

THE CANADIAN CENTRE

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NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by June Callwood

You must know by now that the 54th International PEN World Congress, held in Toronto and Montreal, was a huge success from every aspect: almost the biggest in PEN's history and with a clutch of firsts -- first to have a fifty percent representation of women, first to invite Third World writers, most racially integrated. It distinguished itself as well by finishing in the black. The first meeting of the new Board of Directors was stunned and delighted when the peerless executive director Jan Bauer reported that we are not in debt.

Much credit goes to her for shrewd and careful minding of our resources and for the accuracies of her projections, and also to the tireless, devoted, soon-exhausted people such as David McIntosh, Sarah Thring, Nigel Hunt and Christina Hartling who were recruited as the deadline approached and panic became the daily bread. Also, as PEN archives will show for all posterity, the unflappable and resourceful president Graeme Gibson saved the ship a hundred times. John Ralston Saul, Greg Gatenby and Eugene Benson worked their heads off. Medals all around, please.

You should know that The Canadian Centre (English-speaking) has a new name. When the Congress ended in Montreal, Le Centre francophone canadien decided to change its name to Le Centre québécois. This leaves it possible for us to be, simply, The Canadian Centre.

The new Board of Directors faces two responsibilities, which are somewhat interdependent. One is to establish core funding to enable the Canadian Centre to continue paying the rent on the office at 24 Ryerson and retain the services of professional staff. The 54th International Congress found us so well organized within the PEN family -- one of only a few centres, for instance, to have a computer -- that we have begun to play a significant role on the international scene. This eminence and prestige enables us to be particularly helpful in developing PEN's Writer in Prison programs and we don't want to regress. Accordingly the Board must find the funds to pay administrative costs. Graeme Gibson, as ever, has sixteen spiffy ideas and if they don't work he'll come up with sixteen more.

The other major goal is to establish Censorwatch, and efforts already are underway to draft a fresh new proposal and seek support.

Finally, we have had two resignations from the Board of Directors. Libby Oughton is travelling until next spring and therefore can't remain on the Board, alas, and Phyllis Grosskurth finds that pressure of work makes it impossible for her to remain. One of the two vacancies was filled by the election of Alison Gordon.

The protest group outside the Gala at Roy Thomson Hall has been asking for the resignation of the new president. If sufficient numbers of members agree (25) an emergency general meeting can be called to vote on this. Meanwhile, we have tidied the office and we sail sturdily into a still-uncertain future.

Leonid Lubman (in prison): c/o his father at SSSR/RSFSR, Leningrad 197101, ul. Podkovirova 4/36, c/o Jacob Lubman, Leonid Lubham, USSR

Doan Quoc Sy (in prison): Labour Camp Z30A, Xuanloc, Dongnau, Vietnam

Adem Demaci (in prison): KPO Stara Gradiska, 55400 Stara Gradiska, Croatia, Yugoslavia

Liu Qing (in prison): Lianhua Temple, Hua Country, Shaanxi Province, People's Republic of China

Ivan Jirous (in prison): c/o his wife, Juliana Jirousova, 588 67 Stara Rise 33, Czechoslovakia.

Yacov Ben Efrat (in prison): Kfar Yonah, Ashmoret Prison, PO Box 86, Natanya 42100, Israel

Jack Mapanje (in prison): The Ntcheu District Hospital, Private Bag 5, Ntcheu, Malawi

Jaki Seroke (in prison): c/o D Mokgatle, Litigation Officer, Black Lawyers' Association, 2nd Floor, Manchester House, 68 Von Wielligh Street (Corner Pritchard), Johannesburg 2001, South Africa

Veliswa Mhlawuli (awaiting trial): c/o P.O. Box 1161, Cape Town 8000, South Africa

REPORT ON THE 54TH INTERNATIONAL PEN WORLD CONGRESS

by Graeme Gibson

So it has been done, the Congress is finished and we came in somewhat under budget. The Press book is a satisfying tome of 160 pages and virtually all other feedback has been positive. The management committee and staff are still talking to one another. Winter is on its way and life in the centre struggles back to normal...

And yet, and yet - the Congress itself remains something of a blur. Most of us who were involved have only a partial sense of what actually happened. At one end of the spectrum we know, for example, that Blanche d'Alpuget was bitten by a squirrel, and that Nayantara Saghal's luggage vanished and then reappeared; and at the other end, more than six hundred PEN members, and special guests, from something like 65 countries, and all 10 provinces as well as the Canadian North, spent a week with us and then went home.

So what to make of it all?

It is clear that a number of our initiatives proved to be important and innovative - and fun:

- 1) The special, and far-ranging, two day meeting of the Writers in Prison committee, which preceded the Assembly of Delegates, did much to clear the air and set priorities. As a result it was of great benefit to PEN as a whole.
- 2) The Next Generation component, in which we brought 16 writers (all under 35, some "experimental", and many of them aboriginal and/or minority language writers), from 11 countries, was exciting. The energy and freshness of their contribution left PEN with an opportunity and challenge that must be pursued.
- 3) With financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) we were able to invite delegates or observers from 12 countries who, in most cases, have never been represented at a PEN Congress. For obvious reasons PEN centres, or other organizations, in these countries can't afford the airfare. As a result our Congress had, relatively speaking of course, a wider and more representative base than many.
- 4) We hope that our commitment to the equal participation of women writers, not only from North America and Europe, but also from Latin America, Africa and Asia, has put to rest the calumny that it can't be done. Nor is this just a matter of principle. Much of the style and authority of the proceedings resulted from the equitable and representative mix that we achieved.

You will note I think, that all of the above achievements embody most of the on-going preoccupations that our centre has been advocating within PEN. It must be said, of course, that we have to work with other like-minded centres, and the international office, to ensure these kinds of initiatives find a permanent home within PEN's structure, habits and deliberations.

The Congress also represents a peculiarly Canadian achievement in that it was organized and shared, with good will and diplomacy on both sides, by the English and French-speaking centres of Canadian PEN.

Anyway. So much for the public face of the event. We were also, and equally importantly, involved in the proceedings of the Assembly of Delegates. Suffice it to say we were pleased with how things unfolded here as well. Following this report you will find the texts of resolutions dealt with by the Assembly of Delegates.

I want to make it very clear there is no ritual duty involved, nor any reservation, when on behalf of all of you I thank and congratulate our remarkable Congress staff. It is true that I have a passing weakness for hyperbole, but it would be understatement to say we were blessed with a remarkably inventive and dedicated, hard-working, politically smart and (on the whole), patient and (from time to time), cheerful bunch of people.

Then there are the more than one hundred volunteers who met delegates at the airport and hotel, who helped in various offices and venues, and in fighting the inescapable brush fires that accompany events such as ours. We are both grateful and touched by their generosity.

Our thanks as well to the almost 120 of our members, from all regions of the country, who attended the proceedings. Without you it would have been an artificial affair.

It's been a long haul and it's not finished yet. What with reports, acknowledgements, follow-ups and a final accounting - not to mention the tactical considerations and responsibilities that emerged from the meetings - there is much yet to be done.

Obviously the Congress will have enhanced our presence within International PEN. This strengthened position is accompanied, however, by a similar increase in responsibility. International PEN is growing, becoming more diverse. Welcoming this we also recognize change is a tricky business, and needs to be shepherded diplomatically. And that's not all: the organization needs a sounder financial base and structure.

As a result of all this I believe that our centre can't afford to return to its relatively simple and under-funded pre-Congress days - not if we want to maintain a useful role within PEN. There is valuable work to be done and obviously the Canadian writing community has a constructive part to play.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

**An ANTHOLOGY OF NEW INTERNATIONAL POETRY & SHORT PROSE
by PEN members.**

Send quality unpublished poetry & short prose...with short bio. to
Mona Fertig; editor, 4708-45th Ave. Ladner B.C. V4K 1J8, CANADA.

Submissions must be in English. Please enclose SASE or International Reply Coupons or work will not be returned. Editorial Board to be announced. Sale of Anthology will go toward International PEN, The Canadian Centre.

DEADLINE: SEPT. 1, 1990

*Mona Fertig is a poet and member of PEN & The League of Canadian Poets. She has published 8 books of poetry and most recently edited, "A LABOUR OF LOVE", an Anthology of poetry on pregnancy and childbirth.
Polestar Press.*