

Solidarity linked with dissidents

Michael Monastyrskyj
Unfortunately, governments that violate human rights do not make accommodations in their schedules for human rights congresses. Thus, last week, while writers from around the world congregated in Toronto for *The Writer and Human Rights* conference, the Czechoslovakian government was preparing, according to a leading Czech dissident, a massive show trial in Prague.

Although she does not know the exact date of the trial, Zdena Tomínova states that it will involve eight of seventeen people arrested in May of this year. The eight have been charged with subversion against the Republic. Tomínova was an important member of the Charter 77 movement, and as such, was once attacked by a masked man.

"The trial comes from what I call a Polish panic in the regime," Tomínova says. "The majority on trial are either writers or people who have been trying to keep *Samizdat*, the underground literature, flowing freely."

Referring to *Solidarity*, she continued: "This movement is being carried by the workers but is associated with the dissident movement...they know the working class is stronger

because of its connection with the dissidents."

In the late seventies, some Charter 77 signatories had, in fact, met with representatives of Poland's KOR movement. However, a third meeting on the Polish-Czechoslovakian border was brutally stopped.

Tomínova is married to Julius Tomín, who is well-known for his mastery of classical philosophy and his unofficial lectures on the subject. "Any attempt to coordinate the human rights

stature, Tomín continued: "they pretended that Sabata, who is a very small man, assaulted a policeman."

Tomínova believes that the current wave of repression has come in three parts: "the first was the arrest of Rudolph Batteki. In 1981 he was sentenced to seven and a half years (the harshest sentence we've had in decades). The second is the open police brutality. There have been beatings (and even torture) during interrogations."

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movement in the two countries was viewed by the regime as the primary danger," he says. "They have made it sufficiently clear that such meetings won't be tolerated."

In 1979, Jaroslav Sabata went to a Czechoslovakian border town to take part in a Charterist-KOR meeting. He was arrested, and according to Tomín, "they beat him terribly." Using his hand to indicate Sabata's short

The arrests in May of this year form the final part. "This is a very threatening sign," says Tomínova. "I would like people in Canada and the world to know about it."

"I am deeply thankful I was here and feel such things are terribly important. The conference should not be judged solely on its practical outcome but by the fact that people from different backgrounds came together."

Human rights pinpointed

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works or are forced to conform to anonymous, innocuous style and content in order to survive. In the Third World, illiteracy is often deliberately perpetuated as the surest guarantee of censorship. Here, it is apathy and ignorance which protect the status quo. As one poet said:

"In this country, I speak without fear, for nobody will ever hear."

This is the concept of repressive tolerance. It means that dissidence is officially tolerated because it can be so successfully drowned out by the disinterest or antipathy to thought of the vast, contented majority. It also allows the government to refrain from suppressing extreme views which tend to counterbalance or pre-occupy serious exponents of social and political reform. So it is that we see bigots flourishing in the letter pages of the *Sun* and *Star* and the Moral Majority, Nazis and KKK.

In concluding, the congress expressed its opinion that the greatest threat to human rights is the suppression of the right to criticize and openly express new ideas about the reform of our iniquitous economic and political systems. Without freedom of expression, no matter how that freedom is denied, governments will suppress other rights and be able to get away with it. It is the duty, therefore, of writers to resist complacency, to resist the temptation to join the establishment and to fight against the degradation of longing to be loved. Writers, in the words of American writer Richard Howard, must not be afraid to make themselves hated. Only by remaining contentious and critical can they make the public conscious of the problems which threaten human welfare and dignity everywhere in the world. The writers at this congress at least were unanimous in committing themselves to that struggle.

Mongo Beti

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demonstration of tradition? But then why did Senghor marry a white woman after he wrote so much praise for the Black woman in his famous poem? There are these inconsistencies with Negritude you see... "Look," he said, passionately waving his hands, "I am Black objectively, that is part of my being. Negritude is a false philosophy. It in no way defines me and I am in no way in agreement with Senghor. In fact, I totally disassociate myself from him."

"The African writer," he concluded, "is of necessity engaged, dangerous, subversive, but not everyone is committed to the cause of the masses. It is a choice you make."

Exiled from his country since 1959, Mongo Beti seems comfortable with his situation of ambiguity and the attendant agony. France, it seems, remains the geographical 'home'.

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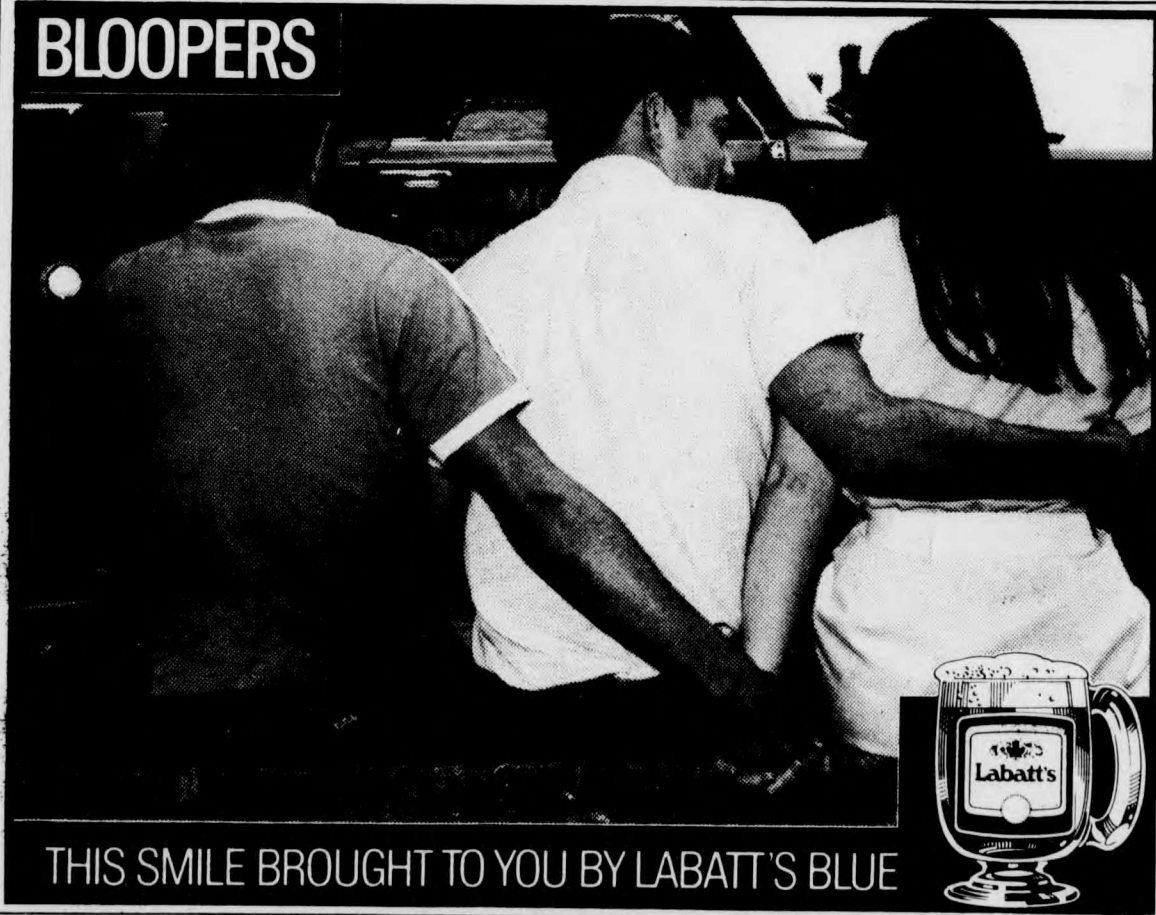
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