

Writers Appeal Post 7, 1966

The Soviet government will be embarrassed, and rightly so, by today's appeal from more than 100 American "members of an international community of letters." They ask that the labor-camp sentences of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel be commuted so that the two can pursue "their profession as writers."

The incarceration of these men, for smuggling out manuscripts which could not have passed party censorship in Moscow, was a narrow retrogressive act which has cost the Soviet leaders far more in confidence at home and esteem abroad than it has gained them in control. The act was a mistake, a futile effort to muzzle two honest writers and intimidate their substantial and growing "constituency." It was a mistake, too, in that it has actively antagonized many foreigners, including Western Communists, otherwise indifferent or sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

How unflattering that Russia should put on a public display of anti-intellectualism just as China, on a much grander scale, is doing the same. Split as they are, the two countries together guard a minority's monopoly of political power and together share a fear of men who speak and write as they please. It is even more unbecoming that the Communist country most feted for its liberality and intellectual liveliness, Yugoslavia, should keep Milovan Djilas in jail.