

# NEWSLETTER

## LEA ROBACK FOUNDATION



Number 5, April 2012



Léa Roback and Madeleine Parent in 1993, at Léa's 90<sup>e</sup> birthday.

Photo: Louise de Grosbois©Lea-Roback Foundation

#### Great Partners of the Foundation:

the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU);  
the Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ);  
the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN);  
the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ);  
the Syndicat des fonctionnaires municipaux de Montréal (SCFP);  
as well as two foundations and one friend who wish to remain anonymous.

#### Partners of the Foundation:

la Caisse d'économie solidaire Desjardins;  
the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement;  
the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ);  
the Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec (SFPQ);  
the Syndicat des conseillères et conseillers de la CSQ, Fonds de solidarité;  
Poudrier Bradet, Lawyers;  
Ms Laura Alper;  
Ms Suzanne Bélanger;  
Ms Thérèse Laliberté;  
Ms Lucille Panet-Raymond;  
Ms Annalee Yassi.

# A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Madeleine Parent: recollections and recognition

For us at the Foundation, the death of Madeleine Parent not only represents the passing of a great trade union and women's movement pioneer, but also that of a dear friend of Lea Roback, a co-founder of the Foundation, a member of the Board of Directors for over 15 years and our first honorary member, when illness kept her on the sidelines. We thus feel it's most appropriate, in so doing, to pay tribute to her unwavering support of the Foundation's mission.



Madeleine Parent, at the reception for the Lea Roback's Foundation 1994 scholarship recipients.

Many many things have been written and said about Madeleine over the past few weeks. Much more than was the case over the past few years. Indeed, I can even recall some articles that described her, just a few years ago, as an "outraged old lady" whose positions and criticisms were outdated. Was her death necessary for the community to duly take the measure of her unique contribution to the evolution of Québec society?

Be that as it may, I don't wish to enumerate her countless exploits: others have done so in the newspapers, on TV and at a commemorative ceremony that was held last April 1. I would prefer to recall the bond that linked her to Lea, as well as her attachment to the Foundation.

When Lea Roback asked to be introduced to Madeleine Parent in 1939 at the end of a meeting of the League of Civil Rights, she probably had no idea that she was laying the foundation for a long-lasting and very close friendship, as well as launching a remarkable activist career focused upon change and progress.

Lea talks about her work as a union organizer at the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). Madeleine expresses the desire to become a union organizer too and asks about what path she might take to get there. Lea encourages her and lends her a hand. Madeleine's career as a labour activist is thus launched; and their friendship is born. One and the other will stand the test of time.

On Lea's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, several friends decided to set up a Foundation in her name, Madeleine being one of them. As long as her health allows, Madeleine is on board, holding Board meetings around her dining room table, participating in various fund raising activities, and thereby perpetuating her cherished friendship with Lea.

Supporting the Foundation's mission was just one illustration, but Oh so eloquent, of Madeleine's coherence and determination in the many struggles that she engaged in throughout her life. Need we recall that in the 1930s Madeleine invested her heart and soul in the Canadian Student Assembly (CSA) and in its campaign to have

scholarships awarded to students from impoverished milieus. Already in those years she was preoccupied by equality of opportunity and defended people's right to an education. No doubt that today she would be sporting a little square red cloth in support of the Québec students' struggle against tuition increases.

Madeleine played a role in the birth of the Foundation, she gave much of her time to it over the years, and she remained close to the Foundation right up until the end. She donated her furniture and some personal belongings to

be auctioned off at a fund raising event for the Foundation, when she left her apartment for the last time. By making such a bequest and by inviting people who wish to pay tribute to her to make a donation, she reminds us all that the causes we fight for outlive the people who fight for them, and she called upon us all to continue the struggle.

The Foundation will always have fond memories of Madeleine and is more than grateful for her unwavering support. In our collective memory, Lea and Madeleine, dear friends and dedicated comrades-in-arms, together forever.

Lorraine Pagé, president



Protest against tuition hikes , March 22, 2012. Abby Lippman holds a photograph of Madeleine Parent.

Photo : Danièle Lacourse©



Charles Lemieux and Madeleine Parent, at the inauguration of the Pavillon Léa Roback, Collège Marie-Victorin, in 2006.

# AU REVOIR MADELEINE

Hosted by Ariane Émond, a journalist and close friend of the Foundation, the ceremony provided us with the opportunity to reflect upon the many great causes embraced by Madeleine.

*“Madeleine Parent chose which side she was on: the working class, and she never lost sight of what this meant. Always motivated by a dynamic quest for greater social and economic justice, she was always an unparalleled ally for all women engaged in political and social movements.”* Monique Simard

These few lines aptly summarize the many testimonies that were given last April 1 in Montreal at the commemorative tribute honouring Madeleine Parent. A simultaneously subdued yet grandiose, sad yet joyful commemoration, which was above all an opportunity to proffer bouquets and sincere expressions of gratitude to Madeleine.

## A great trade unionist

Monique Simard, a dear friend, made Madeleine’s acquaintance when she was at the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CSC/CCU). Monique confessed to being duly impressed by someone who had stood up to giants like Maurice Duplessis in the course of her union struggles.

“Madeleine set very high standards. I would have liked, said Monique, to have worked in the labour movement alongside Madeleine but I don’t know whether I would have been able to keep pace with her and live up to her demands...”

Monique is convinced that “the trade union work done by Madeleine Parent, her primary activity for more than 40 years is what characterizes her best: combative, committed, selfless, determined, strategic, stubborn, lucid, courageous and ahead of her time...”

For Joanie Cameron Pritchett, President of the CSC/CCU, Madeleine was on the cutting edge when she, along with her husband Kent Rowley, fought to build independent trade unionism in Canada. “She was a visionary, a leader, she wasn’t afraid of anything. The first time I met her, last fall, I was just so pleased to tell her that the organization that she has founded was alive and very well.”

Laurell Ritchie, from Toronto, a colleague and trade unionist at the Canadian Auto Workers (TCA/CAW), drew attention to the fact that Madeleine had been a mentor to her, a heroine. “She undertook several battles that changed the social and political fabric in this country and thus leaves a formidable legacy to our society.”

## A dedicated feminist

Judy Rebick, an activist, journalist and writer described how every person that she would meet, in the course of conducting research for her book, spoke to her about Madeleine.

Recalling how Madeleine co-founded and influenced the orientations of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (CCA/NAC), founded in 1972, she drew attention to the fact that Madeleine “taught us to build alliances in order that we build a genuine women’s movement in Canada.”



Françoise David, former President of the Québec’s Women Federation, evoked Madeleine’s participation in the 1995 Bread and Roses March, but also in the international marches organized in 2000 and 2003. “A feminist and reliable ally of the dispossessed, she was always building bridges between women and other constituencies. Madeleine always said that we should never be demoralized.”

## Solidarity with women of every origin

Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré, a retired judge, spoke about Madeleine’s encyclopaedic memory, her sense of strategy, her cutting political analysis, her capacity to be herself in every kind of environment. As a young lawyer, in Me



Bernard Mergler's office, she and others often ended up in Madeleine's home discussing the trial that followed the Valleyfield strike and arguing the various points of law involved in the case.

"Madeleine defended the equality of rights well before the existence of a Charter of Rights, women of colour considered her to be one of their own."

Tess Tassalona, from the Montreal Immigrant Workers Centre, worked with Madeleine in the women's movement. She could count upon Madeleine's support in the many struggles that the Centre undertook, notably those against the expulsion of women immigrants.

Shree Mulay, former Director of McGill University's Centre for Research and Teaching on Women, and today the Associate Dean and Professor, Community Health and Humanities, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University, in Newfoundland, got to know Madeleine at the demonstrations organized in support of Chantal Daigle.

She emphasized Madeleine's staunch support for women from various communities and aboriginal women.

### Should to shoulder with young women as well

Délice Mugabo, a young feminist and anti-racist activist first got to know Madeleine in the history books she read. She pointed out how Madeleine was able to see herself in someone else's shoes, and realized the importance of free speech.

Jeanne Reynolds, from the student movement and spokesperson from CLASSE, proud to have been born in Valleyfield, thanked Madeleine for having laid the groundwork for future generations and opening up new avenues and spaces.

Lorraine Pagé, President of the Lea Roback Foundation, recalled, and it is quite apropos, that the causes we fight for outlive the people who fight for them and that it is up to us to continue the struggle. The essence of Lorraine's comments is summarized in *A Word from the President* at the beginning of this newsletter.

### An unwavering ally of aboriginal women

Michèle Taïna Audette, President of Aboriginal Québec Women lauded Madeleine's commitment to the cause of aboriginal women and to whom four generations wish to express their gratitude. "Petite Madeleine marched with us, with our mothers, against violence in our communities. Thank you for attending our general meetings for more than 20 years, even in your wheelchair."

All these touching testimonies were interspersed by a song composed in honour of Madeleine and sung by a choir from the Maison Parent-Roback, as well as a hymn to Peace by the *Mémés déchainées*. The afternoon ended with an aboriginal ceremony, *A time to say au revoir*. People slowly left the room, their hearts and memories stirred by Madeleine Parent's exemplary contribution to building a better world, that she knew was within our reach.



# MADELEINE PARENT: A LIFE OF STRUGGLE AND SOLIDARITY

**1918** : Madeleine Parent is born a few months before the Armistice is declared in November, in a middle class family in the heart of Montreal, across the street from Lafontaine Park.

**1937** : Madeleine attends McGill University and begins her studies in French Literature and later continues in sociology. She gets involved body and soul in the Canadian Students Assembly's (CSA) campaign to have scholarships awarded to students from impoverished milieus.

**1939** : Madeleine Parent makes the acquaintance of Lea at the end of a meeting of the Civil Rights League. Soon thereafter, she too decides to become a union organizer like Lea and thus begins her unwavering long-lasting friendship with Lea Roback.

**1942** : Upon Kent Rowley's invitation, Madeleine works on the union organization campaign of the 6,000 workers at Dominion Textile's Montreal and Valleyfield plants. The Union is the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA), an international union whose headquarters are located in the United States.

**1946** : Strike at the Dominion Textile mills in Montreal and Valleyfield. The Valleyfield strike is a particularly gruelling strike. Madeleine Parent is arrested, as Duplessis does his very best to help the company union win a union affiliation vote that although illegal receives the benediction of the Labour Ministry at the time. Madeleine succeeds however in making bail and returns just in time to work on getting out the vote for the UTWA, which wins the union election.

**1947** : Strike at Ayers in Lachute. Madeleine is accused of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to 3 years in prison. Her case is appealed, but Duplessis will drag out the proceedings thereby hoping to cast as much doubt as possible on Madeleine's integrity.

**1952** : Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley are expelled from the Union and removed from their positions on the executive of the Canadian branch of the UTWA, which was then in the midst of a witch hunt, as all the activist officers were suspected of being communist sympathizers.

**1953** : Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley get married.

**1955** : The Court hands down a verdict of not guilty, as the Crown Attorneys are unable to produce any evidence to support the accusation of seditious conspiracy.

**1967** : Madeleine Parent moves to Ontario. She will live there until her retirement.

**1969** : Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley, her lifetime companion and fellow union organizer, found the Canadian Council of Unions. This labour confederation will play a decisive role in developing an autonomous Canadian union movement. When it is created, 70% of unionized workers in Canada belonged to union organizations whose headquarters were located in the United States. Today, that same proportion of union members belongs to exclusively Canadian and/or Québec-based unions.

**1971** : Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley lead a strike at Texpack in Brantford, Ontario. This strike illustrates the grim consequences of American corporations that are taking control over Canada's manufacturing sector.

**1972** : Creation of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). Madeleine Parent will sit on the executive committee over several different periods and will play a key role on this committee. She fights to have the CCA pay special attention to the rights of aboriginal women; defends equal pay for women; supports various measures designed to improve the living conditions of women, such as maternity leaves, day cares and pensions.

## NEWS FLASHES

**1973** : Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley lead a strike at Artistic Woodwork in Toronto. The strikers are confronted with police violence. This strike galvanises the labour movement and diverse political powerbrokers in the region.

**1978** : Death of Kent Rowley.

**1982** : Madeleine Parent supports the campaign to organize Cape Breton miners that will mark an important stage in the development of Canadian-based unions, freed from the influence of American-led Unions, in the Atlantic provinces. ans les provinces de l'Atlantique.

**1983** : Madeleine Parent retires and returns to the Province of Québec.

**1984** : The 52<sup>nd</sup> Convention of the CSN and the 29<sup>th</sup> Convention of the CEQ (CSQ) pay tribute to this labour movement pioneer.

**1993** : Madeleine Parent is one of the founding members of the Lea Roback Foundation.

**1995** : Madeleine Parent participates in the *Bread and Roses* march.

**1998** : Madeleine Parent and Lea Roback attend the inauguration of the Maison Parent-Roback, so named in their honour, a building that houses several Québec coalitions of women's groups under a single roof.

**2000** : Madeleine Parent participates in the *International March of Women*.

**2001** : Symposium held at McGill University on the career and interests of the activist Madeleine Parent.

**2001** : Madeleine Parent participates in the demonstration that attracts some 60,000 people during the *People's Summit of the Americas* in Quebec City.

**2002** : Madeleine Parent marches for Peace in the Middle East, in the streets of Montreal.

**2012** : Death of Madeleine Parent in Montreal.

### 2011 FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN

The annual fund raising campaign conducted in the fall 2011 brought a total of \$9,347 into the Foundation's coffers. This amount is in addition to the donations received during the year and the money coming from our fund raising activities.

The Foundation is also able to count upon the support of some 15 *Partners* and *Major Partners* whose total annual contribution amounts to some \$15,000.

Our warmest expression of thanks goes out to all the people and organizations, for the most part long-time loyal donors, for their support of the Foundation's mission.

### SCHOLARSHIPS

More than 775 community groups have received the poster announcing our scholarship program.

There are only a few days left before May 1, the deadline for sending the applications.

All the informations are on the Foundation's Web site at: [www.fondationlearoback.org/scholar.htm](http://www.fondationlearoback.org/scholar.htm)  
The Board of Directors will be awarding the scholarships in June.

### TRIBUTE TO MADELEINE PARENT

The South West borough of Montreal recently adopted a resolution and took steps vis-à-vis the Toponymy Committee of the City of Montreal to have a park located alongside the Lachine Canal named after Madeleine Parent.

As the resolution so justly states: "Madeleine Parent was at the forefront of major social changes in the Province of Quebec and her struggles extended throughout the last century; she participated actively in several strikes [...] in factories [...] located in Saint-Henri and her commitment was closely linked to the people of Saint-Henri, who supported the Dominion Textile strikers and their families [...]"

A nice tribute that, we can only hope, will just be the beginning.

## VOICES FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

### May 5th Concert to Benefit the Lea-Roback Foundation

Friends and supporters of the Lea Roback Foundation and lovers of good music are invited to attend a Benefit Concert featuring well-known singers and musicians Thomas Fox, Kathleen Kennedy and Andrew Cowan in a program entitled:

#### ***VOICES FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE: Songs of Struggle and the Music of Paul Robeson***

When: Saturday, May 5, 2012 at 7:30 pm

Where: 5035 de Maisonneuve West (corner Claremont)-Wheelchair accessible-  
Metro Vendome

Tickets: \$25. [www.fondationlearoback.org](http://www.fondationlearoback.org) or call: 514-985-9815

Métro Vendôme

Billet: 25\$. [www.fondationlearoback.org](http://www.fondationlearoback.org) ou par téléphone: 514-985-9815

Thomas Fox and his fellow singers and musicians will lend their beautiful voices and instruments in support of our cause. Your participation will give you the opportunity to enjoy a wonderful evening while helping the Foundation increase its ability to support women who seek to improve their lives and participate fully in the community

## DES VOIX POUR LA LIBERTÉ ET LA JUSTICE

Des chansons de Paul Robeson et autres chansons de lutte  
Songs of Struggle and the Music of Paul Robeson

### VOICES FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

Thomas Fox  
Kathy Kennedy et ses amies  
Andrew Cowan (piano, guitare)



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Photography : Louise de Grosbois, Irène  
Ellenberger, Danièle Lacourse, Sandra Salomé.