

# Wages in the Printing Industry of the Metropolitan Area of Montreal 1940-1949

Raymond Gaudreau

Volume 5, numéro 10, juillet 1950

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1023417ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1023417ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Gaudreau, R. (1950). Wages in the Printing Industry of the Metropolitan Area of Montreal: 1940-1949. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 5(10), 95–97. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1023417ar>

mic situation of the industry, its paying power and its capabilities of competition with the outside.

Some time from now, especially if an economic crisis is in the offing, other establishments will close their doors. It will continue to be said, in certain circles opposed to extended conventions, that these factories had to shut down because of the convention. No one will say that there was a poor or improvident administrator. But the facts are that, with or without agreements, these firms would shut down just the same, with this differen-

ce, however, that without extended collective agreements, they would shut down after having lowered wages to a lamentable state in their own workrooms and bringing about a similar reduction of wages in competing factories.

The decree for the shoe industry was set up to do away with competition in the wages and bread-winning of the worker's family. The documents cited above seem to demonstrate that it has accomplished that without at the same time imperilling the life of the industry.

## WAGES IN THE PRINTING INDUSTRY OF THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF MONTREAL

1940 - 1949

RAYMOND GAUDREAU

One of the first collective agreements with juridical extent in the province of Quebec was that of the printing industry of Montreal and surrounding territory, concluded in 1936. Since then new collective agreements have succeeded one another year after year. These different collective agreements cover the printing establishments of Montreal and the surrounding territory for a hundred miles.

All printing establishments located in this territory fall into three zones, as follows:

*Zone I:* the Island of Montreal and the surrounding territory within a radius of ten miles. *Zone II:* the following municipalities and the surrounding territory within ten miles of each: East Templeton, Granby, Hull, Joliette, St-Hyacinthe, St-Jean, Iberville, St-Jérôme, Sherbrooke, Sorel, Trois-Rivières and Valleyfield. Those establishments which were publishing or printing one or more weekly newspapers as of the 15th of June, 1946, are not included in this zone. *Zone III:* all the territory not included in zones I and II. (The establishments located in zones II and III which were publishing or printing weekly newspapers as of the 15th of June, 1946, are grouped under the heading of Zone 2a, or Zone 3a.)

These specifications facilitate understanding of the behaviour of wages in the printing industry. They trace out the framework of our study: Montreal and its metropolitan area of a hundred mile radius (i.e. from the city limits). As to the terms of the decree giving a juridical extent to the col-

lective agreement, the minimum wage rates and the number of regular hours of work are fixed for each zone. Let us note at once that the general behaviour of wages is affected by these minimum wage rates. Since the remuneration of the marginal worker is automatically elevated by a rise in the minimum wage, average wage rates are by this very fact subject to an upward pressure.

In the light of these facts let us study the behaviour of wages under two aspects: the volume of wages paid and the wage rate minimums and maximums.

### *Volume of wages paid*

The volume of wages mounted from 3 million in 1940 to 11.5 million in 1949 (see table below). Wages show a somewhat different behaviour for the period from 1940 to 1949 than that of hours of labour and of the average number of employees. Federal wage control during the war restrained the expansion of volume of wages paid. Hence the decade of 1940 to 1949 shows two distinct periods: from 1940 to the first half of 1945, and from the second half of 1945 to 1949.

Between 1940 and 1945, whereas the number of hours worked increased by 72% and the number of employees, by 52%, total wages increased by 97%. From 1945 to 1949, however, these factors increased in the following proportions: number of hours worked, 17.9%; average number of employees, 26.0%; wages paid, 96.1%. In gene-

ral, since 1945 total wages continued to increase at an accelerated rate whereas the number of hours worked and the average number of workers became more and more stabilized.

Since 1940 total wages increased some 286.6%, compared to an increase of 102.8% in the number of hours worked and an increase of 92.1% in the average number of workers. This considerable rise of wages in the printing industry is much greater than that for Canadian workmen in general, for the same period. According to the figures of the Federal Bureau of Statistics, total revenue of Canadian workmen increased by 162% between 1940 and 1949. (\*)

### Hourly wage rates

To remain within the limits of this article, we must restrict our attention to the progression of hourly wage rates of zone I only. These are the most representative because 85% of the total wages were paid in zone I. Wage rates in the other zones, moreover, perceptibly followed the movement of those in zone I since 1940.

The minimum legal rate for journeymen increased \$0.80 to \$1.40 between 1940 and 1949, an increase of 75%. The actual average base rate for the same period increased from \$0.85 to \$1.55, an increase of 87%.

The minimum legal rate, from 1940 to 1946, did not change except for two bonuses for high prices authorized by the federal government. But since 1946, i.e. since the labour market controls were removed, the minimum rate increased six times. From the \$0.88 that it was in 1946, it mounted to \$1.40 in 1949, an increase of 60%. This represents 80% of the total increase for the ten years. Just as noteworthy is the fact that from 1946 to 1949 minimum wage rates increased in an accelerating movement: in 1946, \$0.06; in 1948, \$0.16; in 1949, \$0.30.

From 1940 to 1945 the actual average hourly rate remained just about as stationary as the legal minimum rate: 1940, \$0.83; 1944, \$0.95. But after 1945 the gap between the two widened until 1949 when it returned to the proportion of 1946. This phenomenon is explained by the following facts: 1. the printing industry underwent the general wage increases which followed the war and the end of wage controls; 2. the gigantic increase in production provoked a parallel demand for printed matter. On account of the specialized character of the printing industry and, on the other hand, on account of the relative rarity of skilled labour,

there were more hours of work, both regular and overtime. Without doubt this contributed much to the increase in the average base rate paid.

A comparison between the cost-of-living indices and the minimum and the actual average rates permits many interesting conclusions. However, it is necessary to limit the range of the terms. The cost-of-living is that prepared by the Federal Bureau of Statistics. This index is valid for Canada in general. The legal minimum rate is the obligatory minimum wage rate for a journeyman in zone I according to the terms of the decrees relating to printing trades in Montreal and the surrounding area. The actual average rate paid is the average base rate for a regular working hour.

Since 1939 three phases characterized the behaviour of wage rates compared to the cost-of-living. From 1939 to 1941, the cost-of-living and the average hourly rate ran close together. Then came the period of 1941 to 1944 during which wages were frozen and the index for the cost-of-living outran that of the average base rate of pay. But after 1944 the average base rate took the lead. Wage and cost-of-living indices both underwent a strong rise at the end of the war, during 1946 and 1947. The upward spiral of the cost-of-living was arrested in 1948, but the indices show that wage rates (minimum rates and average rates) continued to mount at a more and more accelerated tempo.

The following figures sum up well what happened in the ten years:

	Cost-of-living index	Minimum legal hourly rate index	Average base rate index
1940	105.6	106.7	106.5
1945	119.5	117.3	124.8
1949	160.8	186.7	198.7

Workers in the printing industry, highly skilled workmen, are thus paid at a minimum rate and an average base rate more than sufficient to contend with the cost-of-living as estimated by the federal government.

The considerable increase in total wages as well as the not less considerable rise in hourly wage rates, notably since the end of the war, bears witness to the prosperity and progress of our printing industry. We can likewise conclude — it is a commonplace today but it bears repeating — that the system of collective agreements with juridical extension and of parity boards creates an atmosphere of peace and understanding in industry eminently favorable both to workmen and to employers.

(\*) Statistical Review of Canada, March 1950.

WAGES PAID, BY YEAR, BY OCCUPATION, FOR ALL ZONES

1940 - 1949

OCCUPATIONS	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
<b>COMPOSING</b>										
Journeymen	1,072,499	1,315,854	1,456,518	1,535,365	1,675,378	1,872,387	2,173,050	2,465,328	2,982,673	3,485,165
Apprentices	157,463	181,343	165,599	161,297	188,808	243,342	391,245	490,017	566,284	625,415
<b>PRINTING</b>										
Rotary pressmen	—	—	—	—	—	41,167	59,520	117,823	133,363	203,849
Assistant rotary pressmen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	99,215
Cylinder pressmen	457,582	578,393	648,035	723,172	839,812	924,615	1,073,838	1,262,209	1,495,105	1,664,835
Cylinder press feeders	130,049	179,724	148,133	128,445	116,167	98,645	102,160	105,656	87,902	93,905
Platen pressmen	187,480	184,502	204,727	221,738	238,225	273,051	338,200	368,162	506,673	632,670
Platen press feeders	63,328	79,759	84,296	72,329	82,437	92,053	117,247	113,371	112,914	134,939
Assistant pressmen	50,507	79,144	96,977	121,555	125,573	147,493	233,225	283,703	360,101	389,709
Apprentice pressmen	110,698	125,574	113,988	111,674	157,580	204,522	316,786	380,709	466,295	539,068
Multigraph operators	25,217	23,673	32,424	34,469	35,397	37,856	37,669	30,446	31,690	37,238
<b>BOOKBINDING</b>										
Journeymen	287,633	339,746	396,299	453,949	508,325	592,972	692,742	751,203	844,686	927,947
Apprentices	69,106	72,773	59,890	44,821	43,772	65,426	111,702	159,826	189,501	258,862
Bookbinding girls	328,273	478,766	659,102	786,337	946,904	1,045,458	1,262,772	1,530,091	1,761,404	1,915,255
Helpers	28,037	56,082	77,146	111,210	158,458	211,780	262,511	291,921	347,198	466,125
<b>TOTALS — (All occupations)</b>	2,967,872	3,695,333	4,143,134	4,506,361	5,116,856	5,853,765	7,172,667	8,350,465	9,885,789	11,474,197

LABOUR JURISPRUDENCE

Prescription and labour laws

"On August 17, 1945, the plaintiff was engaged as a teacher by the defendants, at a salary of \$400.00 per year. She fulfilled her contract and received the sum of \$400.00. The St-Philippe school board is in inspection district number 60. The teachers of this district formed an association following the Labour Relations Act and the Public Services Employees Disputes Act (R.S.Q. 1941, ch. 162A and 169). The certificate of the association is dated August 2, 1944, and it is the negotiation agent for catholic teachers employed by the defendants. The parties being unable to arrive at a collective agreement, the Minister of Labour ordered a council of arbitration to be set up to settle the dispute. The council of arbitration rendered its decision on the 11th of February, 1946. The arbitration award was delivered to the Minister of Labour and transmitted to the defendants. It established the right of the plaintiff, like that decided by the Court of Appeals in the case of The Catholic Association of Rural Teachers of District No. 60 versus the School Commissioners of St-Pascal (1947 B.R. 728). The plaintiff, according to this award, had a right to the sum of \$730.00. The balance of \$330.00 which she claims is still owing to her."

The debate hinged on a question of prescription by the defense which pretended, for this reason, that the arbitration award does not apply.

Here is the substance of the judgment. The Labour Relations Act, the Quebec Trade Disputes Act and the Public Services Employees Disputes Act do not decree any prescription of wages. Similarly, the Professional Association Act, the Collective Agreement Act and the Minimum Wage Act, which do decree a prescription of six months, do not apply to a case of this kind. Hence we must have recourse to article 2260, paragraph 6, C.C. Consequently, the teacher's demand for a raise in her stipulated salary is prescribed by an arbitration award for five years, the parties admitting that there never has been a specific agreement.

(Mlle Gagnon, plaintiff, vs *Les commissaires d'écoles pour la municipalité de St-Philippe*, defendant, Kamouraska, Jan. 24, 1949; President, Justice Langlais; plaintiff's lawyer, Me M.-L. Beaulieu; defendant's lawyer, Me V. Trépanier; cf. R.J. de Q., C.S., 1949, p. 201.)

Union Security

In a recent arbitration case, the members of the board rejected unanimously a request for a "union shop", giving the following reasons for their decision: "The liberty of the individual for which unions themselves fought in the past, individual liberty which is at present sanctioned by the Treaty of the Rights of Man, signed by our country, and the spirit of our laws, do not seem to authorize us or give us the power to grant this request".

(Mc Lennan Lumber Limited, Montreal, and the *Association canadienne des travailleurs du bois*, local No. 16, Inc.; unanimous decision, July 18, 1949; President, Justice Irénée Lagarde; representative of the employer, Me Philippe Lamarre, c.r.; representative of the union, M. Léopold Lavoie.)