

LETTERS

Bias permeates Ukraine stories

The April 17 issue of Street Roots features two articles on the Ukrainian conflict. As an avid reader on the subject I was left sorely disappointed by the anti-Russian bias and lack of balance throughout both articles.

The first article, "Boxes to the Battlefields," gives a rabidly anti-Russian perspective with no counterweight, even though the article itself acknowledges that "... there is divide in the the local Slavic community between those who support Ukraine and those who support pro-Russian separatists."

This is true, and one would think that Street Roots would make an effort to interview the opposing viewpoint. Instead, Ukrainians who are pro-Russian separatists are dismissed as victims of "Russian propaganda."

Both articles relentlessly attack Russian intervention and propaganda in Ukraine, while ignoring the intervention and propaganda of the Obama administration, which is arming the Ukrainian government that it helped bring to power (Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland did not deny it was her voice when she was audiotaped while scheming to push the Maidan demonstrations in a pro-U.S. direction).

Even mainstream media describes the Ukraine conflict as an open proxy war between the U.S. and Russia. And war is the perfect environment for propaganda to grow — always used by both sides of any conflict.

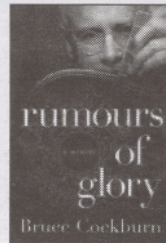
By completely ignoring the pro-Russian voice of local Ukrainians, while also ignoring the role the Obama administration in the conflict, Street Roots finds itself in an odd position; biased to the point where accusations of 'propaganda' may be appropriate.

SHAMUS COOKE
Portland

Bruce Cockburn: Singing in praise of nonviolence

BY JOE MARTIN
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

"I honour nonviolence as a way of being, and as a political tactic, but I am not a pacifist. As we continue to watch the world's greatest military powers plunder weaker states and people as an integral, almost pro forma method of planetary domination, it's clear that a violent



Rumours of Glory, a Memoir by Bruce Cockburn and Greg King

response to such injustice, and carnage, would be useless and ever more destructive. But that's easy for me to say as I sit on my peaceful deck in my peaceful city in my relatively peaceful country."

So writes the gifted Canadian singer, songwriter and guitarist Bruce Cockburn in his recent memoir, "Rumours of Glory." An intrepid

world traveler and human rights activist, he has journeyed to dangerous war zones and scenes of hideous human travail. In 1983, under the auspices of Oxfam, Cockburn went to southern Mexico to observe the living conditions of impoverished Guatemalan citizens who had fled to refugee camps near the Guatemalan border.

Cockburn was shocked by the stench and destitution. The displaced had fled the murderous policies of their country's regime, its brutal soldiers trained and funded by the United States. "The Guatemalan military wasn't content to simply torture and slaughter and destroy villages where they were. They continued to harass the survivors, crossing the border into Mexico and attacking the refugee camps, strafing from helicopters, now and then dragging people off to the jungle and

hacking them to pieces with machetes."

Cockburn wrote "If I Had a Rocket Launcher" in response. The final verse of this powerful song highlighted his outrage: "I want to raise every voice — at least I've got to try. Every time I think about it, water rises to my eyes."

Cockburn grew up in a comfortable middle class family in Ottawa. His family's dynamic tended to stifle emotional communication. To this day, Cockburn is inclined to introversion and solitude, a self-titled "emotionally cloistered chameleon." This internal orientation and frequent traveling has contributed to a string of broken marriages and relationships.

Early in life, he expressed a passion for music. He had little interest in the rest of academia. For a time in the mid 1960s Cockburn was a student at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. The city then was a center of the folk music scene. Cockburn left Boston before he obtained his degree, returning to Canada to pursue music in his own way and immerse himself in the Canadian music scene: "Here's the door. There's the cliff. Go through. Jump. Just don't forget your guitar," he writes.

Cockburn writes of his interest in spirituality. His first wife inspired him to revisit the deeper dimensions of Christianity, though he remains "leery of the dogma and doctrine that so many have attached to Christianity as well as to most other religions." Cockburn's attraction to things spiritual and mystical surely influences his laid back and critical approach to the venal side of the music industry. "Commerce, in an era when the market has become god, can derail our quest for the Divine." Cockburn admits his perspective has sometimes driven his manager, Bernie Finkelstein, to distraction, yet their partnership has endured for decades.

Cockburn's political consciousness came about gradually. He was becoming more aware of greedy corporations wrecking

ecological devastation in his native country. Mercury contamination especially stirred his sense of urgency, as it combined environmental destruction with the deepening economic horrors overwhelming the world's poor.

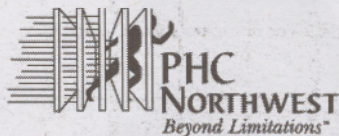
Around the globe, Cockburn has witnessed manifold aspects of planetary crisis. While concerned individuals and organizations of goodwill remain hopeful harbingers of positive change, the sheer magnitude of natural resource erosion and social dislocation is daunting. Too many in the developed world remain indifferent or oblivious. Referring to his song "The Trouble with Normal" Cockburn writes: "Each sliding step down this road brings cries of warning and expressions of dismay. Each new skid downward leaves the previous one seeming acceptable after all. That, indeed, is the trouble with 'normal.'"

Cockburn has championed the effort to rid the world of land mines, which are still in many countries: Egypt, Iraq, Mozambique and Cambodia to name a few. "At least 60 million are still buried across the globe, including a staggering 23 million in Egypt alone (more than any other nation), alongside unexploded ordnance left from World War II, disallowing use of huge regions in the north and east of the country," he wrote.

Wherever he finds himself in the Third World, Cockburn jams with local musicians. These encounters can open new musical horizons.

His book is an honest and compelling memoir. Those unacquainted with Cockburn's substantial oeuvre can find plenty of songs and performances on YouTube. The book and his music taken together present Cockburn as an indisputably accomplished artist and also one of the great humanitarians of our troubled time.

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