

APTS WEST-CENTRAL MONTREAL

OUR UNION BATTLES



No 02



The history of Quebec's minimum wage in three major stages

Women's minimum wage: 1919

During the First World War, women entered the workforce on a massive scale. When the war ended, the men who had gone off to fight returned home. On their return, they struggled to find work, as the presence of women in the workforce put downward pressure on the number of jobs available and on wages.

The solution to this problem would have been to abolish wage discrimination between men and women, but the government was not prepared to do so. In 1919, the Quebec government chose to legislate only the minimum wage for women, and then only in industry: "According to the spirit of the Act, the minimum wage should at the very least assure women workers of a minimum living wage. As the vast majority of female workers in the industry were single, the standard budget was calculated for the needs of a single person. This standard budget seems to have been established in good logic with the idea people had of women's work: a temporary job intended either to survive until marriage, or to afford a little luxury, or to provide a supplementary income for the family[i]."

[i] L'HISTOIRE DU SALAIRE MINIMUM AU QUÉBEC, publié à l'Automne 2010, (En ligne : www.travail.gouv.qc.ca).



Reasonable Wages: 1937

In 1937, the Reasonable Wages Act was passed. By using the term “reasonable”, the Act aimed to ensure a minimum living wage for workers, although the term was not defined in concrete terms.

Prior to this date, there were no regulations governing men's wages, which meant that they had to accept work at any price. This law, which affects both men and women, also ensures that women receive equal pay for equal work.

The Minimum Wage Act: 1940

The Minimum Wage Act, which came into force on September 18, 1940, was designed to make up for certain shortcomings in previous legislation. It applies to all employees in Quebec, whether working for an employer or at home, and its provisions are of public order.

Today, the minimum wage is still relevant. A number of unions are still calling for a minimum wage that provides a decent standard of living. The APTS supports campaigns to raise the minimum wage to \$18 an hour. Low-wage earners are currently in a situation where it is impossible to lift themselves out of poverty. Only an increase in the minimum wage can correct this situation, so that the “working poor” in Quebec become a thing of the past.

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