

## The Making of ILO Convention #100: Whose Equality?

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During the interwar years, legal equality feminists, led by the National Women's Party (NWP) from the United States and Open Door International from Great Britain, assaulted the ILO for contributing to discrimination against women by treating women as weaker workers requiring special protections due to biological, cultural, and moral fragilities. Other international women's organizations, especially the World Young Women's Christian Association, took a more constructive stance in seeking inclusion of women in ILO instruments and coverage of female-dominated occupations in labor standards, like holidays with pay or social security. Labor feminists, associated with unions and government bureaus, defended protection of working-class women as part of a class project; most of the women from the ILO Office involved with women's issues identified with this tendency. In 1944, the ILO reaffirmed an equality standard, announcing in the Declaration of Philadelphia: "All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity." With Convention #100, "Equal Remuneration," of 1951, the ILO furthered its embrace of equality discourses.

Convention #100 became one of the most ratified instruments. But its form was not a foregone conclusion. This presentation looks at the conflicts that emerged during deliberations over this convention. Not only did nations spar over whether there should

be a convention or merely a non-binding recommendation, but they also disagreed over how to measure equal remuneration—whether through job evaluation to determine the rate for the job or by comparing jobs with skills of similar value—and whether to include the public sector or merely private enterprise. Labor feminists and legal equality feminists both promoted equal pay, but ILO advocates worked within the constraints of an organization that required employers and trade unionists to agree with governments, who in turn took into account their national configurations of labor and capital. Debates over equal pay illuminate the ways that equality served as a terrain of struggle during the Cold War and not only as an indicator of women’s rights. Finally, this paper assesses the position of Nordic countries compared to other Western capitalist, colonial powers, and state socialist nations.

I draw upon the records of the ILO, including the Proceedings of the International Labour Conference, internal minutes and correspondence, committee meetings, and correspondence.