



## Florence Kelley

Florence Kelley, the daughter of United States congressman, William D. Kelley, was born on 12th September, 1859. She studied at Cornell University and the University of Zurich. While in Europe she became a follower of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Over the next few years she worked on an English translation of Engel's *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* and this was eventually published in the United States in 1887.

Kelley moved to New York City where she married a fellow member of the Socialist Labor Party, the Polish-Russian physician, Lazare Wischnewetzky. The marriage was not a success and in December 1891 she left him and moved to Chicago with her three children. Soon after arriving in the city she joined Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, Alzina Stevens, Mary McDowell, Edith Abbott, Grace Abbott, Julia Lathrop, Alice Hamilton, Sophonisba Breckinridge and other social reformers at Hull House.

John Peter Altgeld was one of the many visitors to Hull House. When he was elected governor of Illinois in 1892 and the following year he appointed Kelley as the state's first chief factory inspector. Kelley recruited a staff of twelve, including Alzina Stevens and Mary Kenney. In 1894 Altgeld and Kelley managed to persuade the state legislature to pass legislation controlling child labour. This included a law limiting women and children to a maximum eight-hour day. This success was short-lived and in 1895 the Illinois Association of Manufacturers got the law repealed.

In 1899 Kelley helped establish the radical pressure group, the National Consumer's League (NCL). The main objective of the organization was to achieve a minimum wage and a limitation on the working hours of women and children. Kelley, the NCL's first leader, traveled the country giving lectures on working conditions in the United States.

One important initiative introduced by Kelley was the NCL White Label. Employers whose labour practices met with the NCL's approval for fairness and safety were granted the right to display the NCL's white label. The NCL then urged consumers to boycott those goods that failed to earn the right to use the label.

In September 1905, Kelley joined with Upton Sinclair and Jack London to form the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. Over the next few years she was a frequent speaker on American campuses and one of those students she recruited to the cause was Frances Perkins, the woman who was eventually to become the country's first woman cabinet minister and the person responsible for bringing an end to child labour in America.

A strong supporter of women's suffrage and African American civil rights, Kelley helped to establish the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1909. A committed pacifist, Kelley opposed USA involvement in the First World War and was a member of the Woman's Peace Party (WPP) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Kelley wrote several books including *Some Ethical Gains Through Legislation* (1905), *Modern Industry in Relation to the Family* (1914), *The Supreme Court and Minimum Wage Legislation* (1925) and *Autobiography* (1927). Florence Kelley died in Germantown on 17th February, 1932.