

# APTS WEST-CENTRAL MONTREAL

## OUR UNION BATTLES



No 04



## Our battles from 1940 to 1979

### **Minimum working age: 1943**

As explained in a previous issue, the exploitation of children was a major problem. They performed menial tasks under conditions just as bad as adults. In factories, from the age of 8 or 9, children were employed in jobs that no machine could perform at the time. Their agility, flexibility and small stature could be used for certain tasks, such as tying up broken threads under running looms and cleaning dirty bobbins.

In the mines, their small size enabled them to squeeze into the narrowest galleries. They pushed coal-filled wagons, risking being crushed when they could no longer hold the heavy load. Much of this work was ill-suited to the children's actual strength, and accidents were rife.

Since the beginning of the trade union movement, reducing child working hours has been a major objective. It was, however, difficult to achieve. Over the years, various laws were put in place, only to encounter various problems in their application. In 1943, the most decisive factor in reducing child labor was the introduction of compulsory schooling. For families, having a working child improved their quality of life, and schooling took a back seat. In the end, it was the fact that schooling was free of charge, and that the State granted family allowances based on school attendance, that greatly contributed to this generalization.

Today in Quebec, there is no minimum age for employment. However, the law gives priority to school. More specifically, it stipulates that the obligation to attend school prevails until the end of the school year in which the child reaches the age of 16.

## **Annual leave: 1946**

Nowadays, annual leave is an acquired right. Yet this right has only existed since 1946. In fact, it was from this year onwards that all Quebec workers were entitled to a week's paid leave. As a result of various demands, this entitlement gradually increased to reach, in 1990, three weeks of paid leave after five years of service with the same employer.

Our collective agreement stipulates that an employee with at least one year's service is entitled to twenty working days' annual leave (article 23.03). This number is gradually increased as of the 15th year of service (art. 23.03 c.c.).



In the health and social services network (RSSS), our current challenge is to obtain more days of annual leave, but above all, to ensure that everyone can benefit from a period of vacation at a convenient date. Indeed, many employers are trying to reduce the number of people who can take their annual leave simultaneously, forcing many people to take their leave outside the summer period.

## **Hospital Insurance Act: 1968**

Before the 1960s, the hospital network was run mainly by nuns. From the 1960s onwards, due to a shortage of religious personnel, they began hiring trained lay nurses and doctors.

In those days, people had to pay for medical care. For some, treatment was a luxury they couldn't afford. To remedy this problematic situation, the government passed the Hospital Insurance Act in 1968, offering first-rate health care to the entire population, without financial discrimination. In its first year, over 650,000 people benefited.

Today, the health and social services network is under attack. After two years of pandemics, years of underfunding and structural reforms that increasingly restrict the autonomy of professional and technical staff, the government recently announced its intention to make greater use of private-sector companies. With its plan to "refound" the network, we know that we have a major battle ahead of us.





## **Common front bargaining: 1972**

In 1971-1972, to counter the government's wage policy, the CSN, FTQ, CEQ and a number of independent unions decided, for the first time, to join forces in a common front to negotiate more effectively with the government. During this period, negotiations in the public and parapublic sectors turned the province upside down.

The talks centered on one of the central labour bodies' key demands: raising the minimum wage for public sector employees to \$100 a week. The Bourassa government considers that the average wage in the public sector should not exceed that in the private sector. The unions, on the contrary, want to create a ripple effect by improving these working conditions, which would then serve as benchmarks for negotiations in the private sector.

Of all the bargaining rounds, this was the most striking, with an indefinite strike involving more than 210,000 union members from all sectors (social affairs, education and the public service). The government enacted a law suspending the right to strike, imposing heavy fines on offenders and imprisoning the leaders of Quebec's three central labour bodies - Marcel Pepin (CSN), Louis Laberge (FTQ) and Yvon Charbonneau (CEQ).

Over the years, a series of "bludgeoning" laws were passed, restricting the right to strike. Today, the right to strike is still restricted in the network. The parties are obliged to negotiate essential services before any strike period.

## **Maternity benefits: 1979**

Not so long ago, pregnant women were at risk of losing their jobs because of their pregnancy.

Union committees and sectors dedicated to defending women's rights were at the forefront of obtaining and improving elements that would enable them to start a family while retaining benefits linked to working conditions. This was the case for the first maternity leave in the Quebec public sector, which in 1979 enabled Quebec women to take eighteen weeks' unpaid leave, while guaranteeing job protection during their absence.

The introduction of the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) in 2006 was the fruit of a fifteen-year struggle, during which numerous union groups, as well as representatives of community and women's rights groups, joined forces to form the Regroupement pour un régime québécois d'assurance parentales. The aim was to make it easier for families to obtain longer leave and better financial support when a new child arrives.

Today, the QPIP provides benefits to all workers who take maternity leave, parental leave, adoption leave or, uniquely in North America, paternity leave exclusively for fathers. In Quebec's public sector, workers are entitled to 20 weeks' maternity leave, paid at 93%, and up to two years' unpaid parental leave.

Today, the shortage of childcare places has become a crying, collective problem. Sometimes, following parental leave, parents are forced to stay at home, resulting in a considerable loss of income.

**Next issue:**  
**Our union battles from 1980**  
**to the present day**