

Child Labor Laws

ANNCR: Child Labor Laws - Today on Congressional Moment

Over a hundred years ago the Industrial Revolution quickened the pace of manufacturing, and businessmen sought cheaper labor. Millions of children worked at dangerous jobs, and the national debate over Child Labor laws began. Listen to these journal entries from the early 1900s...

On cold, rainy mornings, well before dawn, I have been awakened by the clatter of boots as the half-awake, joyless children hurried not to school, but to the great factory. They are thin and sickly looking...

I worked in a factory where they made oil cans, and I saw children 8 and 10 years old work like slaves on big machines...most every day it happened that a finger or hand was cut off, but that didn't matter, they were sent home, and others would take their places.

ANNCR: The injustices of child labor prompted people to organize, in an effort to get Congressional regulation. While many states took it upon themselves to regulate child labor, many did not. As national discontent continued to grow, a key challenge for Congress was protecting children in every state without interfering with state's rights.

Eventually, after years of debate, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed in 1938, and upheld by the Supreme Court in 1941. It provided basic protections, not only to children, but to all workers in the U.S.

CLOSING: This is Lee Hamilton. Congressional decisions impact all our lives. To find out more about how Congress works, or to get involved in your government, visit the Center on Congress website at congress.indiana.edu.