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BOOKS



Newsweek—Robert R. McElroy

Neruda (left) and Miller: For peace, poetry and the reasonable man

P.E.N. Pals

Poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, novelists (hence the name of the organization)—some 600 P.E.N. delegates from most of the 56 member countries in all parts of the world descended on Manhattan Island last week for the 34th International P.E.N. Congress, the first congress to convene in the United States in 42 years. It was, said American P.E.N. president Lewis Galantière, “a scandal” that so long a time had elapsed since the U.S. had last played host to the world’s writers. Magnitude compensated in part for tardiness: it was, Galantière said, the “largest, most numerous encounter ever assembled between U.S. and foreign writers.”

P.E.N. was founded in 1921 “to promote world understanding, to defend free expression within and between all nations and to maintain friendship and intellectual cooperation among men and women of letters of all countries.” The P.E.N. charter of 1948 pledges its members to “do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds” and to defend “the principle of unhampered transmission of thought.” And, in 1966, freedom is still the theme.

**Regrets:** London-based David Carver, International P.E.N.’s general secretary, had recently returned from a visit to the Soviet Union, where he had appealed on behalf of P.E.N.’s members for clemency for recently imprisoned writers Sinyavsky and Daniel. To further strain the atmosphere, six Soviet “observers,” who had been scheduled to attend, cabled their regrets at the last moment, without explanation, as did the Czech delegation. (All other East European Communist nations were represented.)

While deploring the Soviet action, International P.E.N. president, playwright Arthur Miller, pointed out that Russia

was not the sole source of sin. “P.E.N.’s Writers-in-Prison Committee,” Miller said, “never lacks customers. Portuguese writers are in prison. The Spanish Center of P.E.N. was suppressed by Franco. Franco has tried to suppress the Catalan language and culture.” Still, Miller told NEWSWEEK, “the Russians made a mistake—originally by naming an obscure delegation, without a single first-rate writer, and then by missing this chance to come out of the icebox.”

On a jammed boat party around Manhattan, politics was momentarily absorbed by the din of amplified electric guitars and folk-rock singers. Japanese novelist-poet-critic Sei Ito, seeking refuge in a corner of the upper deck, said: “This is wonderful. Wonderful. A chance to make friendship with foreign writers. That is the important thing.” And he added with unconcealed delight: “I’m the Japanese translator of ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Lady Chatterley’s Lover,’ and I wish to say I was indicted and fined before any of you were.”

**Corpse:** Tomi Ungerer, the savagely satiric caricaturist and writer, exulted in the congress. “I like P.E.N.,” he said. “What can be better than bringing people together? The New York literary establishment could use some of that.” The Alsace-born American artist, who travels on a French passport and works in the seamy heart of 42nd Street (after the word “American” on his delegate’s badge, he had inked in a question mark) added, “I couldn’t do a mean drawing tonight. I feel too good.” Not everyone was happy. “I am a corpse,” said expatriated Soviet novelist Valeriy Tarsis. “I am bored with my life.”

After the parties were over, the hangovers had subsided and the echoes of official messages from President Johnson, Governor Rockefeller and Mayor Lindsay had died away, the congress got