

Observation after Nicaragua visit

# 'Vietnamization' of Central America possible if Reagan wins — Comfort

by Gord Murray

Another four year term for President Ronald Reagan and his administration could mean the "Vietnamization" of Central America, Eldon Comfort fears.

Comfort, a Speyside area resident, has a burning interest in the Third World and international issues. Frequently he has travelled abroad to see if the picture we get in Canada of international hot spots and events is a true one, as he did last month to Nicaragua. Eldon is very heavily involved in the disarmament movement and programs through the United Church like Ten Days for World Development.

He says he doesn't know if Nicaragua and other small Central American nations can survive re-election of the Reagan team without the end result being a regional full-scale war.

In fact Comfort can see a scenario whereby American troops are involved too. He points out that the use of military advisors in Central America and tons of military aid to various factions in the region is just the way the whole Vietnam experience began.

Raids into Nicaragua by U.S. trained and equipped guerrillas from the old Somoza regime have stepped up from neighboring nations, Comfort observed. Raids used to consist of 30 to 40 men armed with light weapons, now these insurrections involve forces of 250 or more men with helicopter gunships and mortars.

Recent raids have been bids to occupy remote parts of the Nicaragua jungle, Comfort explained, and if they could occupy a portion of the country they could declare they'd formed a provisional government, a new

icaragua, and then call on the United States to help them keep the new country afloat.

This kind of scenario could result in American troops moving into the region and it wouldn't take long for the turmoil to spill over all borders, much like the Vietnam conflict spread into Cambodia and Laos.

Consciousness raising  
Over the years Comfort has studied the situation in Central America quite a bit and went on the tour sponsored by the Association of Cultural Workers, a Toronto based group which is affiliated with an international organization of writers, poets, etc., "to put some flesh and blood on the statistics, contact the people, ask questions and observe."

"I wanted personal confirmation of the many contradictions I've been reading and hearing about the situation." There were seven others in his tour and he says they went to Nicaragua because it would be a consciousness raising experience. "For me, my conscious was raised long ago."

The Pentagon, U.S. National Security Council and White House, who Eldon claims put out a "lot of misinformation" about the situation today in Nicaragua, try to paint the country as one which is becoming communist and so must be stopped by the western world.

From his observations from March 10 to 21, Comfort says that's not the case.

He notes there's elections coming up in November and six of eight political parties have met the various criteria (there's criteria for running in elections here too, Eldon notes) required to appear on the ballot. "Six political parties, that doesn't sound much like communism or too totalitarian to me," Comfort observed. He also notes, with a twinkle in his eye, that one of the two parties not approved for the election yet is the Communist Party of Nicaragua.

"You ask a person on the street, and I asked many, if they're communist and they don't know what you're talking about. All they know is what things used to be like in their country and what things are like now and the promise the future holds for them," he declared. Comfort added he's not saying Nicaragua's present military Sandinista government isn't leaning left, but it's not communist. He'd label it "democratic socialist."

The American-installed Somoza government ruled the country cruelly and oppressively for over 50 years before falling in the late 70s (see other story).

The Sandinistas, a rebel group, took over the country and is the biggest political party. With no American aid to the country under its then three man and later nine man military Junta, the country was driven into the arms of Russia, Cuba, Bulgaria, etc., Comfort says. For example they had to switch to communist states to buy wheat when the U.S. cut them off. Comfort notes the U.S. cut off polio vaccine the nation was buying, the Yugoslavs stepped in and gave them the vaccine as a gift.

With three priests holding cabinet posts and 20 other religious leaders involved with the government in top positions this is another sign, Comfort says, that the communists haven't taken over. Nicaragua isn't communist now, but "it could be someday." The Americans would have nobody to blame but themselves either. "They've been shoving Nicaragua into the communist camp."

Literacy, health improving  
Under the Sandinistas much of the land has been returned to the people, small farming communes have been established, the literacy level in the country has improved astonishingly and health programs have been bolstered quite significantly. Land which was productive and owned by foreigners, including Americans, wasn't confiscated if the workers were being treated fairly. Citizens can buy land and own it free and clear, paying 10 per cent interest rates, but they can't later sell it, only will it to others.

"It's a very people-oriented government. Nicaragua is a unique experiment, a combination of private and state enterprise, with a prominent role for the church. That's why the Americans fear it so much, if it succeeds there, other Central American countries will want it too. It's a real threat to American economic exploitation."

But, while vowing to fight on regardless, Nicaraguans don't know if they can survive another four years of Reagan. The old Somoza military forces fled to Honduras and from there continually raid the country,



Eldon Comfort recently returned from a trip to Nicaragua and fears another four years of Reagan could mean the "Vietnamization" of Central America.

there's even three airstrips in the jungle beside the border. "The Americans are trying to destabilize the region and disrupt the upcoming elections," Comfort himself saw war torn areas, oil tanks destroyed, etc. "The U.S. has mined their harbors, there are gun boats off either coast. They aren't just fighting the U.S. and their backed counter-revolutionaries, but also enemies from within like rich landowners whose property was bought by the new government."

Comfort found Cubans there, along with Norwegians, Dutch, West Germans, Swedes, etc., helping with many social programs. He didn't see Cuban or Russian troops, but imagines there might be some military advisors.

"They are a beautiful, friendly, affectionate people. Also it's a very young population, average age is less than 20. They have a real passion for protecting the gains of the last few years."

"They are also very forgiving. They have a deep hatred for the Reagan administration, but surprisingly not for the American



George Dehaan waited patiently to donate his pint of blood at the Red Cross clinic March 28 at the Acton Legion.

## 119 donate at clinic

Acton Red Cross sent 119 pints of blood to the Toronto Blood Bank following last Tuesday's blood donor clinic here. In all 130 people made donations, but 11 pints were rejected.

In announcing the results of another successful clinic, Acton Red Cross thanked the many volunteers. Acton Legion Ladies' Auxiliary and Branch 197, The Free Press, Acton Clergy Association and Dr. Richard Telford for sponsoring the clinic. Of course they also thanked all the donors who gave the "gift of life."

Following is the list of donors:  
S.D. Alonby, J.D. Ancker, B.L. Andrews, J.N. Andrea, C.H. Auger, R.A. Baker, Y.L. Baxter, C.A. Blake, D.A. Blashuk, D.M. Blashuk, J.B. Binden, N. Braids, W.E. Brak, V.R. Bratton, M. Bolert, L. Bottero, N. Brown, R.D. Brown, S.S. Brunelle, B. Campbell, M.E. Byrne, H.W. Coe, R.H. Colbeck, P.M. Cooney, K. Cozzy, C. Cozzy, J.M. Daponte, F. DeHaan, G.M. DeHaan, G.D. Dennis, T. Dewdney, A.A. Doby, M.A. Durline, L.A. Enslin, A.R. Entwistle, D. Entwistle, W.M. Fabian, J. Feenstra, O.A. Feenstra, K.L. Fitzgerald, A.R. Ford, L.E. Fritzel, B. Fryers, M. Fryers, M. Gibson, C. Gidman, P.A. Gopall, J.B. Goring, J.C. Graham, P.J. Graham.  
G.P. Guy, S.C. Guy, G. Hargrave, A.J. Higgins, W. Higgins, G. Hollett, G.A. Hollett, D. Huisman, L.G. Jennings, G. Kamminga, J. Kamminga, D.D. Keith, K.G. Killingbeck, R.L. Kilpatrick, P.H. Kroes, H. Kroes, B. Kroes, J.J. Krol, A.G. Kroezen, G. Kroezen, S. Kuechler, G. Kuiper, H. Landborough, R.T. Lee, G.E. Lewis, R.H. Lewis, D.F. Lindsay, R. Looyenga, B.E. MacPherson, V.T. Mahon, I. Marcoux, M.C. Marcoux, G.J. Mason, C.A. McDonald, A.M. McDonald, R.J. McGregor, A.D. McKeen, P. Mills, J.R. Miller, G.C. Miller, E. Mihalovic, J.M. Morris, M.W. Morris, V.S. Morris, G.R. O'Donnell, S. O'Donnell, P. Peterson, J.J. Reid, S. Reid, J.C. Rey.  
A. Roach, T.D. Schick, J.R. Schreiber, P. Schreiber, B.K. Shannon, G.N. Shonk, K.P. Smith, C. Sook, F.A. Uyl, K.V. Vanderlaan, H.D.M. VanSproonsen, F.A. Vanwyck, W.J. Perrin, E.I. Pietrzyk, W.D. Scott, J.P. Tatton, M.R. Thatcher, E.S. Thompson, G.E. Thompson, N.S. Thornhill, J.M. Traas, A.J. Tribe, E.P. Tuitman, L.F. Tuitman, P.D. Quinn, H. VanderWal, M.A. Walker, J.M. Watson, D. Wyza, P.J. Wright.

## Meanderings

by M. E. Barkman  
The bone I hung in the tree for the birds to feed on wasn't exactly the type I wanted. But it was all the butcher had that day. Anyway, the chickadees and the woodpeckers seemed to like it even though it looked like the ribs of a rabbit.

It seemed that something else thought it might be connected with a rabbit because I got the thrill of a lifetime. A large northern barred owl, commonly called a hoot owl landed in the tree and for about five minutes I was able to watch him close up. I had heard his familiar "hoot" many times in the woods but had never been able to see him. There were no little birds at the feeder while this big ominous creature stayed there and when he left, it was many more minutes before they ventured near again.

Accept resignations  
Halton Board of Education Thursday evening accepted the resignations of Barbara Koopp from M.Z. Bennett School and Lynn Stokes from Brookville School, as of August 31.

people. There's great interest in the U.S. election."

Eldon and others involved in Ten Days for World Development have been pushing Ottawa to frame a new foreign policy for the area. They believe our government should embrace the Contadora Group's (Mexico, Columbia, Panama, Venezuela) proposal that all foreigners get out of the region, Russian and Americans, and that there be negotiated settlements and self-determination in Central America.

They also want to see Ottawa distance itself from Washington on Central American issues.

Comfort is encouraged since Allan MacEachen is going there, he seems to support the Contadora proposal.

Comfort and others are also calling for Canada to increase aid to the region to human rights records, speak out at the United Nations and before the World Bank and International Monetary Fund on Nicaragua's behalf, and establish an embassy in Nicaragua.

Comfort feels Ten Days and others have been "instrumental" in starting the shift in Canadian policy for the region and they'll continue to urge changes. In fact, he and others met just recently with Brampton-Georgetown MP John McDermid. He concluded though that they're having trouble making a case with Halton MP Otto Jelinek because they can't get an appointment. "He's too busy, or off in Yugoslavia watching skating."

## American involvement dates back to the early 1900s

Eldon Comfort has just recently returned from a fact-finding trip to Nicaragua after years of study of the history and affairs of this and other Third World nations.

Following is a brief synopsis of the political history of the country and American involvement there, as Comfort sees it.

American involvement in Nicaragua, which is about the same size and population as our Maritimes, began around the turn of the Century.

A Yankee adventurer took over and ruled the nation for five years and after that the history of Nicaragua is one of years and years of American intervention.

In fact the Marines occupied the country pretty much steadily from 1912 to '33. Forces were there to protect American business and political interests and American involvement drastically changed life in the country.

"The Americans have long considered them like they were children living in their back yard." The U.S. had big fruit company interests in the country for decades, and were also involved in mining, coffee and cotton.

With all this U.S. involvement what had been a "landed peasantry" of small farms was changed dramatically. The big foreign firms took over the best land and then hired the peasants at poverty wages to work seasonally. This is a tale of exploitation which has been repeated time and again in the Third World, Eldon added.

In the late 20s to 1934 a man named Sandino and his bands of guerrillas kept harassing the Marines and finally the U.S. forces got tired of the stalemate and decided to pull out.

However, the U.S. decided to leave behind a military regime which they equipped and financed under Anastasio Somoza. Somoza's

family ruled the country until 1979.

Sandino was called to a meeting with the new rulers to work out a truce and at the end of the meeting they assassinated Sandino, making a martyr of the rebel for the whole country to follow.

The cruel and oppressive Somoza governments wound up owning all the banks and major commercial interests as well as all the best land over the years, Comfort noted.

There was always resistance everywhere, especially in the rural parts of the country, and to the people Sandino's ideas and goals never died.

Nicaragua is a very religious country, there are many more signs of piety there than you'd ever see here, Comfort observed, and the Catholic Church took the sides of the poor and oppressed people. While the Somozas courted the church hierarchy, the church at the parish level was firmly in the resistance or liberation corner. The resistance grew stronger and more organized in the 60s and 70s and by '77 the war was on in earnest. There never was any hope of the liberation movement going away because the people knew what the Somozas were doing wasn't "God's will for their country. They had nothing to lose through revolution."

Comfort admits the rebels accepted arms and aid wherever they could get it, including from the communist bloc.

By late 70s too, Comfort notes, most nations except the U.S. had dropped all support for the Somozas. Finally this untenable regime lost American backing under Jimmy Carter's administration and Somoza fled, later to be assassinated in exile. He didn't go empty-handed, he and his supporters emptied their banks, leaving just enough money to keep the country going for a day. Nicaragua was also left with the debts.

The fifth anniversary of Triumph Day is coming up, July 19, and there are signs of this celebration everywhere in the country. Also there are signs reminding people Sandino lives, 50 years later.

# DOWN TO EARTH VALUES

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**Community Calendar**

**Bazaar**  
There will be a craft and recreation bazaar at 8 Durham St. on Saturday April 14 from 1:30-3:30 p.m. There will be crafts, ceramics, tea and draws. Admission is Adults \$1 and children \$.50.

**Christian Fellowship**  
Saturday, April 14 is the date for Halton Hills Christian Women's Fellowship's popular annual guest night at St. George's Anglican Church Hall at 6:30 p.m. A roast beef dinner will be served. Speaker will be Brian Skiller and music will be by The Canadian Gospel Echoes. Tickets at \$10 each and are available at Col Craft, Georgetown Decorating Centre and The Hope Chest.

**Historical lecture**  
The winner of the Governor General's award for non-fiction in 1983, Christopher Moor will speak at the Georgetown Public Library on Wednesday April 11, at 7:30 p.m. His new book, to be released in May, *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile and Settlement* will be the theme of his talk. Admission is free and coffee will be served. Sponsored by the Library and Esqueing Historical Society.

**La Leche League**  
La Leche League of Acton will hold their next meeting on Monday, April 9 at 8 p.m. in Trinity United Church, Acton, for interested women. The topic will be Nutrition and Weaning. For information call 878-4803 or 878-4732.

**Marmalade, preserves**  
An additional interest at Coffee, Books and Conversation meetings 10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. on Friday, April 6 and May 4 will be the opportunity to taste an assortment of marmalades and preserves—man made at home. Recipes available; April 6 is Marmalade Day and May 4 is Preserve Day. All welcome at the Georgetown Public Library.

**Tack auction**  
Esqueing Pony Club's Consignment Tack Auction and nearly new riding apparel sale will be Sunday, April 29 at the Esqueing town hall, Stewarttown, at 10:30 a.m. For information call 878-3787 or 853-3817.

**Film**  
A special showing of the new World Wide Pictures release *Jesus Is Victor* is scheduled Sunday, April 8 at Mountainview Baptist Church on Mountainview Rd. The free showing is at 7 p.m. *Jesus Is Victor* is an intimate portrait of Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who traveled the globe telling of her experience in Nazi-occupied Holland during World War II. She and her family saved the lives of hundreds of Jews through their work with the underground.

**Jewish singles**  
Re-Connect—a life skills support group for separated and divorced Jewish women will hold eight Tuesday sessions May 8-June 26 from 7:30-10 p.m. Price is \$20, non-refundable. Call the Jewish Singles Project Contact, 731-4600 mornings for information or registration.

**Travel series**  
Thinking of a trip? Why not take a short trip to Norval Presbyterian Church and we'll take you around the world. The Norval Choir and Norval and Union Youth Group present a travel series. On April 10 hear about Europe, including Oberammergau. On April 24 Hawaii will be discussed and on May 8 cruises, including Alaska. Admission is \$2.50 for one night and \$6 for all three. There will be refreshments and door prizes.

**Film Series**  
Imagine Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Cary Grant and Henry Fonda all in Georgetown! The Halton Hills Recreation Department is presently putting together a Golden Oldies film series on Monday evenings April 9 and 16 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$2 for adults and \$1 for seniors each night at the cultural centre.

**Flower Show**  
The Georgetown and District Horticultural Society is sponsoring a trip to the Toronto Civic Garden Centre Spring Flower and Garden Show on Saturday, April 14. Tickets are \$6.50 for members and \$8.50 for non-members. Call June Dean, 877-8068 for information.

**Sax Concert**  
Internationally famous saxophonist Paul Brodie will perform during the evening of April 11 at the John Elliott Theatre in a concert sponsored by the Halton Hills Arts Council. Tickets for the evening are available through Orbow Books and Georgetown Fabrics (Deirex Plaza) or by phoning 877-4078.

**Osis**  
The architect of OSIS (the new Secondary School program), Bill Lambie, will address all interested educators, parents and students on Thursday, April 5 at 8 p.m. in George Kennedy School, Weber Drive, Georgetown. If you have concerns or comments please come out. For information contact 877-2887.

**Pineview soccer**  
Final registration for the Pineview Soccer Club will be Thursday, April 5 at 7-9 p.m. Call Nanda Tilstra at 877-8714.