SEE ALSO
African Americans; Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.); Lynching; Race relations; Reform movements; Segregation; Washington, Booker T.; Wells-Barnett, Ida B.

FURTHER READING

National Consumers’ League

THE NATIONAL CONSUMERS’ League (NCL) was one of the most prominent activist arms of the Progressive Era consumer movement. It was founded in 1899 to challenge employer abuses in industry and retailing. The NCL used both pressure tactics and legislative means to achieve this goal. To convince individual manufacturers and store owners to improve working conditions for employees, it adopted two labor union techniques, the “white list” and the “white label.” The white list consisted of the names of factories and retail shops that obeyed state labor laws and did not employ children or require unpaid overtime. Garment workers would sew a white label into clothing made in approved shops. Leagues then urged consumers to patronize only approved establishments and buy only those clothes that displayed white labels.

When these methods proved insufficient to bring about widespread change, the organization turned to legislation. By the 1920s, it had won an impressive number of legal cases. The most important of these cases, the 1908 Supreme Court case of Muller v. Oregon, limited the hours of women laundry workers in Oregon to 10 hours a day. The Court’s validation of limited hours laid the groundwork for protective labor legislation for all workers.

Under Florence Kelley’s leadership, the NCL spearheaded national movements to outlaw child labor, establish a minimum wage, and create two federal agencies concerned with the welfare of women and children: the Children’s Bureau, founded in 1912, and the Women’s Bureau, founded in 1920. The federal government began to pass laws limiting child labor in 1916, and by 1920 most states had outlawed the employment of children under 14 and mandated compulsory education up to that age. Nine states adopted minimum wage laws by 1913, but a federal law establishing a minimum wage would not pass until 1938. In that year, the Fair Labor Standards Act, inspired in part by NCL agitation, banned the full-time employment of children under 16. Still in existence today, the NCL is one of the most enduring Progressive Era reform organizations.

SEE ALSO
Children’s Bureau, U.S.; Consumer movement; Kelley, Florence; Muller v. Oregon (1908); Women’s Bureau, U.S.

FURTHER READING