

Pioneers of Feminism and Unionism: Léa Roback and Madeleine Parent

Special feature by the Cinémathèque québécoise, in collaboration with the RÉQEF, 2023

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

The Split with the Communist Party (1950s) – Léa Roback with Madeleine Parent

Sophie Bissonnette: Léa, I'd like to know, when the report . . . In the fifties, when the findings of the Khrushchev report came out, how did you feel at that time, having been an active communist for so many years?

Léa Roback: Truly, for me, it wasn't the Khrushchev situation. No. There was . . . That's not what bothered me. When I quit the movement, in '58, I believe, it was because of the leadership. That was the main thing. The headquarters were located in Toronto, and no one spoke French, even though at that time there were some very good French-speaking comrades who had every right to be in the party. So when they came [from Toronto], everything had to be translated. I'd had it with that. And here it was very weak. In Toronto, things were going on in the movement that I didn't care for. We didn't have strong, stable leadership. So I quit, but I never renounced communism. I was very motivated. They gave me a job I had never done before. I was Fred Rose's election campaign manager.

SB: Léa, could you go back to the subject of how the Francophones were treated?

LR: Well, after all, it was at the national level. But I found that in Toronto, they just didn't understand the issue. And here, everybody had their own opinions. I didn't attend the meetings very often. Honestly, I'm not much of a "meeting" person. Maybe it's a character flaw, but regarding meetings, I've always said, "I'm an activist. If there's something to be done, we'll get it done." But I found the long speeches a bit boring. But I said to myself, I'll always appreciate what I've learned. And I think that everything I learned in Berlin, when I was in that movement, had remained very strong in me. So I've always said, "I quit, and I know why I quit." But some people said, "Oh, so now you're going to live a different kind of life." But that's not what I was looking for.

It gave me opportunities to do many things that I may not have done otherwise. I've never regretted it. No, it was very enriching. And all the people I met there . . . No, if I had to do it all again, being who I am, I wouldn't change any of it.