**U.S. Supreme Court**

**Lochner v. New York, 198 U.S. 45 (1905)**

**Lochner v. New York**

**No. 292**

**Argued February 23, 24, 1905**

**Decided April 17, 1906**

**198 U.S. 45**

*Syllabus*

The general right to make a contract in relation to his business is part of the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, and this includes the right to purchase and sell labor, except as controlled by the State in the legitimate exercise of its police power.

Liberty of contract relating to labor includes both parties to it; the one has as much right to purchase as the other to sell labor.

There is no reasonable ground, on the score of health, for interfering with the liberty of the person or the right of free contract, by determining the hours of labor, in the occupation of a baker. Nor can a law limiting such hours be justified a a health law to safeguard the public health, or the health of the individuals following that occupation.

Section 110 of the labor law of the State of New York, providing that no employes shall be required or permitted to work in bakeries more than sixty hours in a week, or ten hours a day, is not a legitimate exercise of the police power of the State, but an unreasonable, unnecessary and arbitrary interference with the right and liberty of the individual to contract in relation to labor, and, as such, it is in conflict with, and void under, the Federal Constitution.

[…]

The mandate of the statute that "no employee shall be required or permitted to work," is the substantial equivalent of an enactment that "no employee shall contract or agree to work," more than ten hours per day, and, as there is no provision for special emergencies, the statute is mandatory in all cases. It is not an act merely fixing the number of hours which shall constitute a legal day's work, but an absolute prohibition upon the employer's permitting, under any circumstances, more than ten hours' work to be done in his establishment. The employee may desire to earn the extra money which would arise from his working more than the prescribed time, but this statute forbids the employer from permitting the employee to earn it.

The statute necessarily interferes with the right of contract between the employer and employes concerning the number of hours in which the latter may labor in the bakery of the employer. The general right to make a contract in relation to his business is part of the liberty of the individual protected by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Federal Constitution.Allgeyer v. Louisiana, [165 U. S. 578](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/165/578/case.html). Under that provision, no State can deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law. The right to purchase or to sell labor is part of the liberty protected by this amendment unless there are circumstances which exclude the right. There are, however, certain powers, existing in the sovereignty of each State in the Union, somewhat vaguely termed police powers, the exact description and limitation of which have not been attempted by the courts. Those powers, broadly stated and without, at present, any attempt at a more specific limitation, relate to the safety, health, morals and general welfare of the public. Both property and liberty are held on such reasonable conditions as may be imposed by the governing power of the State in the exercise of those powers, and with such conditions the Fourteenth Amendment was not designed to interfere. Mugler v. Kansas, [123 U. S. 623](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/123/623/case.html); In re Kemmler, [136 U. S. 436](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/136/436/case.html); Crowley v. Christensen, [137 U. S. 86](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/137/86/case.html); In re Converse, [137 U. S. 624](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/137/624/case.html).

The State therefore has power to prevent the individual from making certain kinds of contracts, and, in regard to them, the Federal Constitution offers no protection. If the contract be one which the State, in the legitimate exercise of its police power, has the right to prohibit, it is not prevented from prohibiting it by the Fourteenth Amendment.

[…]

It must, of course, be conceded that there is a limit to the valid exercise of the police power by the State. There is no dispute concerning this general proposition. Otherwise the Fourteenth Amendment would have no efficacy, and the legislatures of the States would have unbounded power, and it would be enough to say that any piece of legislation was enacted to conserve the morals, the health or the safety of the people; such legislation would be valid no matter how absolutely without foundation the claim might be. The claim of the police power would be a mere pretext -- become another and delusive name for the supreme sovereignty of the State to be exercised free from constitutional restraint. This is not contended for. In every case that comes before this court, therefore, where legislation of this character is concerned and where the protection of the Federal Constitution is sought, the question necessarily arises: is this a fair, reasonable and appropriate exercise of the police power of the State, or is it an unreasonable, unnecessary and arbitrary interference with the right of the individual to his personal liberty or to enter into those contracts in relation to labor which may seem to him appropriate or necessary for the support of himself and his family? Of course, the liberty of contract relating to labor includes both parties to it. The one has as much right to purchase as the other to sell labor.