

SISTER CELEBRATION

BURLINGTON

The caldron that is Central America cooled a bit in Burlington's City Hall Park on Saturday, July 25.

Up to 300 placard- and banner-waving marchers celebrated city-sisterhood and five years of Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Burlington's official representative, Mayor Bernard Sanders, announced a sister-city relationship between the city of Burlington and the Nicaraguan town of Puerto Cabeza.

A half-dozen speakers fleshed out the headlines and network news-briefs, asking the larger questions about North American involvement in Nicaragua, El Salvador and other republics. Artwork, music, and theater accompanied the spoken word.

Largely preaching to the converted, the mayor said that Burlington stands in opposition to the Reagan policies in Latin America, and moreover, that actions would soon follow words. Medical and other kinds of supplies will be sent to the sister city.

Nicaraguan Embassy Second Secretary Miriam Hooker thanked not only the people of Burlington, but, quoting Daniel Ortega, head of the Sandinista government, she also expressed gratitude to "those North Americans that have helped and continued to help."

Hooker cited the successes of the Sandinista government during its first five years, saying it had fought disease, ignorance and hunger. "The successes would have been greater had they not had to spend [money] on war" against the US sponsored Contra guerrillas. A recent US boycott of Nicaraguan beef dealt a severe economic blow to the economy, she said after the speech.

Burlington becomes the fourth city to enter such a relationship, Hooker said. New Haven, Connecticut; Atlanta, Georgia; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina already have sister cities in Nicaragua.

Because a number of the speakers, North and Central Americans both, had just come from the region, rhetoric often gave way to bulletins from the front. Arnoldo Ramos, US spokesman for the Salvadoran Revolutionary Front, said at present it has 12,000 soldiers in arms "supplied by the 'socialist republics' of Texas and New Mexico." Last week, he said, the government asked for direct US bombing, reporting that "300 people died in the indiscriminate bombing in the first days of the [newly elected President José Napoleon] Duarte administration."

He said that his country was in the grips of "the worst economic crisis that has ever taken place," signaled by a four-year-old wage freeze and triple-digit inflation.

A pointed commentary on the US political scene occurred when Ellen David-Friedman, Jesse Jackson supporter and Vermont's National Democratic Committee chairwoman, stepped to the mike. She said



One of the many panels in Ron Slayton's "Last Supper."

she did not want to talk about her party's nomination of Walter Mondale, adding, "The mainstream of politicians are not our allies."

"We have some political lessons to learn," she continued, like those she heard when visiting Cuba. "Our Cuban host told us every day, 'We need whatever breathing room we can get.'"

Later, Hooker said she was encouraged by Mondale's campaign pledge to disengage US troops from Central America within his first 100 days as

president.

Montpelier artist Ron Slayton presided over the rally, sitting in front of his multi-panel work "The Last Supper." In vivid blues and oranges it depicts how "the poor, sick and weak are supporting the military tables our government gave us." Tagged onto the speakers list, Slayton indicated he saw his painting as a political education tool.

"I'm committed to carrying it wherever there is a need or a desire to have it shown," the

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artist said. "It takes 42 minutes to set up and 42 minutes to take down." This week, the exhibit stayed in City Hall.

Approximately 50 people from Montreal attended the rally; Canadian trade unionist Fred Jones outlined his fellow activists' public information campaign. He told of how an open letter to the government demanding changes in Canadian foreign policy appeared in major newspapers. Two hundred unions, churches and

citizens signed the letter, and suggested that US organizers try the same tactic.

The Latin American activists called for changes: using Canadian minesweepers to clear Nicaraguan ports of Contra mines and ending all unilateral and multinational aid to the El Salvadoran government. They also demanded that the kind of elections taking place in Nicaragua set for November 4, should also take place in the Honduras, a client state of the US.

■ *Stephen Ward*