

Pioneers of Feminism and Unionism: Léa Roback and Madeleine Parent

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These transcriptions were extracted from footage shot during the filming of *A Vision in the Darkness* (1991), directed by Sophie Bissonnette.

Strike in the Dressmaking Industry (1937)

So we went on strike. We didn't have a choice. It was well organized. That was because of Rose [Pesotta], and other committed workers, too. One night, we went to see the workers we trusted, and we said, "Tomorrow, nobody goes in." And what was interesting was that there were some young communists working there, and they did a great job. They were communists who had . . . They were Jewish women who had learned to speak French. So there was a rapport there, and we trusted them. And there was also Mr. Peters . . . What was his first name again? In any case, Peters.

Sophie Bissonnette: Lazar?

LR: Lazar! He was very active. A huge personality. He did a lot of organizing. But people change . . . Nowadays, he has his own business, and things are going well for him. Anyway! But at that time, there was a need, some of the workers were saying, "I want a good boss," Like Yves . . . What's his last name again? Who wrote the song "Les bons boss" again? Anyway, I forget his name, a small man, his hair is white now. So that was it, she had a good boss. Sure, she knew how to sneak around, but people like that aren't too reliable. So basically, the strike lasted three weeks. And these people—workers, tailors—they helped us a lot. But of course they did! Because if we won, they would also receive raises. And if we continued to be activists, well, things would get done.

SB: Léa, I'd like to revisit the subject of the picket lines, because it was one of the first women's strikes in Quebec. Seeing women on the picket lines was a relatively new thing.

LR: Yes, the women were there. And they fought hard! The vast majority of the women campaigned, and that's how the union made the employers understand that "You're going to sit down and you're going to negotiate!" And one thing that helped us a lot, there was one employer, the "Wolofsky Dress." He was a smart man. And he said, "Come on, this is ridiculous!" The summer season was starting. The items had to be released. The spring and summer seasons were their best seasons, so they pushed things along a little. But there were some improvements. Unfortunately, their union lost a lot of its activism because of certain injustices that continued. But about lifting skirts, maybe a few let that happen, and it made them happy, but the majority said, "No."