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The Menace of the Interstate Compact

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The Menace of the Interstate Compact

DURING the next months women will face an issue which will have an important bearing on their economic security, and they will have the opportunity to register their will at the polls by electing to State Legislatures only those men and women who will give them a fair deal. When the Legislatures are in session, they will have the further opportunity of voicing their demands in no uncertain terms.

Seven northeastern industrial States—Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania—have entered into a compact to regulate the minimum wages paid women and children. The compact becomes effective when ratified by the Legislatures of these States and sanctioned by Congress.

With a new wording which they think will circumvent the Supreme Court decision declaring unconstitutional a minimum-wage law for women only, the sponsors of the compact are attempting by interstate action to fasten on women more permanently and effectively laws which will keep them in a special labor class.

State minimum-wage laws classing women with children are bad enough, but interstate compacts on such a basis are a real threat to women's economic security. The next step may well be a Federal law with similar provisions.

The classing of women with children in interstate labor compacts assumes that women's work is of the same caliber as that of children and that women are no better able to bargain for their wages. This is an insult to that great body of working women who have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are an important, skillful part of our economic system.

Women expect their constitutional rights to be respected in interstate compacts, and one of these is the right to bargain for their wages on the same terms as men.

An interstate labor compact classing women with children is out of step with the times. NRA codes prohibit child labor and regulate the wages of both men and women. They recognize the fact that, to be effective, minimum-wage rulings must apply to all adult workers. In States where women are bound by minimum-wage laws and men are not, men and boys undercut the minimum and women lose their jobs.

Women workers do not need special regulations. They can be organized to look after their labor interests. Those who question their ability to organize need only look to the large and powerful women's clubs for the answer. What these clubs have done in the past for social and civic betterment can now be done by organized women to win economic security.

The only protection that women need is equal pay for equal work, and they will never attain this as long as they allow themselves to be put in a special class by labor legislation.

Reprinted from EQUAL RIGHTS, September 29, 1934.

NATIONAL WOMAN'S PARTY

Alva Belmont House

Washington, D. C.



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