

Cockburn solos at Cohn

by Christopher Elson

"All of these songs have changed from the band context, some more than others." With this introduction to the song "Stolen Land", Bruce Cockburn summed up the central fact of his December 11 concert at the Rebecca Cohn

For those of us who have come to care about Cockburn's songs relatively recently — since the late nineteen-seventies when he began his collaboration with gifted Toronto commercial/fusion musicians such as Hugh and Fergus Marsh, Kathryn Moses, John Goldsmith, etc. — the abrupt shift back to a solo format proved somewhat shocking. Comments overheard from younger elements of the audience included "It was all right" and "I liked him better with a band". Others, call them

the more seasoned fans, seemed to welcome the return of the shy, introspective bard.

Cockburn delivered fine, if not particularly inspired or innovative, versions of his songs, from "One Day I Walk" (1970) to as yet unreleased pieces written during the past year. That this was possible at all speaks volumes about the importance of the *songwriting*; there are few concessions to pop music's fashions, just a sincere attention to thoughtful lyrics and music.

Indeed, many early songs from the so-called "acoustic period", such as "All the Diamonds in the World", worked beautifully on electric guitar(s), with the sounds produced (including a hint of digital delay) nicely complementing the strident yet somehow placid vocals of Cockburn.

Interestingly enough, his more recent songs, electric in concept, failed to survive the reductive move to solo performance. Even performed on electric guitar with the discreet use of delay/sampling and some percussion (played with the feet), certain songs did not make the transition. "Lovers in a Dangerous Time", stripped of the contribution of other musicians, proved to be an uncomfortable low point in the show.

As always, Cockburn's musicianship was impressive. Frequently he would provide a minimal but essential bass-line with his thumb on the guitar while singing the melody and, at the same time, harmonizing on the guitar with his remaining fingers, overtly (as in "How I Spent My Fall Vacation") or more subtly ("To Raise the Morning Star"). It was clear, too, that the

absence of a rhythm section in no way indicated the rhythmic pulse was of lesser importance. Cockburn's legs pounded metronomically, evidence of the urgency of the beat. A greater attention to dynamics and more risk-taking in solos would have made the concert more emotionally satisfying: in this respect, the lack of a band was sorely felt.

The more recent songs included some written in Nepal during a USC-sponsored visit there in May of last year. "I Don't Feel Your Touch Again", a love song, made use of some Himalayan imagery. Cockburn also performed "The Gospel of Bondage," a stong anti-fundamentalist statement.

These newer songs revealed the same sorts of tensions that have been present throughout Cockburn's career: tensions

between the personal and the political, between urban and rural, between electric and acoustic instruments, between ecstasy and outrage. It is perhaps significant that the choice of songs seemed to emphasize the more detached, contented side of Cockburn's writing (through possibly necessitated by the solo approach).

The last selection of the 7 p.m. show was "Down Here Tonight", with the words "we're doing o.k. down here tonight."

One hopes, or rather, one expects, this profoundly Christian songwriter will not neglect the spark that other bring to his art, and that, musically speaking at least, this vaguely unsatisfying solo concert will prove to be evidence of a transition rather than a new musical destination.

No immigrants, please, we're Canada

Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration
by Reg Whitaker
Lester & Orpen Dennys
Hardcover, 384 p., \$24.95

by Stephen Shay

If there is one event that will always pull me back to the summer of 1987, it is the arrival of 174 Asians on the coast of Nova Scotia.

Their landing at a small fishing village on the southeast coast created waves that were felt around the world. In the media flurry that followed their arrival, one image stands out and haunts my memory.

The Sikhs were to be brought to Halifax to determine their status as potential immigrants. They arrived by the busloads at CFB Shearwater, a military base in the city's north end. Greeting the confused people (they thought they could get cabs to Toronto) was a man in his early twenties. He held up a large sign and shouted invectives as the buses pulled in. His homemade sign, which he proudly displayed for the media present, read "Go Home Trash". Even if they couldn't read the sign, his message was all too clear.

There were a lot of questions being asked by a lot of people,

but the only one that came to my mind was, What made this man react this way? Was it anger? Anger prompted by what? Fear? Fear prompted by ignorance? This seemed like a reasonable answer to settle for, but it was most unsettling.

Why was it virtually unknown that we hadn't even met the quota of immigrants set by the federal government for 1986, let alone 1987? Why would most Canadians tell you these immigrants were stealing our jobs when documented reports show they actually create jobs? Why would our government make immigration laws tougher when they were the first to defend the benefits of a cultural mosaic?

The answer to these questions is a simple yet frightening one: our government has always intentionally kept the issue of immigration out of the public's reach.

With documents obtained through the new Access to Information Act, Reg. Whitaker uncovers the bleak story of the rise and evolution of Canada's immigration policy in his book *Double Standard*. To say it's not a pretty picture is an understatement.

Whitaker presents a history of immigration policy that was

tainted from the beginning with the fears of national security.

Most of our present policy was shaped by the hysteria generated by the Cold War. In retrospect, we can see how exaggerated our fears were, but this hasn't changed the policy of screening potential immigrants to ensure that the 'undesirables' be kept out. Undesirables included union organizers, homosexuals, and above all, communists.

According to Whitaker, the interest of national security provided a respectable veil for the arbitrary immigration policies to hide behind. And arbitrary they are, since they were shaped more by the Security Intelligence and Review Committee and the RCMP than by our elected representatives in Ottawa. Both the SIRC and the RCMP are independent from the government regardless of which party is in power. With this in mind, it is understandable that our immigration laws resemble those of a police state more than they do a democratic one.

Whitaker presents case after case of just how arbitrary the immigration policies have been. Although hundreds of Britons were airlifted to Canada in the early '50s, it was difficult if not impossible for the French to gain entry, nominally because the Communist Party had more

strength in France than in Britain. It now seems ironic that the British were given preference, since some of these immigrants went on to become great union organizers in Canada's western provinces.

But the irony doesn't stop there. The same obsession with keeping communists out also made it easy for Nazi war criminals to get in. They were, after all, clearly not communist sympathizers. Although Whitaker points out that our alliance with NATO was also a contributing factor in the easy entrance of war criminals, it was the anti-communist hysteria that let their entry go unchecked.

The book, as the title suggests, is filled with secrets uncovered, secrets so distasteful they have been hidden from the public's scrutiny by classifying them in the interest of national security. They are not secrets that jeopardize our nationhood, but rather secrets that if told would shame us in the world community. Anti-Semitism hiding behind the "sacrosanct rubric of national security" is but one of these secrets.

Undoubtedly it was these secrets that enabled Canada to gain its world reputation as a haven of justice. Now that the secrets have been told, we can only be seen as hypocrites in the

eyes of the world.

Unfortunately, some of the secrets remain untold. Much of the report prepared by the infamous Dechenes Commission on War Criminals in Canada remains classified. Apparently some of its findings could, if revealed, cause our country to collapse under its own guilt. These findings would not change Whitaker's 'history', but they do show how questionable our policies must have been if they can't stand up to public scrutiny forty years after they were carried out.

Whitaker also provides us with glimpses of the men involved in shaping the immigration laws. None of these are particularly flattering but they provide insight into the workings of the immigration machine. Included is MacKenzie King's musings on the bombing of Hiroshima, an oblique explanation of why Japanese Canadians were interned during World War II.

Double Standard provides a lot of answers to questions that have been unanswered for years, but the most important question answered is why Canadians fear immigrants. The fear is caused by ignorance of the issue. And the ignorance of the issue has been government policy.