

# PEN fights to free women's thoughts

by Moira MacDonald

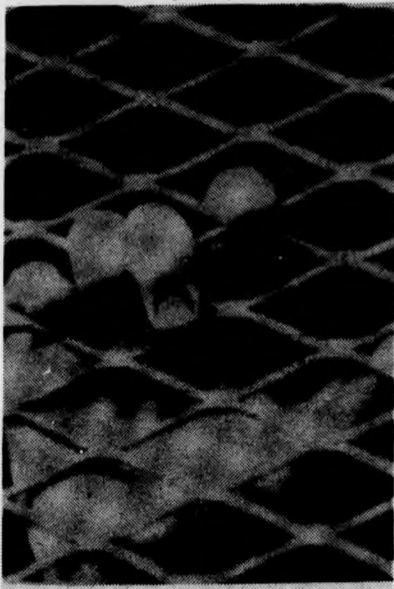
The writers are as high-profile as Burmese Nobel prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi and as faceless as a 25 year-old Tibetan Buddhist nun known only as Kunsang. Some have written as little as a political pamphlet, some have written volumes of books, or are editors of newspapers. All share the experience of political imprisonment by governments threatened by their ability to express their beliefs through the written word. And all share this experience as women.

Imprisoned women writers are in the minority, compared to their male colleagues. Case files compiled in Fall 1991 by International PEN, a world-wide writers' organization which defends writers' rights of expression, showed that out of 323 writers who were either in prison or facing restrictions, only 20 were women.

Jan Bauer, director of the Canadian PEN centre provides one explanation for the disparity, saying that in atmospheres of political oppression, "women are more inclined to mind their own business" and that it is only when "circumstances are ineluctable" that some decide to take action.

According to Bauer, the decision has much to do "with the preoccupations... (and) the role of women in society." In many countries the opportunity for women to write is rare in itself. For those few women who do write, responsibilities such as raising children, taking care of a home and a husband, even obtaining clean water make political risk-taking a non-option.

PEN cases of women who have found circumstances "ineluctable" come from around the globe although the greatest concentration is in countries with absolute regimes or quasi-democracies. The



organization is investigating several cases of women journalists in China who have been arrested and confined on largely ambiguous charges. Turkey, although recognized as a democracy, also has a high record of human rights abuses. PEN cases from that country include that of Fatma Yazici, a female editor convicted in 1990 for (among other charges) publishing the Helsinki Watch Committee report on rights abuses against Kurds in Turkey; and that of Ulker Karayel, a journalism student who is reported to still be in prison after being arrested and later tortured for participating in a Labour Day demonstration in May 1991.

Torture is a common feature in political detentions. But for women there is another aspect, says Jan Bauer: "Rape is a given when a woman is arrested... they are spared nothing." Bauer says the first 72 hours after an arrest are critical "...it's when the worst things happen." Periodic torture can continue for the next one to two weeks. Sometimes a reprieve is granted only to have the torture suddenly resumed again, as

retribution for an external anti-government act.

According to Bauer, writers are not jailed so much for their writings as for their beliefs and associations; "they just belong to the wrong group" she says. What makes politically active writers a threat is that their opinions may sooner or later be transferred through the pen. In atmospheres of repression "journalists are the first to go," says Bauer, followed by poets, novelists and playwrights.

Aung San Suu Kyi from Burma (Myanmar) is one such writer. Suu Kyi had published several works including children's books prior to becoming Secretary-General of Burma's National League for Democracy — now banned by the government — in late 1980. Her political activities led to Suu Kyi being placed under house arrest in July 1989. She is

still under detention despite being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1990.

Maria Elena Cruz, a 37-year-old Cuban writer and poet was sentenced last November to two years in a maximum security prison after publishing a letter with other Cuban intellectuals which included calls for talks on direct elections to the National Assembly, dropping of travel restrictions and release of political prisoners. Cruz was also a member of an independent political analysis group and in March 1991 was expelled from the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, presumably for her political activities.

Political associations also affect the female partners of male writers facing repression. These women, Bauer says, "suffer equally... often they can't hold a job... they spend most of their time

trying to get the gut out... keeping the family together." She adds that "they are subject to surveillance and intimidation."

The horror can extend to male writer's female colleagues. Bauer relates the story of the secretary of a Peruvian journalist facing governmental harassment. One day she received a package for her boss. When she opened the package it blew up in her face, killing her.

The fundamental principal behind PEN, says Bauer, is that "you have the right to express yourself and the right to enquiry... and it could happen to us tomorrow." However, Bauer adds, it is sometimes hard for her not to feel special empathy for the plights of her female colleagues facing severest repression. She expresses her personal philosophy towards these cases in simple yet eloquent terms: "She is I and I am she."

## Some men finally reject violence

by Sheona Jarvis

Men are finally organizing to oppose rape — an issue women have been struggling against for years.

Rape is a crime of violence, a crime motivated primarily by the desire to control and dominate rather than by the desire for sexual gratification. Traditionally in our society it is males who are socialized to be the aggressors, the dominators, the controllers, and females who are socialized to be passive, submissive and to accept patterns of male violence as the norm. It is from this sex-role stereotype that many acts of rape emerge.

Whether a woman is raped by someone she knows or not, the fact still remains that control of her body, her sexuality and her right of choice has been taken away from her by the male aggressor.

Up until recently, the onus has been on women to protect themselves against rape. Women have been forced to become virtual prisoners in their own society. They fear to walk alone at night, to go anywhere unaccompanied, they are compelled to watch what they wear, who they see, what they say in order to not "bring" the rape upon themselves.

On university campuses all over Canada, women are put in danger in residences, classrooms and offices; many are afraid to stay on campus at night.

Encouragingly, more and more men are becoming involved in men's groups aimed at supporting the women who are fighting back against rape.

Jim Ducker, a member of the University of Toronto men's forum, said in his group men are examining the issue of violence against women. Through discussions, seminars and workshops they are addressing issues that men have traditionally been silent about, such as sexism in the classroom.

Metro Men Against Violence is another men's group that is looking at the ways in which men can address problems of rape and sexism. "We are a group of men who seek ways of challenging and developing alternatives to individual and social expressions of violence, primarily but not solely against women," said Eric Malmsten, a member of the Toronto-based group.

Sharon Chimming of York's Sexual Harassment Education and Complaint Centre described the emergence of these men's groups as encouraging and necessary.

"Men organizing against violence against women is fairly new," she said. "For the most part there are a lot of men who haven't thought about the issues a lot," but "It's important for men to be able to say this is inappropriate."

SHEACC does seminars on campus in which men and women are divided into separate groups and asked to complete sentences (such as - "I feel threatened when..."). Chimming said this "hits home that men and women have very different experiences and attitudes."

For this reason, and because "some men won't listen unless it comes from another man," SHEACC is setting up a Peer Education Project for next fall which will use a male and a female student representative in each college to organize events and awareness projects. The program will be "students educating students," according to Chimming, and will be geared to changing attitudes towards rape and

other acts of violence.

Many men became aware of the need to oppose violence against women in the wake of Dec. 6, 1989, when 14 women were murdered at a Montreal university. Last Dec. 6, men organized the White Ribbon Campaign, where they wore white ribbons in solidarity with women in opposition to rape and misogynist violence.

Michael Kaufman, a professor at York who was one of the founders of the White Ribbon Campaign said that while it may not seem as if things are changing all that quickly, we are entering a new era of openness and understanding.

"The Montreal Massacre was a real turning point for men. The sheer horror of that event galvanized Canada. For the first time hundreds of thousands of men were forced to look at the levels of violence against women," Kaufman said.

"While not all men are violent, virtually all men are silent and by their silence have allowed the violence to continue. The significance of things such as the white ribbon campaign is that men have begun to break that silence."

## International Women's Week recovery from discovery

A fundraising event supporting native women's groups  
in Ontario and Quebec.

at the Rivoli

### Wednesday, March 4

- Snowdogs
- The Matrophiles
- Sarah Peebles & Helen Dryz.

### Thursday, March 5

- Celtic Gales
- Cate Friesen Trio
- Rebecca Barclay

### Friday, March 6

- New Black Nation
- Gloria Blizzard & the Wind
- Rose Stella
- Tisa Farrell
- Brian Wright McLeod
- Brend Baker

\* All events at 9:00pm. \$7.00 a night/\$10.00 two night pass at Toronto Women's Book Store, Pages, or Another Story.

### At The Underground: Friday, March 6

FEMFEST '92 Sheila Gostic & Mourning Sickness  
with Random Order

### Saturday, March 7

- 6:30am Sunrise ceremony Queen's Park
- 8:30am Potluck breakfast Trinity St. Paul Centre
- 11:30am The March From Native Canadian Centre
- 12:30pm Rally Queen's Park to Ryerson
- 1-5:00pm Fair Ryerson, Jorgerson Hall
- 6:30pm Evening social & dance St. Lawrence Market North Hall

### what men can do

- Refuse to accept traditional male stereotypes which view men as the aggressors, controllers, or dominators
- Understand that not "scoring" is OK and doesn't make you less of a man. Resist peer pressure.
- Understand that no really does mean no, no matter how it is expressed, and that it is a person's right to say no at any point in time no matter how far the physical intimacy has progressed
- Understand that it is never OK to force a woman into sexual relations no matter what you think she wants or whether you've had sex before
- Communicate honestly what you expect from a relationship, sexually and emotionally
- Do not assume you know what your partner wants or that you both want the same degree of intimacy
- Work at actively changing attitudes in society. Speak out against violence against women. Get involved.

### what women can do

- Refuse to accept the female stereotype which depicts women as passive or submissive. Decide for yourself how you want to view male and female gender roles and how you want to be viewed.
- Understand that it is always your right to say no, no matter what the circumstances
- Be in charge of your life by practicing assertive behaviour. Resolve not to be passive to physical intimacy that you do not want to accept
- Recognize that all men do not rape and do not perpetrate violence against women. While there are certain patterns of aggression that may or may not indicate a tendency towards violence in any particular individual, men are not innately violent
- Understand that the responsibility of confronting violence against women belongs to both males and females
- Work at actively changing attitudes in society. Speak out against violence against women. Get involved.

