

# WOMEN WRITERS AND SOCIETY

## Dorothy Livesay

From my comfortable country, English Canada, *laughter: Denise Boucher from Quebec embraces me* I have heard the delegate's plea from Peru for women writers everywhere to take a stand against poverty, suppression of free speech, arrest without trial, torture. I sympathize. Woman's voice needs to be heard on these issues. And I am reminded of the fine poems written by the young Canadian poet, Patricia Lowther, on behalf of Chile. She is dead now but her words, "For Allende," ring on. Our Quebec delegate has spoken of the fact that no Canadian Native Indian women writers were invited to this conference. It seems we are faced not so much with apathy, as with thoughtlessness. We stick to our own concerns: destruction of the environment, alienation, the new roles women are taking on in social and family life, in politics; and we fail to speak out against world problems: starvation and hunger, repression, designs for nuclear war.

In Canada it was not always so. During the depression of the 1930s these issues were in the fore and women participated in writing to expose them. As an activist I wrote about the breadlines in Montreal and Toronto, trade union struggles with the police, the deplorable condition of Indian families at Caughnawaugha, the lock-outs in company towns all the way west, the plight of unemployed single men. A young poet in Victoria visited Saskatchewan during the drought and depression years and wrote a most moving documentary poem, "The Wind Our Enemy;" a young journalist from the same city, Irene Baird, marched to the parliament buildings with the single unemployed men and wrote a novel about that trek: Waste Heritage. In those days, women were deeply concerned, especially about unemployment and the arms race.

Then the Second World War came; women rushed into industry and unionism, never again to be merely "homemakers." But they did not develop a political conscience until now, the end of the seventies. And women writers in Canada today are more concerned with feminism, with equal pay and equal rights, with the search for woman's identity as a human person, than they are concerned with society as a whole and where it is heading. For myself, now towards the end of my life, I still hope that women will wake up to their responsibilities to society and to humankind. I agree uncompromisingly

with Simone de Beauvoir, who has written of her discovery that her "destiny was bound to that of all other people; freedom, oppression, the happiness and misery of men was a matter of intimate concern to me."

## IS THERE A FEMININE VOICE IN LITERATURE

Mariam Waddington

I don't know if there is a characteristic feminine voice in literature but there is a feminine view of life and certainly a content that arises out of feminine experience. When it came to electing Colette to the French Academy, one academician objected saying that she had written about nothing: just love. This objection tells us two things. First, that the masculine ideology which has shaped our world has always interpreted feminine psychology according to its own masculine principles and needs. These principles have consistently undervalued feeling and overvalued facts. Masculine ideology has also confused intuition--which is nothing more nor less than the logic of our complex emotions--with superstition, which has always only been a way of placating fear.

