

# Oregon's Law For Economic Democracy

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"This young woman possesses skills and abilities which if given an opportunity will be of great value to any employer but there is no opportunity for her in this town. Here, there is such community prejudice against her race that even such tasks as house-keeping and other domestic work is difficult for her to obtain. This girl deserves a good job so her talents won't be wasted . . ."

This letter from the files of the fair employment practices division of the Bureau of Labor was written by a friendly official of a small Oregon town in behalf of a high school graduate looking for a job. It points up graphically the reasons behind the passage of the Oregon law for tolerance in employment, the Fair Employment Practices Act of 1949.

Before July 16, 1949, the date the Oregon law became effective, members of religious and racial minority groups in this state faced a discouraging and in many cases hopeless job future. The only job opportunity the girl mentioned in the letter above could hope for were those suggested by her high school principal — a maid in a lunchroom or a waitress in a "high class" restaurant — if she could find an employer, who would hire a Negro girl for these positions. For a person with aptitudes and skills of high order and ordinary human ambition this was a bleak outlook.

Now, thanks to the year-old Oregon law which forbids job discrimination on such illogical grounds as race, religion or national origin, new job opportunities have opened up in that

short space of a year for this girl and members of her race. Their right to jobs commensurate with their skills and intelligence is protected by state statute and a statewide attack against community prejudice through an evolving educational program in swinging public opinion into line for economic democracy as well established-political democracy in Oregon.

Oregon was the sixth state of the Union to declare it a public policy that "practices of discrimination against any of its inhabitants because of race, religion, color or national origin are a matter of state concern and that such discrimination threatens not only the rights and privileges of its inhabitants but menaces the institutions and foundations of a free and democratic state."

Specifically the Oregon law forbids employers to refuse to hire, to discriminate in terms of employment or to discharge any person because of his race or religion. Labor organizations are forbidden to exclude or expel members on the same grounds, and employment agencies cannot discriminate in registering or referring applicants for employment.

The law further prohibits discrimination on job-application forms and in help wanted classified sections of newspapers. No longer such advertising as the following is legal in Oregon: "Help Wanted, White," "Christians only need apply," "Chinese boy wanted . . ." References as to race, religion and nationality or the request for a photograph are forbidden as part of job-application questions or demands. "Where were your parents born?" and "What religious holidays do you keep?" are no longer considered