

# Diplomacy for the People: How Frances Perkins Shaped Landmark Social Legislation of the New Deal

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## Introduction:

On a cool February evening in 1933, a middle-aged woman wearing a distinctive tricorne hat waited to meet with the President-elect at his house in New York City. Franklin D. Roosevelt knew that his choice for Secretary of Labor was thoroughly qualified to guide the Labor Department - and indeed, the nation - through the worst economic depression in history.<sup>1</sup> Frances Perkins knew why she had been summoned; newspapers had been predicting her appointment as Secretary of Labor for weeks. She dreaded the position, but arrived prepared with a list of programs she would pursue: ideas for unemployment relief and public works projects, the prohibition of child labor, national minimum wage and maximum hour laws, factory workplace safety regulations, a broad social security program, and more.<sup>2</sup> This ambitious agenda arose from Perkins's priority to improve the living and working conditions of the American people.

It was this desire to help others that led Perkins to accept the post,<sup>3</sup> becoming the first female Cabinet member in American history. By the time her twelve-year tenure as Labor Secretary concluded, Perkins had achieved almost everything on her original list.<sup>4</sup> She had also helped design numerous New Deal alphabet agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the National Recovery Administration (NRA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Public Works

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Burns, "The Rising Road," in *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History* (2014). <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-roosevelts/>.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Perkins, interview by Dean Albertson, 1955, transcript, Columbia University Libraries Oral History Research Office, part 3, available online at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/nny/perkinsf/introduction.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Frances Perkins, Columbia University Oral History, part 3, session 1, pg. 607.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Perkins, *List of Accomplishments for F.D.R.*, January 19, 1945, Frances Perkins Papers, Columbia University Libraries, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins/item/422>.

Administration (PWA).<sup>5</sup> Perkins's legacy has been so influential that historians have dubbed her "the architect of the New Deal" for the breadth and significance of her accomplishments.<sup>6</sup>

Frances Perkins approached the politics of the 1930's in a fundamentally diplomatic way, utilizing her background as a social worker to mediate disputes, arrange meetings, and foster friendships that helped her shape landmark social legislation of the New Deal. Perkins deftly employed these strategies to accomplish her goals, particularly as she advocated social and labor legislation, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, that would have previously been unthinkable on a national level.

### **From Social Worker to Secretary of Labor:**

Frances Perkins was born in 1880 into a family of conservative Republicans and staunch Congregationalists who adhered to the commonly-held middle-class belief that poverty and unemployment resulted from alcohol and laziness. She attended Mt. Holyoke College in an era when only three percent of women went to college. On a field trip to nearby paper and textile mills with her American economic history class, Perkins witnessed dangerous factory working conditions for the first time, which inspired her passion for social work.<sup>7</sup>

After college, she worked with reform organizations in Philadelphia and New York to eradicate child labor, reduce long hours and low wages for women, and minimize workplace fire

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<sup>5</sup> Jessica Breitman, "Honoring the Achievements of FDR's Secretary of Labor," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/perkins> (accessed October 13, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Kirstin Downey, *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience* (New York: The Doubleday Publishing Group, 2009); George Martin, *Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976); Leah W. Sprague, "Her Life: The Woman Behind the New Deal," 2014, <https://francesperkinscenter.org/life-new/> (accessed October 13, 2021); Jennifer B. Lee, curator, "Frances Perkins: The Woman Behind the New Deal," Columbia University Libraries, 2009, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins> (accessed November 5, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Downey, *Woman Behind the New Deal*, 11.

hazards.<sup>8</sup> In 1911, Perkins witnessed the devastating fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, where she helplessly watched trapped young women jump to their deaths.<sup>9</sup> She later explained that this tragedy influenced her desire to help the working class and set her career on a path to social justice.<sup>10</sup> Perkins began working tirelessly to improve factory conditions and the lives of laborers, particularly women and children workers who were traditionally under-represented. New York Governor Al Smith appointed her to the state Industrial Commission in 1918 to oversee factory working conditions, and she continued to work to improve the lives of laborers across New York when Smith's protegee Franklin D. Roosevelt became governor of New York in 1928.<sup>11</sup>

It was during this period that Perkins honed the skills she relied on throughout the rest of her career; she gained experience drafting bills, lobbying legislation, and navigating politics. In just one year as the director of the Committee on Public Safety for New York, she was responsible for the creation of twenty-eight bills on factory safety regulations and fire codes, twenty-six of which passed the state legislature.<sup>12</sup>

To help legislators understand the need for social reforms, Perkins often organized factory visits so they could personally observe horrifying working conditions. This approach, which had inspired her in college, proved an effective strategy when she lobbied for factory safety legislation in New York:

We saw to it that the austere legislative members of the Commission got up at dawn and drove with us for an unannounced visit to a cannery and that they saw with their own

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<sup>8</sup> Gordon Berg, "Frances Perkins and the Flowering of Economic and Social Policies," *Monthly Labor Review* 112, no. 6 (1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41843308> (accessed December 3, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Sprague, "Her Life."

<sup>10</sup> Perkins, Columbia University Oral History, part 1, 126-132.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Governor addressed a communication to Chambers of Commerce and Labor Leaders all over the State with reference to unemployment conditions," 1930, Frances Perkins Papers, Columbia University Libraries, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins/item/387>.

<sup>12</sup> Downey, *Woman Behind the New Deal*, 51.

eyes the little children, not adolescents, but five, six, and seven-year-olds, snipping beans and shelling peas. We made sure that they saw the machinery that would scalp a girl or cut off a man's arm.<sup>13</sup>

As a member of the New York Industrial Commission, Perkins oversaw the Bureau of Mediation and Arbitration, a position that frequently required her diplomatic techniques and negotiation skills to settle union strikes.<sup>14</sup> In 1919 the entire labor force of Rome, New York went on strike against local copper manufactures, who refused to negotiate with demands for eight-hour workdays and pay raises. When Perkins arrived, the situation had escalated: company owners were becoming violent and workers had stockpiled dynamite.<sup>15</sup> Perkins spent several days talking with the laborers and their employers, eventually succeeding in reaching a compromise. As biographer George Martin wrote about Perkins, "She herself, in tackling any problem, invariably would suggest a conference of those concerned. In labor disputes she was always trying to get the parties together to talk, and she had almost endless patience in allowing them to disagree, so long as they continued to talk."<sup>16</sup>

One key to Perkins's success as Secretary of Labor lay in her understanding of how to reach compromises between different people and groups in a way that appeased both sides. One of her first official acts as Secretary of Labor was to convene a conference of labor leaders to discuss solutions for combating the Great Depression. She took great care in selecting the attendees, recognizing the need to balance the strong political opinions and ambitions of labor leaders.<sup>17</sup> Perkins never expected the conference to reach an agreement regarding the

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<sup>13</sup> Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins*, 151.

<sup>15</sup> Downey, *Woman Behind the New Deal*, 81-82.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, *Madam Secretary*, 326.

<sup>17</sup> "Labor Laws and Court Decisions," *Monthly Labor Review* 36, no. 3 (1933), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41861354> (accessed December 3, 2021).

unemployment crisis – her real intent was to gain labor organizations’ support for the Roosevelt administration.<sup>18</sup> By including labor leaders, Perkins sent a clear message that she intended to work to pass legislation beneficial to working-class people. This remarkable conference was the first time a Labor Secretary had organized such a diverse group of labor representatives, and Perkins continued to demonstrate this approach throughout her tenure.<sup>19</sup>

### **Navigating the New Deal:**

Diplomatic skills were particularly useful to Frances Perkins as she advocated for the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which established a national minimum wage, regulated maximum hours, and abolished child labor.<sup>20</sup> The struggle over the FLSA involved months of debate, both in Congress and on a national level, which culminated in the larger constitutional debate over the power of the federal government.

Perkins used the skills she learned from her time in state politics to cleverly maneuver the many groups who furiously opposed the bill: organized labor groups,<sup>21</sup> manufacturing and business interests,<sup>22</sup> and Southern Democratic lawmakers.<sup>23</sup> In Congress, lawmakers spent over a year in a legislative deadlock, engaged in furious debate, revision, and alternate proposals that in turns expanded or weakened the bill’s provisions.<sup>24</sup> Supporters of the bill called it ”the most vital

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<sup>18</sup> Wandersee, "I'd Rather Pass a Law Than Organize a Union:" Frances Perkins and the Reformist Approach to Organized Labor.

<sup>19</sup> Wandersee, "I'd Rather Pass a Law Than Organize a Union."

<sup>20</sup> *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938*, S. 2475, 75th Cong., 3rd Session.

<sup>21</sup> David Montgomery, "Labor and the Political Leadership of New Deal America," *International Review of Social History* 39, no. 3 (1994), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44583321> (accessed January 14, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> "Letter Opposing the Fair Labor Standards Act," United States House of Representatives: History, Art, & Archives, 1937, [https://history.house.gov/Records-and-Research/Listing/c\\_075/](https://history.house.gov/Records-and-Research/Listing/c_075/).

<sup>23</sup> "Southerners Rake Wage Bill As Evil to Whole Nation," *New York Times*, July 31, 1937.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew J. Seltzer, "The Political Economy of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938," *Journal of Political Economy* 103, no. 6 (December 1995), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2138713> (accessed November 21, 2021).

social legislation” in the country’s history,<sup>25</sup> while opponents warned that the bill “constitutes a step in the direction of communism, bolshevism, fascism, and Nazism.”<sup>26</sup>

As a young lobbyist in New York, Perkins had witnessed horrific sweatshop conditions, where laborers worked more than eighty hours a week to earn wages as low as one dollar.<sup>27</sup> It wasn’t until the Great Depression, however, that the nation was favorable to broad social reform. The Roosevelt administration embodied Americans’ growing belief that the federal government had a responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.<sup>28</sup>

From the beginning of state legislated social reforms in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the constitutionality of a government regulated minimum wage was questioned.<sup>29</sup> A crucial part of the constitutional controversy facing the FLSA stemmed from a New Deal program, the National Recovery Administration (NRA).<sup>30</sup> Enacted as an early effort by Perkins and Roosevelt to regulate labor standards, businesses were encouraged - but not required - to adopt a minimum wage of thirty to forty cents per hour, a forty hour work week, and end child labor.<sup>31</sup> This progress was thwarted when, in 1935, the Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional in a unanimous vote.<sup>32</sup> The following year, the Court ruled that neither the federal government nor the states could pass a

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<sup>25</sup> Isador Lubin, as cited in Martin, *Madam Secretary*, 393.

<sup>26</sup> Downey, *Woman Behind the New Deal*, 256-269.

<sup>27</sup> Frances Perkins, "Why We Need a Minimum Wage Law," *Nation's Business* (1933), <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins/item/410>.

<sup>28</sup> Derek A. Webb, "The Natural Rights Liberalism of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Economic Rights and the American Constitutional Tradition," *The American Journal of Legal History* 55, no. 3 (2015), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24798065> (accessed January 14, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> *Adkins v. Children's Hospital of D.C.*, No. 795 (Supreme Court, 1923).

<sup>30</sup> Paul H. Douglas and Joseph Hackman, "The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 I: The Background and Legislative History of the Act," *Political Science Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1938), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2143527> (accessed October 7, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> "National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933," Social Welfare History Project, 2011, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/new-deal/national-industrial-recovery-act-of-1933/> (accessed January 13, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> *A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, No. 854 (Supreme Court, 1935).

general minimum wage law.<sup>33</sup> A labor standards bill seemed doomed from the start; very few people envisioned that the power of the federal government could extend to an all-encompassing regulation of minimum wage and maximum hour standards.

Frances Perkins tackled this constitutional stalemate with her characteristic diplomatic approach, intentionally cultivating friendships and relationships that undoubtedly helped the passage of the FLSA. Perkins was well known for hosting dinner parties for colleagues, friends, and political leaders at her house in Washington, and these gatherings gave her an informal setting for networking.<sup>34</sup> As she noted in her oral history, she attempted to establish friendly relationships with people in order to more effectively reach her goals:

I thought to myself, ‘Now, I will go out of my way this year to be very politic, diplomatic, and to show attention to the members of Congress...’ I would invite them to a series of proper dinners that I would be giving, but I would show them particular hospitality and would take them into conference, asking their advice about legislation which I might think was desirable, but before it was introduced.<sup>35</sup>

This technique often proved essential as Perkins navigated the politics of the New Deal, and throughout her tenure Perkins continued to employ this diplomatic approach to labor issues.

Additionally, Perkins developed ties with several Supreme Court justices by attending social functions and spending time with their wives.<sup>36</sup> These friendships likely influenced what came to be called the “switch in time” that occurred when the Supreme Court suddenly reversed its stance on New Deal programs in 1937, allowing the FLSA to pass without significant opposition.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Howard D. Samuel, "Troubled Passage: The Labor Movement and the Fair Labor Standards Act," *Monthly Labor Review* 123, no. 12 (December 2000): 32-37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41845146> (accessed November 21, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Lee, curator, "Frances Perkins."

<sup>35</sup> Perkins, Columbia University Oral History, part 4, 377.

<sup>36</sup> John McGuire, "In the Oval Office Inner Circle: The Development of Female Presidential Advisers in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency," *White House Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>37</sup> Martin, *Madam Secretary*, 394.



Perkins often proved to be very socially astute, and she used her observations of people to her advantage. Although critics often claimed her gender hampered her role as Secretary of Labor,<sup>38</sup> Perkins described how she used her gender to her advantage by intentionally cultivating a “motherly” persona.<sup>39</sup> She kept a file she titled “Notes on the Male Mind,” where she noted that men responded better to her when they were reminded of their own mothers.<sup>40</sup> This technique extended to her style - when she became Secretary of Labor, she began dressing in a matronly fashion, which created a serious, professional image and inspired men around her to confide in her.<sup>41</sup>

### **Lasting Legacy:**

The Fair Labor Standards Act was signed by Roosevelt on June 25, 1938 and provided for a twenty-five cent minimum wage that was to be raised incrementally to forty cents, a maximum work week of forty-four hours that would be gradually reduced to forty hours, and the immediate abolition of child labor in most industries.<sup>42</sup> Soon after it was enacted, the FLSA improved the working conditions of more than twelve million people, raised the pay of roughly three hundred thousand workers, and significantly reduced the hours of more than a million laborers.<sup>43</sup> Over the years the act has been amended twenty-two times; most recently in 2009,

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<sup>38</sup> Gerry Kluttz and Herbert Asbury, "The Woman Nobody Knows," *Collier's*, August 5, 1944, [https://francesperkinscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/August-5-1944-Issue\\_Colliers-weekly-all-three-pages-combined.pdf](https://francesperkinscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/August-5-1944-Issue_Colliers-weekly-all-three-pages-combined.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Perkins, Columbia University Oral History, part 1, 231.

<sup>40</sup> Downey, *Woman Behind the New Deal*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Perkins, Columbia University Oral History, 232.

<sup>42</sup> *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938*, 3rd Session, S. 2475.

<sup>43</sup> Berg, "Flowering of Economic and Social Policies."

when the minimum wage was raised to \$7.25 per hour. The minimum wage amount is still a political issue that continues to be hotly debated today.<sup>44</sup>

In a 1941 ruling, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Fair Labor Standards Act, finally resolving the debate over whether the federal government had the power to institute a general minimum wage.<sup>45</sup> The concept of a minimum wage, once so revolutionary, is now the foundation of modern American labor. More than 139 million workers, about 85% of laborers, are currently covered by the FLSA.<sup>46</sup> However, not all of Perkins's objectives were attained. The act included a number of exemptions – most notably, agricultural workers. Originally, these exceptions were the result of compromises between lawmakers, but they remain in place today and continue to affect millions of workers.<sup>47</sup>

Widely regarded by historians as the last major piece of New Deal legislation, the congressional debate over the Fair Labor Standards Act was significant for the very nature of its debate. When Roosevelt won the presidency in 1932, he carried forty-six out of forty-eight states,<sup>48</sup> creating a unified coalition that was able to pass more legislation in the administration's first hundred days than any other president and Congress thus far.<sup>49</sup> For five years the Congressional New Deal coalition routinely passed every piece of major legislation proposed. Yet the Fair Labor Standards Act was the first major bill of the Roosevelt Administration to be

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<sup>44</sup> "The Fair Labor Standards Act: Continuing Issues in the Debate," 2008, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL34510.html>.

<sup>45</sup> John W. Tait, "The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938," *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (1945), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/824285> (accessed October 3, 2021).

<sup>46</sup> *The Federal Minimum Wage: In Brief*, (Congressional Research Service, 2021), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43089.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Grossman, "Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for a Minimum Wage," U.S. Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/flsa1938#1> (accessed November 3, 2021).

<sup>48</sup> Robert K. Fleck, "Democratic Opposition to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938," *The Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 1 (March 2002), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2697971> (accessed November 7, 2021).

<sup>49</sup> Adam Cohen, *Nothing to Fear: FDR's Inner Circle and the Hundred Days that Created Modern America*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).

initially defeated in the House. The unified Democratic party crumbled under the intense debate over the FLSA, and the split was chiefly a regional one; Southern lawmakers heavily opposed the measure, while Northern legislators generally supported it.<sup>50</sup>

Frances Perkins was one of only two Cabinet members who stayed with Roosevelt for his entire presidency. By the end of her term as Secretary of Labor, all of the original items on her list had been successfully enacted except for a national health insurance program<sup>51</sup> - an issue that continues to be the subject of political debate today. Perkins was the driving force behind much of the New Deal, ushering through programs that have become foundations of American society including social security, minimum wage, maximum hour regulation, the abolition of child labor, factory fire and safety codes, and much more. In her later life, she lectured at Cornell University, where she mentored and inspired students on the successful techniques she utilized to pass landmark labor legislation.<sup>52</sup>

The barriers Perkins broke as the first woman Cabinet member helped pave the way for future women in politics.<sup>53</sup> Almost ninety years after Perkins was Secretary of Labor, twelve of the twenty-four Cabinet-level positions in President Biden's current Cabinet are held by women, a record-breaking number.<sup>54</sup> Perkins was successful due to the skills in diplomacy she had learned as a young labor arbitrator for New York; her background as a social worker and a mediator ensured that she approached politics with an understanding of how to navigate

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<sup>50</sup> Fleck, "Democratic Opposition to the Fair Labor Standards Act"

<sup>51</sup> Perkins, *List of Accomplishments for F.D.R.*

<sup>52</sup> Christopher N. Breiseth, *The Frances Perkins I Knew*, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Unpublished paper, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, 1966.

<sup>53</sup> Rakich, Nathaniel, Anna Wiederkehr, and Meredith Conroy. "Biden's Record-Breaking Cabinet Nominees, In One Chart," *FiveThirtyEight*, 2021, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/bidens-record-breaking-cabinet-in-one-chart/> (accessed January 9, 2022).

<sup>54</sup> "Biden's Record-Breaking Cabinet Nominees, In One Chart," *FiveThirtyEight*, 2021, accessed January 9, 2022, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/bidens-record-breaking-cabinet-in-one-chart/>.

opposition. Her ability to settle disputes, arrange meetings, and foster friendships propelled her ideas to the forefront of governmental policy during the Depression years, forever altering the way Americans perceived the federal government and its role in society.

Perkins approached her position as Secretary of Labor in a unique way; she understood and empathized with ordinary Americans, particularly groups who had been previously left out of federal legislation. She stood for the millions of Depression-era laborers as well as for working mothers, children, and workers who were not union members.<sup>55</sup> She strove to improve the lives of all Americans, and in the process enacted legislation so central to the American system that her accomplishments continue to affect the everyday lives of millions. Hers truly was a diplomacy for the people.

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<sup>55</sup> Wandersee, "I'd Rather Pass a Law Than Organize a Union."

## Appendix A: The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

Full text accessible at the following link:

<https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/fair-labor-standards-act-1938-5567>

[PUBLIC—No. 718—75TH CONGRESS]

[CHAPTER 676—3D SESSION]

[S. 2475]

AN ACT

To provide for the establishment of fair labor standards in employments in and affecting interstate commerce, and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*, That this Act may be cited as the “Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938”.

### FINDING AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

SEC. 2. (a) The Congress hereby finds that the existence, in industries engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for commerce, of labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency, and general well-being of workers (1) causes commerce and the channels and instrumentalities of commerce to be used to spread and perpetuate such labor conditions among the workers of the several States; (2) burdens commerce and the free flow of goods in commerce; (3) constitutes an unfair method of competition in commerce; (4) leads to labor disputes burdening and obstructing commerce and the free flow of goods in commerce; and (5) interferes with the orderly and fair marketing of goods in commerce.

(b) It is hereby declared to be the policy of this Act, through the exercise by Congress of its power to regulate commerce among the several States, to correct and as rapidly as practicable to eliminate the conditions above referred to in such industries without substantially curtailing employment or earning power.

**(I used all pages of this source – too much to include here)**

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Asbury, Herbert, and Gerry Kluttz. "The Woman Nobody Knows." *Collier's*, August 5, 1944.

[https://francesperkinscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/August-5-1944-Issue\\_Colliers-weekly-all-three-pages-combined.pdf](https://francesperkinscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/August-5-1944-Issue_Colliers-weekly-all-three-pages-combined.pdf).

This magazine article, written in 1944, discussed how Frances Perkins was largely denounced by the general public and ignored by labor organizations, despite the fact that she implemented some of the New Deal's most sweeping programs. Reading this gave me a better understanding of what Perkins's critics thought of her and how she dealt with her public persona, and I cited this source in my paper as an example of public opposition to Perkins's appointment as Secretary of Labor.

Breiseth, Christopher N. "The Frances Perkins I Knew." Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Unpublished paper, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, 1966.

Mirroring the title of Perkins's own memoir of Roosevelt, this unpublished article was written by the president of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, who, as a young student at Cornell University, knew Perkins in her later life. Breiseth shared anecdotes of Perkins that were more personal than any she wrote about herself, so this gave me insight into how Perkins used diplomacy to navigate the people in politics.

Brooklyn Merchant Bakers Association to Eugene J. Keogh, August 13, 1937. United States House of Representatives: History, Art, Archives. [https://history.house.gov/Records-and-Research/Listing/c\\_075/](https://history.house.gov/Records-and-Research/Listing/c_075/).

In this letter, a spokesman of the Brooklyn Merchant Baker's Association wrote to a New York representative, expressing their association's opposition to the Fair Labor Standards Act. This is just one example of many similar letters from business and industry groups that opposed the Act, and I cited this in my paper to demonstrate this opposition of manufacturing groups specifically.

Douglas, Paul H., and Joseph Hackman. "The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 I: The Background and Legislative History of the Act." *Political Science Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (Dec., 1938): 431-515. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2143527> (accessed October 7, 2021). This article provided a great primary source perspective of the Fair Labor Standards Act, including information about how it originated in the National Industrial Recovery Act. It also included detailed descriptions of the opinions of various groups involved in the debate, which I used in my paper to clarify the arguments for and against the FLSA.

Forsythe, John S. "Legislative History of the Fair Labor Standards Act." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 6, no. 3 (1939): 464-90. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1189608> (accessed January 14, 2022).

Forsythe focused on the congressional debates over the Fair Labor Standards Act, which I used in my paper to supplement my description of the battle over this key piece of legislation. More specifically, this provided useful background for my discussion of how Frances Perkins applied the diplomatic techniques she had learned elsewhere in order to help pass the FLSA.

"Frances Perkins of New Deal Dies." *The New York Times*, Saturday, May 15, 1965, 31. <https://www.nytimes.com/1965/05/15/archives/frances-perkins-the-first-woman-in-cabinet-is-dead-frances-perkins.html>.

This New York Times article was written as a tribute to Perkins's accomplishments as Secretary of Labor, and included information on her contributions to New Deal legislation, her role in mediating labor disputes, and her friendship with Roosevelt. This article, written at the time of Perkins's death, provided me with a good perspective on her lasting legacy, which I used in my paper to support my argument.

"Labor Laws and Court Decisions." *Monthly Labor Review* 36, no. 3 (1933): 537-42.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41861354> (accessed December 3, 2021).

This article described the conferences Perkins organized in the early months of the Roosevelt administration - both the conference of labor leaders that convened to discuss the unemployment crisis as well as the conference of state Governors to discuss the labor policies. I used these examples in my paper to illustrate how Perkins used diplomatic strategies to manage meetings and differing opinions in order to come to a solution for the good of the American people.

Newspaper Guild of New York to Edward Walter Curley, May 14, 1938. United States House of Representatives: History, Art, and Archives. <https://history.house.gov/the-first-congress-women-labor-laws-for-a-modern-world/>.

Similar to the letter from the Brooklyn Merchant Bakers Association, this is just one example of the many hundreds of letters sent to Congress and the Department of Labor regarding the Fair Labor Standards Act. This letter expresses the support of the Newspaper Guild of New York for the FLSA and I used this to reinforce my knowledge of the groups who were involved in the debate over the act.

Perkins, Frances. Interview by Dean Albertson. 1951-1955. Transcript. *Notable New Yorkers*. Columbia University Libraries Oral History Research Office, New York.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/nny/perkinsf/introduction.html>.

Frances Perkins's oral history is extensive, running thousands of pages in length. Perkins discussed her life and career, described colleagues and political figures, and explained in clear terms the enactment of New Deal legislation. Most importantly for my paper, she related stories that conveyed how she utilized skills in diplomacy to navigate politics; I included several quotes from this in my paper to demonstrate the breadth of her mediation and negotiation skills.

———. "List of Accomplishments for F.D.R." Frances Perkins Papers, Columbia University Libraries, January 19, 1945. <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins/item/422>. Perkins wrote this document in 1945, just before she stepped down as Secretary of Labor, where she summarized her many accomplishments as Secretary of Labor under FDR's presidency. I



used this source in my paper to highlight Perkins's many accomplishments as Labor Secretary and show how much of her original agenda was eventually implemented.

———. "A National Labor Policy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 184 (1936): 1-3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1019535> (accessed November 28, 2021). In this article, Perkins clearly and concisely describes the need for a fair labor standards bill and outlines her views on the role of the federal government in helping ordinary American laborers. I used this to clarify how Perkins's ideals represented the larger, national debate that occurred during the New Deal over the power of the federal government.

———. *The Roosevelt I Knew*. New York: The Viking Press, 1946. Frances Perkins knew Franklin D. Roosevelt for thirty-five years and worked closely with him in politics for seventeen. In this biography of FDR, Perkins gives an excellent first-hand account of their joint accomplishments during his years as in state and national government. This source also provided me with useful information on New Deal programs, Roosevelt's personality, and the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, and I frequently referred to this book as I wrote my paper.

———. "Why We Need a Minimum Wage Law." *Nation's Business*. (1933): 23-24, 56, 59. <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins/item/410> (accessed January 15, 2022). In this journal article, Perkins argues for a federal minimum wage and maximum hours law, describing in detail the horrible working conditions of sweatshop laborers to illustrate her point that thousands of workers were overworked and underpaid. This gave me a perspective of Perkins's motives behind her desire to enact the Fair Labor Standards Act, and I included this information in my paper to show the dire need in the 1930's for social legislation on this scale.

Perkins, Frances, and J. Paul St. Sure. *Two Views of American Labor*. Los Angeles: Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, 1965.

This short book contained two articles, written by two important figures in the labor movement. One author was Perkins, who argued for the importance of fair labor standards legislation and social security, while the other author represented the opposite point of view, arguing for a different approach to labor issues. This source gave me good information on New Deal labor legislation from a perspective of 30 years after the enactment of FLSA.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Message to Congress on Establishing Minimum Wage and Maximum Hours." May 24, 1937, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-congress-establishing-minimum-wages-and-maximum-hours>.

Roosevelt described the horrible conditions of unpaid and overworked laborers in this message to Congress, encouraging legislators to vote for the FLSA to improve these conditions. Essentially a call to action, Roosevelt's eloquent language is inspirational, and I used this to reinforce my examples of how Perkins and Roosevelt utilized diplomacy to pass minimum wage legislation.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Governor Addressed a Communication to Chambers of Commerce and Labor Leaders All over the State with Reference to Unemployment Conditions." Frances Perkins Papers. Columbia University Libraries, New York.  
<https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins/item/387>.

In this document, Roosevelt, during his time as governor of New York, created a special committee on unemployment designed to form programs and provide relief to the citizens of New York. Frances Perkins, as Industrial Commissioner, was appointed to oversee the committee, and I used this source in my paper to support my discussion of how Perkins's background in state politics influenced her actions as Secretary of Labor.

"Southerners Rake Wage Bill as Evil to Whole Nation." *New York Times*, July 31, 1937.

This newspaper article quoted several senators involved in the congressional debate over the FLSA, particularly those opposed to the proposed bill. I gained a great perspective of

lawmakers' opinions on minimum wage from this article, and I used these quotes to illustrate the strong viewpoints of those opposed to the FLSA.

Tait, John W. "The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938." *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (1945). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/824285> (accessed October 3, 2021).

This primary source article about the FLSA provided me with a perspective of this landmark legislation just a few years after its passage. The article was very detailed in its description of labor history, congressional debates, and constitutional challenges to the FLSA's concept of a minimum wage, which I included in my paper.

U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*. 75th Cong., 3rd sess., 1938. Vol. 83, pt. 6: 6911-13.

One of the many volumes of congressional records available online, this extensive document was helpful as I researched the legislative debate over the Fair Labor Standards Act. I was able to find testimonies from various senators and representatives, and I used their opinions in my paper to demonstrate the breadth and variety of viewpoints regarding minimum wage legislation.

U.S. Congress. Senate. *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938*. S 2475. 75th Cong., 3rd sess., 1938.

This is the Fair Labor Standards Act itself, the document at the core of my topic. I used this source in my paper to explain the legislation of minimum wage, and this was critical as I researched how Frances Perkins fought so long and hard to get this bill passed.

Woolf, S.J. "Miss Perkins Foresees New Gains for Labor." *New York Times*, March 6, 1938: 8, 21.

In this article, Woolf briefly covered Frances Perkins's life and her career and included quotes from an interview of Perkins about the Department of Labor. I used this in my paper to demonstrate Perkins's thoughts on using labor diplomacy in politics.

## **Secondary Sources:**

Berg, Gordon. "Frances Perkins and the Flowering of Economic and Social Policies." *Monthly Labor Review* 112, no. 6 (1989): 28-32. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41843308> (accessed December 3, 2021).

The author of this article included specific statistics on the numbers of laborers who were immediately affected by the regulations established by the Fair Labor Standards Act, which was helpful as I wrote my paper. This provided me with an in-depth understanding of the far-reaching impacts of the FLSA immediately after its passage in 1938.

Breitman, Jessica. "Honoring the Achievements of FDR's Secretary of Labor." Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/perkins> (accessed October 13, 2021).

This website provided a general overview of Frances Perkins and her relationship to FDR, including many photos, which were helpful visual aids. This webpage also contained valuable information I used in my paper about how her legacy is felt by millions of Americans today.

Burns, Ken. "The Rising Road." *The Roosevelt: An Intimate History*, 2014. <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-roosevelts/>.

Directed by Ken Burns, this PBS documentary was very informative, specifically the episode I used in my paper, which focused on Roosevelt's New Deal years. This provided useful historical background information on the Great Depression, social and labor reforms, and Roosevelt himself, and I used this information in my paper to provide historical context for my topic.

Cohen, Adam. *Nothing to Fear: FDR's Inner Circle and the Hundred Days That Created Modern America*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.

In this book, Cohen provides a good overview of the first "hundred days" of FDR's presidency, when a huge part of the New Deal's major social legislation passed. Specifically, in my paper I used the information on the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and Frances Perkins's role in the early years of the New Deal.

Congressional Research Service. *The Federal Minimum Wage: In Brief*. 2021.

<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43089.pdf> (accessed January 27, 2021).

This research report provided me with modern information and up-to-date statistics on the Fair Labor Standards Act as it exists today and the facts of the current minimum wage debate. I used this source in my paper to demonstrate the far-reaching legacy of Frances Perkins.

Downey, Kirstin. *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience*. New York: The Doubleday Publishing Group, 2009.

Kirstin Downey's fantastic biography of Perkins gave me a thorough understanding of her life, the breadth of her accomplishments, and how she utilized diplomacy in the midst of debate in a wide variety of situations. This resource provided me with an initial jumping off point for the rest of my research and gave me a clearer picture of how to focus my topic on Perkins's diplomatic strategies.

"The Fair Labor Standards Act: Continuing Issues in the Debate." CRS Reports, 2008.

<https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL34510.html> (accessed February 5, 2022).

This report thoroughly discussed modern issues surrounding the FLSA and its minimum wage provisions, which gave me an excellent perspective of the act today. I used this in my paper to demonstrate that although the original constitutional debate over the FLSA was resolved, the debate over minimum wage continues to this day.

Fleck, Robert K. "Democratic Opposition to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938." *The Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 1 (March 2002): 25-54.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2697971> (accessed November 7, 2021).

I gained an in-depth understanding of how the Democratic party split into several different factions during the debate over the FLSA from this article. This information was very helpful to my understanding of what caused the split in the New Deal legislative coalition and helped convey the extent of the debate over this critical legislation.

Grossman, Jonathan. "Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for a Minimum Wage." U.S. Department of Labor.

<https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/flsa1938#1> (accessed November 3, 2021).

Grossman provided a fantastic overview of the FLSA debate in congress, with a particular focus on the groups who were involved in the debate – manufacturing interest groups, organized labor representatives, and Southern lawmakers. This source gave me a solid understanding of the history of this pivotal act and inspired me to learn more about how Frances Perkins used diplomatic skills to participate in this debate.

Johnston, Taylor. "The U.S. Labor Movement Is Popular, Prominent and Also Shrinking." *New York Times*, January 25, 2022.

This article happened to be on the front page of *The New York Times* as I conducted my research, and provided a great perspective on how labor issues are prominent in politics today. The article reported on the growth of the current labor movement and the decreasing number of union membership, which gave me a reference point to include in my paper to show how labor legislation of the 1930's continues to affect workers to this day.

Lee, Jennifer B., curator. "Frances Perkins: The Woman Behind the New Deal." Columbia University Libraries, 2009. <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/perkins> (accessed November 5, 2021).

Compiled by Columbia University, this online exhibition includes extensive information on Frances Perkins's life and career, particularly her role in designing New Deal legislation. This website incorporated links to numerous digital primary source documents in Columbia's archives that were incredibly useful to me as I conducted my research.

Martin, George. *Madam Secretary: France Perkins*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.

This biography of Perkins was an excellent source of information and provided additional insights into my topic that supplemented the Perkins biography by Kirstin Downey. This source was interesting specifically in the discussion of the Social Security Act and the

FLSA, particularly how Perkins navigated the people involved in New Deal social legislation. Martin summarized Perkins's skillful mediation of labor disputes so well that I included a quote from this book in my paper to illustrate her diplomatic skills.

McGuire, John. "In the Oval Office Inner Circle: The Development of Female Presidential Advisers in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidency." *White House Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020): 233-38.

The author of this article highlighted several women who helped shape the Roosevelt administration's agenda; I used this source for its clear and understandable discussion of Frances Perkins's diplomatic and political strategy, which was very helpful as I explored topics relating to this year's NHD theme. In particular, the author discussed how Perkins's close friendship and working relationship with Roosevelt impacted New Deal legislation, which I used in my paper to support my thesis.

Montgomery, David. "Labor and the Political Leadership of New Deal America." *International Review of Social History* 39, no. 3 (1994): 335-60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44583321> (accessed January 14, 2021).

This article explored the connection between the labor movement and the government during the Depression era. This was useful to me as I researched the background of trade unionism and why labor organizations supported or opposed major social legislation of the New Deal, particularly in relation to the FLSA.

Rakich, Nathaniel, Anna Wiederkehr, and Meredith Conroy. "Biden's Record-Breaking Cabinet Nominees, in One Chart." *FiveThirtyEight*, January 11, 2021.

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/bidens-record-breaking-cabinet-in-one-chart/> (accessed January 22, 2022).

This webpage summarized the members of the Biden administration's Cabinet, and discussed his barrier-breaking appointees, including the record number of women currently holding Cabinet level positions. I used this in my paper to illustrate the substantial gains in diverse representation since Frances Perkins became the first woman Cabinet member.

Samuel, Howard D. "Troubled Passage: The Labor Movement and the Fair Labor Standards Act." *Monthly Labor Review* 123, no. 12 (December 2000): 32-37.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41845146> (accessed November 21, 2021).

Samuel provided excellent information in this article about the involvement of organized labor in the debate over the Fair Labor Standards Act. The author chronicles the reasons behind labor organizations' opposition to a bill that would improve working conditions, and shed light on the relationship between William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, and Frances Perkins, which I included in my paper.

Seltzer, Andrew J. "The Political Economy of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938." *Journal of Political Economy* 103, no.6 (December 1995): 1302-42.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2138713> (accessed November 21, 2021).

I used this article in my paper to describe why the FLSA's provision for a national minimum wage inspired so many debates. The author concluded that the political, ideological, ethnic, and geographical differences between laborers around the United States directly contributed to the controversy of the FLSA. I used this information in my paper to enhance my explanation of how Frances Perkins deftly navigated the tensions between these interest groups.

Social Welfare History Project. "National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933."

<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/new-deal/national-industrial-recovery-act-of-1933/> (accessed January 12, 2022).

This website covered the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and the act creating it. Specifically, this source was useful for its analysis of how the NRA established an early concept of a federally regulated minimum wage and maximum hours codes, ideas that were later enacted in the FLSA.

Sprague, Leah W. "Her Life: The Woman Behind the New Deal." Frances Perkins Center, 2014.

<https://francesperkinscenter.org/life-new/> (accessed October 13, 2021).



In this website, Sprague provided a great starting point for my research. The article gave me an overview of Perkins's accomplishments as Secretary of Labor and mentioned a number of useful resources that I used as I continued my research.

Wandersee, Winifred D. "‘I’d Rather Pass a Law Than Organize a Union:’ Frances Perkins and the Reformist Approach to Organized Labor." *Labor History* 34, no. 1 (1993): 5-32. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00236569300890011> (accessed October 3, 2021).

This fantastic article covered the relationship between Frances Perkins and organized labor during the New Deal years, focusing particularly on how Perkins's background as a social feminist influenced her approach to policy. This gave me a clear understanding of how Perkins utilized diplomacy to navigate the tensions and debates between labor organizations, and it was very helpful as I formulated by argument.

Webb, Derek A. "The Natural Rights Liberalism of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Economic Rights and the American Constitutional Tradition." *The American Journal of Legal History* 55, no. 3 (2015): 313-46. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24798065> (accessed January 14, 2021).

The author of this article discussed how FDR and proponents of the New Deal validated the constitutionality of New Deal programs. This gave me a solid background in the ideology behind social legislation championed by Perkins and helped me to understand the constitutional debates over minimum wage legislation.