

temalan issue.

Many were sending money to then president Efraín Ríos Montt—a fervent evangelist Christian.

"A lot of people thought he was really great. A lot of the Christian community in North America thought he was God's gift to anti-communism," he said. "But it was his army out there doing the sins."

They (Christians) always waited until the end of my concerts. They listened to everything and then they'd want to get in the last word. They always said something like 'what about Christian unity?' as if it was more important than the effect of his policies on people's lives."

Montt was toppled by a coup about six weeks after Cockburn's tour, and was succeeded by another general—Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores.

"Now there's a general that has no pretensions of being anything but a general," he said.

From the Guatemalan refugee camps the tour went on to Nicaragua.

"If the refugee camps represented the worst of the status quo in Central America, Nicaragua was at the opposite pole—at least in terms of potential."

When Cockburn arrived in Managua he was surprised to find an ad in the paper stating he was doing a show the next day.

"I wanted to make it a purely investigative trip," he said, "but the government saw us as artists and sort of thought it must be some kind of cultural tour."

"It's going to be a long time before the Guatemalan army turns into bunch of nice guys..."

"Fortunately we had brought guitars. I was really nervous. I had never played to an audience that didn't know my music and that didn't speak English before."

Cockburn was rotated about different neighbourhoods on various evenings to play street corner concerts.

"Managua is an interesting city because it doesn't have any downtown. It had been completely destroyed by the earthquake in the early 70's. It was never rebuilt because Somoza took the relief money that was sent from all over the world and put it in his pocket. The downtown looked like an atomic war 50 years later. So we ended up playing these neighbourhoods."

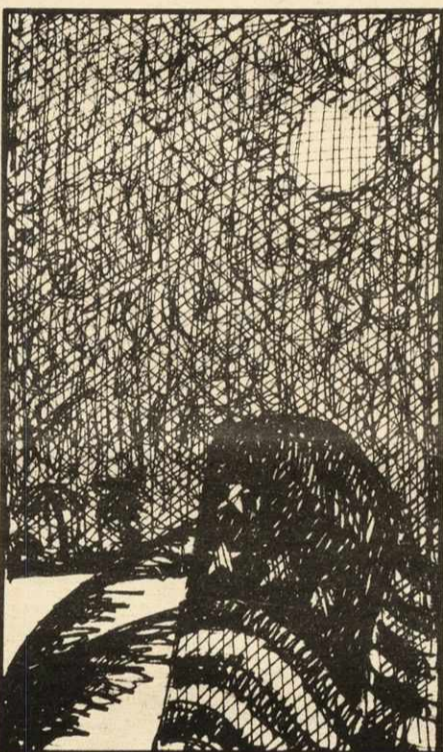
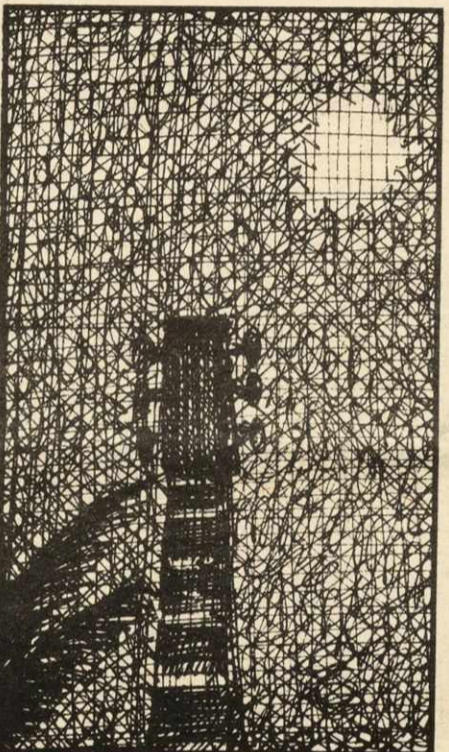
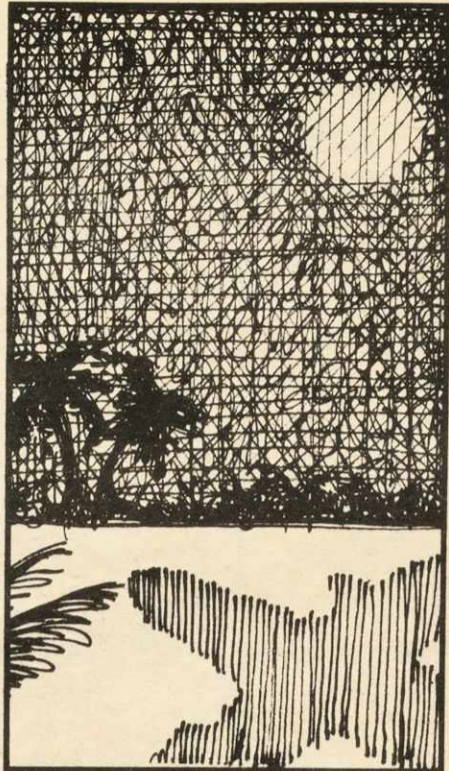
Each evening a crew would come along and set up a P.A. system on a street corner. While this was going on a little Volkswagen with a speaker on top would circulate around the neighbourhood announcing the concert.

"By 7 p.m. a big crowd of kids and old people and all kinds of individuals would be sitting there. Somebody would make a speech, there'd be the chanting of a few revolutionary slogans, and then we'd play," he said.

Cockburn said things were a little more conventional in the middle class neighbourhoods.

"What the shows did for us in the end was they gave us a real in to talking to people, because we were in their neighbourhoods putting on a show. That in turn made them very curious about us. They'd come up to us and say things like 'where is Canada anyway?' and they'd want to know what we thought of the revolution. We got a good cross-section of the people's views this way."

During the day they met with people from church organizations, the police, military, the local defense committees, women's organizations, medical people



"Somebody would make a speech, there'd be the chanting of a few revolutionary slogans, and then we'd play."

and other groups.

"We had originally submitted a list of things to do and people we wanted to meet, places we wanted to go and that sort of thing. They had done their best to arrange a timetable for us and they had done a pretty good job, only with a few glaring holes"—the legal opposition.

"I was afraid of a guided tour of the sights of Sandinism."

As it turned out the opposition refused to talk to officials from the government, making it impossible to set up meetings in advance.

The tour eventually set up an interview with the editor of *La Prensa*—a long time opponent of the Sandinista government.

Their travels throughout Nicaragua included a farming community closer to the southern border with Costa Rica. They played with local musicians in a house about the size of a hotel room. Normally three families lived there.

"It gets dark there very quickly. There were no lights so we were sitting in the dark with the occasional flair of matches when somebody lit a cigarette. While sitting there after dinner having a couple of beers, one guy kept on humming a song asking me if I knew it. It was nagging at my head. I could sort of recognize it."

"He said 'you know, you know, los Beatles, los Beatles—it turned out he was humming 'I Want To Hold Your Hand!'"

Cockburn said that artists and culture played a huge part in the revolutionary process.

"I've never seen anything like the amount of interest in poetry, theatre, music and visual arts among such a broad cross-section of people. Every town, every military unit, every organization had its own theatre group. They put on plays regularly and they were usually satirical."

Cockburn said during a national festival of these plays, one group put on a very pointed skit critical of a local Sandinista official. After the play, some of the government junta members went to the

people and asked them if their criticisms were true. The theatre group concurred and the official was fired.

"The plays were not only a form of artistic expression, but also a means of communicating with each other and focusing their feelings and thoughts—which I guess is what art is all about."

"The impression I got out of it (the trip) is that the majority of people have benefited so much from the revolution. They're so solidly behind it they're trying to do so much with so little."

Former dictator Anastasio Somoza had looted the national treasury before fleeing Nicaragua and left the country with enormous debts.

The U.S. has continually blocked Nicaragua from borrowing money in the international money markets. In addition they have tried to discourage countries from trading with Nicaragua and armed the rebel "contras" in their war of destabilization against the Sandinistas.

"It's just so sad to see they're (the U.S.) wasting everybody's time and energy and lives and everything else. It's such a stupid policy. How can you expect the Sandinistas to do anything but cozy up to Russia if you cut them off from all their other sources of supply?"

"Then they'll (the U.S.) turn around and say we had to waste them because they were too close to the Soviet Union. That's exactly what's happening. What they're destroying is one of the best attempts at setting up an equitable, moral and pluralistic society. It's obviously a humanitarian type of government. Yet the more pressure that gets put on them the less that will show—they'll have to keep the lid down because otherwise too many people will be killed. They're doing a good job keeping that from happening."

Cockburn said the social order of the world is going to have to eventually change.

"We can't continue to live like parasites on the rest of the world forever."

Cockburn agreed the biggest fear the Americans have of Nicaragua is that other countries in the region may want to emulate it—"just like the American revolution spread to Europe," he said.

"It's such tragic hypocrisy. It's obvious to anybody who looks that's the case. Somehow not enough people look—especially in Canada. Canadians have a tendency to kind of sit back. We don't even support each other. How many people from Ontario came down for the Cape Breton spraying?"

"My hope is that there would be enough pressure generated somewhere that would see a change (in Central America) without too much more violence—but it's going to be a long time before the Guatemalan army turns into a bunch of nice guys."

Meanwhile Cockburn continues to sing about it, doing what he can in concert auditoriums rather than lecture halls.

"The anger's natural. You can't be confronted by those kinds of things and not get angry. It's not necessarily the best way to accomplish things, but it's my job to write about what's really there. The anger is really there."

"I've got a faith, and I know what my faith is—but now what do I do about it in relation to the rest of the world? What does Christian love mean? In the world it doesn't mean sitting around and watching your neighbours starve to death, that's for sure."

In those bitter songs Cockburn leaves his characteristic trademark—an ounce of hopefulness.

"That hope that seems to be in Nicaragua—one I guess that is really through the world—but that hope we can all latch on to is pretty tenuous. It's a very fragile thing."

But then again Bruce Cockburn is going up against chaos.