

# APTS WEST-CENTRAL MONTREAL

## OUR UNION BATTLES



No 03



### **Unemployment insurance: 1940**

During the Great Depression of 1929 to 1939, the unemployment rate was very high, and unemployed men had to work in camps set up by the federal government for derisory wages.

In 1935, over 1,500 residents of the relief camps went on strike to protest poor living conditions and demand a living wage. After months of fruitless demands, a large-scale march was organized to Ottawa. On June 3, over 1,000 strikers from Vancouver and more than 2,000 from Regina crossed the country by clandestinely boarding train cars. At destinations, following numerous riots and the arrest of union leaders, the strike ended. A few years later, in 1940, this movement gave birth to unemployment insurance. "Canada was the last major Western country to introduce unemployment insurance.[i]

Over the course of nearly 60 years, this system has undergone a number of changes, and is now known as employment insurance. This program is an important economic safety net in the event of job loss. It also provides sickness, parental and caregiver benefits, as well as benefits for people unable to work for health or family reasons.[ii]

## Unemployment insurance (continued)

However, certain issues are still topical. A recent court case brought by the Mouvement action-chômage de Montréal, with the support of 12 organizations and unions including the APTS, confirmed that the Employment Insurance Act is discriminatory on the basis of gender, with real consequences for women's well-being and economic security.



"If a woman loses her job while on maternity or parental leave, she no longer has any protection. She has to rely on her savings or her spouse's income. This keeps women poor and dependent. It's treating women's income as a secondary wage that doesn't deserve the same protection.

As soon as this decision was won, it was challenged by the Trudeau government, which claims to be feminist... so the fight will continue.... Once again, we see that equality in law does not guarantee equality in fact, and that we must fight relentlessly and collectively to ensure that women's rights are respected.

[i] MARCH ON OTTAWA AND REGINA'S EMU, published April 26, 2021,  
(Online [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca))

[ii] LA NAISSANCE DE L'ASSURANCE CHÔMAGE, (Online: [congrèsdutravail.ca](http://congrèsdutravail.ca))

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Our union battles between 1940 and 1979