

THE HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA LABOR LEGISLATION, 1910-1930

THESIS

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## The History of California Labor Legislation, 1910-1930.

### Chapter I.

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to bring up to date the "History of Labor Legislation in California," written by Miss Lucile Eaves and published in 1910. Since that time a number of important additions have been made to the labor laws of the state. In fact more protective labor legislation has been enacted since 1910 than was passed during the entire prior sixty years of the state's existence.

As a state becomes more industrialized there arises a greater need for labor laws. When a large majority of the people work as independent producers on agricultural lands, the wage earning class is relatively unimportant and there is no pressing need for such legislation as that pertaining to industrial safety, factory sanitation, workmen's compensation and the regulation of wages and hours of labor. Conditions are entirely changed, however, when large numbers of people live and work together in compact cities where they make their livelihood by selling their labor power to employers engaged in some capitalistic, competitive, or monopolistic enterprise.

California is rapidly becoming an industrial commonwealth. Since 1910 the population of the state has increased 147 per cent, the number of cities having more than 10,000 inhabitants has increased from twenty-one in 1910, to forty-seven in 1930, and the people engaged in manufacturing industries have more than trebled during the same period.

Thus a greater need for protective labor legislation in

California has undoubtedly been one reason for its enactment. But an interesting fact is that practically all of the labor laws enacted since Miss Eaves wrote her book were passed during the first subsequent five years.

Beginning about 1910 there was a great wave of progressivism throughout the United States. California was one of the leading states in this progressive movement. For almost forty years in California large corporations, particularly the Southern Pacific Railroad, had exerted a powerful influence in the party machines and as a consequence had practically controlled state government.\*

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\*See Older, Fremont, My Own Story, The Call Publishing Company, San Francisco, 1919, p. 195.

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But in 1910 under the leadership of Hiram W. Johnson, who was elected governor in that year, the old control was displaced. Then in the space of two years' time the people of the state were given the Initiative, the Referendum and the Recall, woman suffrage, and the practically direct primary. These changes made the state legislature much more responsive to the needs of the populace and gave to the wage earners real instead of fancied political power.

Organized labor, although not as strong industrially as it has previously been, built up and maintained a strong and effective lobby at the state capital. In the 1911 session of the legislature thirty-nine of the forty-nine bills advocated by organized Labor and its supporters were enacted into laws. Similar legislative gains were made by trade unions in 1913 and 1915.

Although many of the California labor laws have been strengthened and improved since 1915, there have been no gains comparable to those made during the period 1910 - 1915. Since the war,

economy and retrenchment have been the desire of a large percentage of the people. Labor has usually been on the defensive to retain that which it had previously acquired.

The workers in California have not obtained their protective legislation unaided. Often the driving force has come from such organizations as the American Association for Labor Legislation, The Consumers' League, the California Conference of Social Agencies and the Federated Women's Clubs of the state. Then, too, the state Labor Commissioner and the men and women serving on the Industrial Accident Commission and the Commission of Immigration and Housing have frequently sponsored legislation beneficial to the workers of the state.

The writer has attempted to give an account of the conditions and influences which have led to the passage of labor <sup>laws</sup> and to briefly discuss their practical application. It has also been necessary in many instances to present court interpretations of the laws in order to make the meaning and effect of the statutes intelligible.

Wherever practicable the arrangement and methods of presentation adopted by Miss Eaves in her book have been followed. It has been necessary in many cases to shift the emphasis, however, upon new legislative topics. Because of the numerous laws passed during the last twenty years, only the more immediately important ones have received extended treatment.