATION

1. WHAT kind of ESTABLISHMENT are you working in?
2. WHAT is your work
3. WAGES—Week..... or Month.....
4. HOURS employed—Day..... or Week.....
5. LIVING at Home? (Yes or No).....
6. VACATION with pay?.....
7. HOW long with firm?.....
8. FIRST wage here?.....

COST OF LIVING

1. HOUSE or Room rent, per year
2. FOOD, per year.....
3. CLOTHING, per year.....
4. CARFARE, per year.....
5. LAUNDRY, per year.....
6. DOCTOR Bills, per year.....
7. CHURCH Dues, per year.....
8. LODGE Dues, per year.....
9. EDUCATION, per year (books, newspapers, etc).....
10. RECREATION, including vacation, per year.....

NOTE.—On reverse side of card, give all other items of expense that you deem proper, or information concerning working conditions.

The Source

The Consumer's League of Oregon organized a Survey Committee in 1912 to carry out an investigation of the working conditions, cost of living, and wages in support of further labor legislation aimed to protect women workers. The 1913 "Report on the Wages, Hours and Conditions of Work and Cost of Standard Living [for] Woman Wage Earners" was a continuation of the National Consumer League's efforts to protect women, with the "Bill for an Industrial Welfare Commission" attached directly to the report itself. This report and bill supported the difference ideas established in the hour law consideration of *Muller v. Oregon* (1908) and continued the case's efforts to protect women under the guidelines of sex-based legislation.

"They get used to it, as the bent twig does by growing into a crooked tree." One girl that was talked about by the investigator shows this concept quite well, "How they stand it all the time, I don't know. The girl next to me said that she suffered much on account of her back and feet at first, but now she is used to it."

(CLO Report, 49)

This Oregon-specific report that outlined the dangers and injustices within the workforce towards women also demonstrated the influence of Oregon's legislative decisions on national ideas about women laborers. Reports like this one passed legislation that supported a difference theory which indicated men as superior to women. While labor legislation successfully provided protection for women in workplace environments, it also established, in official interpretation of law, the idea that women would always be inferior to men.

Conclusions

The Consumer's League of Oregon's report supported the ideas of difference in gender and continued the use of these ideas for the bill supporting a minimum wage. The Consumers' League of Oregon relied on uncovering ample evidence that the proposed bill was necessary. To ensure the minimum wage bill was passed, the Consumers' League of Oregon created the 1913 report which revealed their motivations and the nature of working environments in Oregon. My research expands this Oregon legislative analysis within the national ideas of difference theory and its relation to protective labor legislation. Due to the isolating nature of sex-based laws, protective labor legislation came at the expense of women's equality in the workforce.

Literature Cited

Consumer's League of Oregon, Social Survey Committee. *National Consumers League, Report of the Social Survey Committee of the Consumer's League of Oregon on the Wages, Hours and Conditions of Work and Cost of Standard Living of Woman Wage Earners in Oregon with Special Reference to Portland, Portland Oregon.* 1913.