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Sturges and Burn Mfg. Co. Vs. Beauchamp

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Court : US Supreme Court

Decided On : Dec-01-1913

Appeal No. : 231 U.S. 320

Appellant : Sturges and Burn Mfg. Co.

Respondent : Beauchamp

Judgement :

Sturges & Burn Mfg. Co. v. Beauchamp - 231 U.S. 320 (1913)

U.S. Supreme Court Sturges & Burn Mfg. Co. v. Beauchamp, 231 U.S. 320 (1913)

Sturges & Burn Manufacturing Company v. Beauchamp

No. 54

Submitted November 3, 1913

Decided December 1, 1913

231 U.S. 320

ERROR TO THE SUPREME COURT

OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

SYLLABUS

A state is entitled to prohibit the employment of persons of tender years in dangerous occupations, and, in order to make the prohibition effective, it may compel employers, at their peril, to ascertain whether their employees are in fact below the age specified.

Absolute requirements as to ascertaining age of employees of tender years are a proper exercise of the protective power of government, and if the legislation has reasonable relation to the purpose which the state is entitled to effect, it is not an unconstitutional deprivation of liberty or property without due process of law.

A classification in employment of labor of persons below sixteen years of age is reasonable, and does not deny equal protection of the laws. The provisions of the Child Labor Act of Illinois of 1903 involved in this case are not unconstitutional as denying due process of law, as

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depriving the employer of liberty of contract, or of his property by requiring him at his peril to ascertain the age of the person employed, or as denying him the equal protection of the law.

250 Ill. 303 affirmed.

The facts, which involve the constitutionality under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Illinois Child Labor Act of 1903, are stated in the opinion.

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MR. JUSTICE HUGHES delivered the opinion of the Court.

The Sturges & Burn Manufacturing Company is a corporation engaged in manufacturing tinware and other metal products. It employed Arthur Beauchamp, the defendant in error, who was under sixteen years of age, as a press hand to

operate a punch press used in stamping sheet metal. Beauchamp was injured in operating the press, and brought an action through his next friend in the Superior Court of Cook County to recover the damages sustained, counting on the statute of Illinois, passed in 1903 (Laws of 1903, p. 187, Hurd's Stat. 1909, p. 1082), which, by 11, prohibited the employment of children under the age of sixteen years in various hazardous occupations, including that in which the injury occurred. The trial court, refusing to direct a verdict for the defendant, instructed the jury that, if the plaintiff was in fact less than sixteen years old, and, when injured,

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was employed by the defendant upon a stamping machine, the defendant was guilty of a violation of the statute, and the plaintiff was entitled to recover. A verdict was rendered for the plaintiff, and judgment thereon was affirmed by the supreme court of the state. 250 Ill. 303. The case comes here on error.

The plaintiff in error complains of the ruling that a violation of the statute gives a right of action to the employee in case of his injury, but this is a question of state law with which we are not concerned.

The federal question presented is whether the statute, as construed by the state court, contravenes the Fourteenth Amendment. It cannot be doubted that the state was entitled to prohibit the employment of persons of tender years in dangerous occupations. *Holden v. Hardy*, [169 U. S. 366](#) , [169 U. S. 392](#) -395; *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, [197 U. S. 11](#) , [197 U. S. 31](#) ; *Muller v. Oregon*, [208 U. S. 412](#) , [208 U. S. 421](#) ; *Chicago, Burlington & Quincy R. Co. v. McGuire*, [219 U. S. 549](#) , [219 U. S. 568](#) -569. It is urged that the plaintiff in error was not permitted to defend upon the ground that it acted in good faith relying upon the representation made by Beauchamp that he was over sixteen. It is said that, being over fourteen, he at least had attained the age at which he should have been treated as responsible for his statements. But, as it was competent for the state, in securing the safety of the young, to prohibit such employment altogether, it could select means appropriate to make its prohibition effective, and could compel employers, at their peril, to ascertain whether those they employed were in fact under the age

specified. The imposition of absolute requirements of this sort is a familiar exercise of the protective power of government. *Reg. v. Prince*, L.R. 2 C.C. 154; *People v. Werner*, 174 N.Y. 132; *Ulrich v. Commonwealth*, 6 Bush, 400; *State v. Heck*, 23 Minn. 549; *State v. Hartfiel*, 24 Wis. 60; *State v. Tomasi*, 67

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Vt. 312, 31 A. 780; *Commonwealth v. Green*, 163 Mass. 103; 3 Greenleaf on Evidence 21; 30 Am.Rep. 617-620, note. And where, as here, such legislation has reasonable relation to a purpose which the state was entitled to effect, it is not open to constitutional objection as a deprivation of liberty or property without due process of law. *Shevlin-Carpenter Co. v. Minnesota*, [218 U. S. 57](#) , [218 U. S. 70](#)

It is also contended that the statute denied to the plaintiff in error the equal protection of the laws, but the classification it established was clearly within the legislative power. *Heath & Milligan Co. v. Worst*, [207 U. S. 338](#) , [207 U. S. 354](#) ; *Louisville & Nashville R. Co. v. Melton*, [218 U. S. 36](#) , [218 U. S. 54](#) ; *Lindsley v. National Carbonic Gas Co.*, [220 U. S. 61](#) , [220 U. S. 78](#) ; *Mutual Loan Co. v. Martell*, [222 U. S. 225](#) , [222 U. S. 236](#) .

The judgment is

Affirmed.