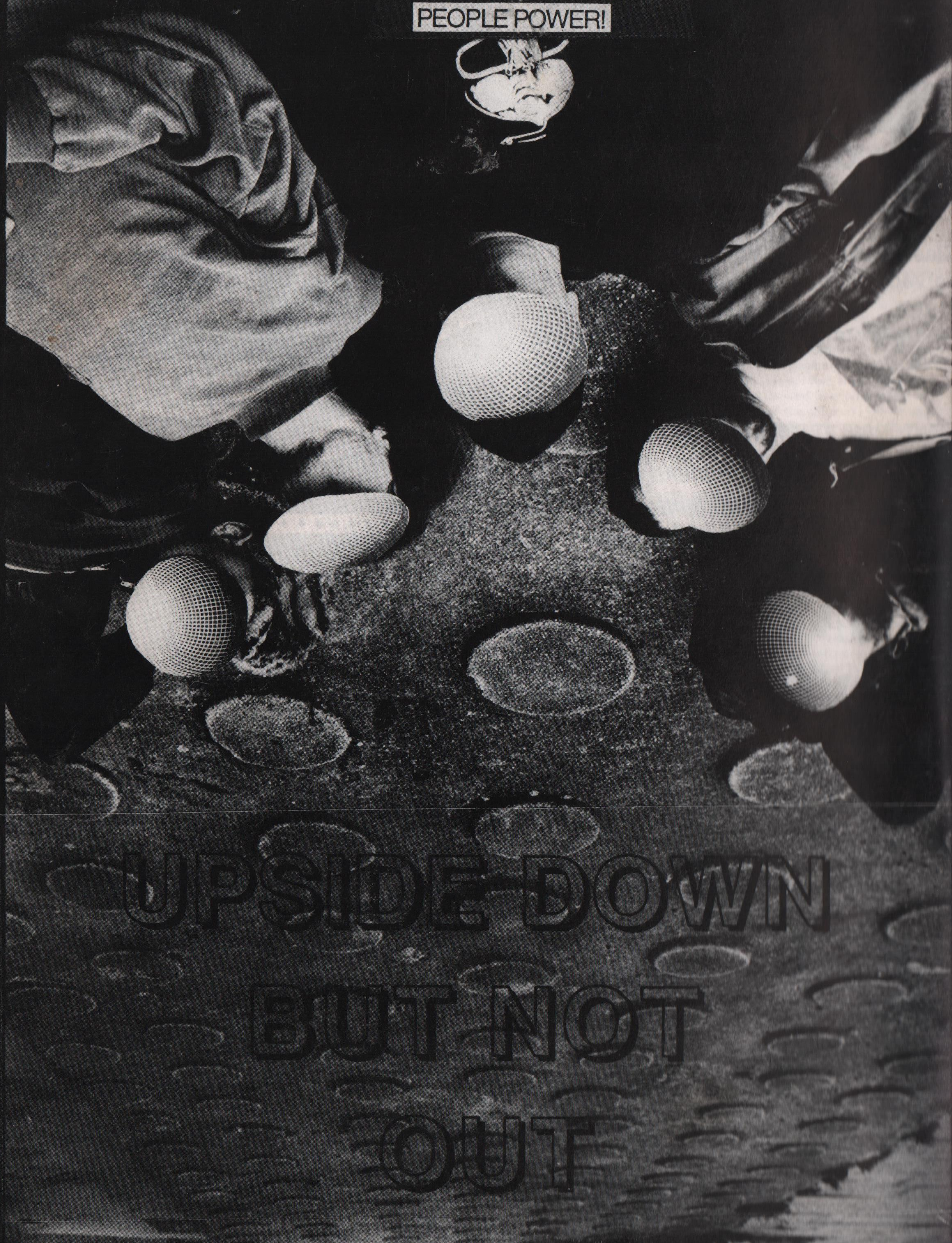
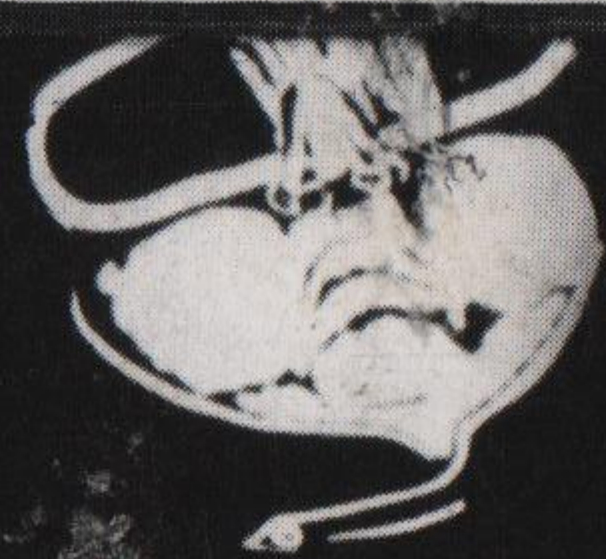




PEOPLE POWER!

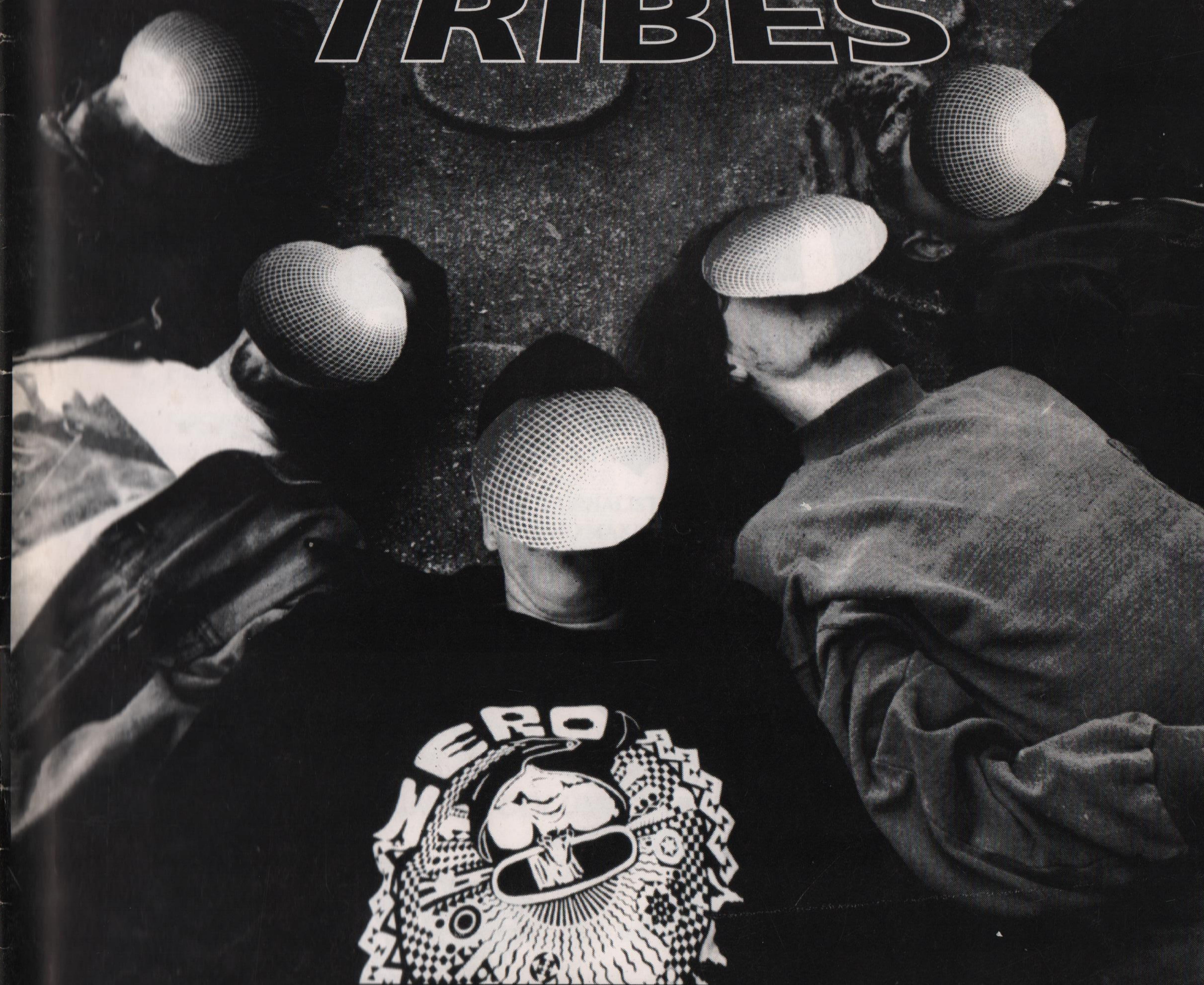


UPSIDE-DOWN  
BUT NOT  
OUT

ISSUE 4



OUT ON  
THE EDGE:  
BRITAIN'S  
*UNDERGROUND*  
*TRIBES*



THE FREE SPIRIT ISSUE



THE CONSCIOUS  
COLLECTIVE

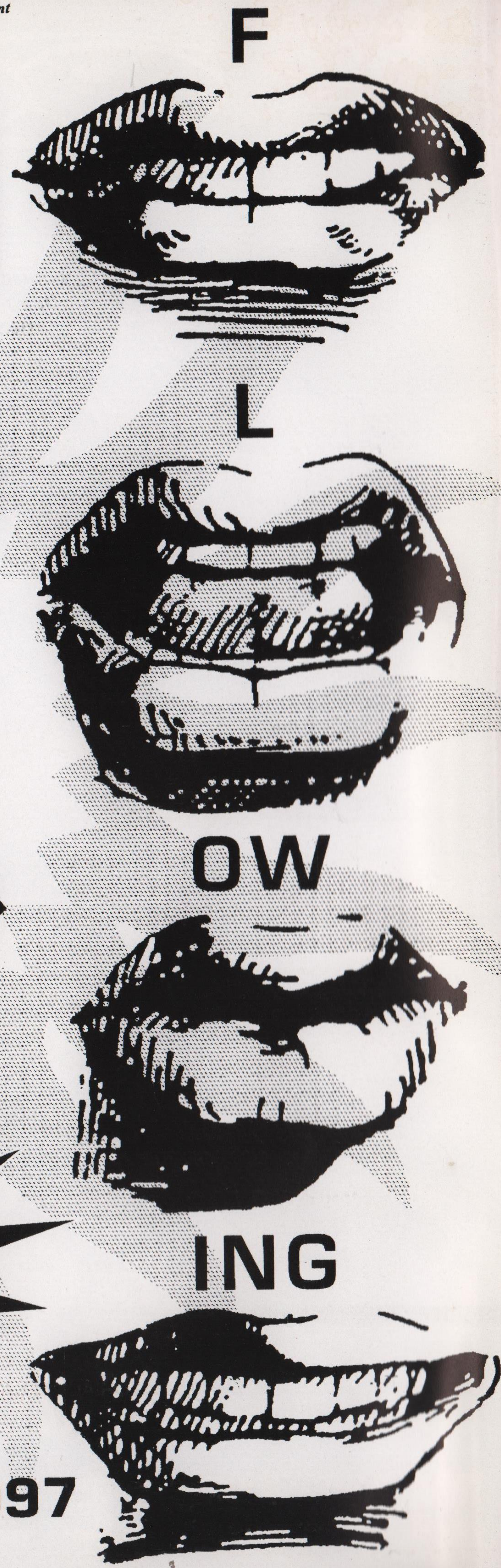
ALIVE  
and  
KICKIN'

RAISE THE PHONE

GET  
CONSCIOUS  
NOW



081-691 0097



WHERE POD'S COMING  
FROM.....

"Just remember this," said the press officer at the Conservative Party HQ. "It's far harder to conform than not to conform. Put that on your pillow and sleep on it." Then the telephone line went dead. Miss Pod picked up her cap-gun and fired two rounds into the receiver. All she'd wanted was a copy of John Major's speech at last summer's Tory party conference in Brighton; you know the one, 'New Age travellers, not in this age, not in any age.' Instead she got a shirty suit with his pin-stripes in a twist.

She paced up and down the room for a while and then got to thinking that in fact, the guy had a point. All the poor bastards who bought the Thatcher dream ticket, only to find themselves being sold down the river, must be finding it bloody hard to conform right now. Then she remembered a snatch from a conversation she'd had with a bloke who'd described himself a free-spirit. 'Things are bad,' he'd said. 'But don't forget, there's a whole post-punk generation out there who are just not interested in society. They see it as rotten to the core and they're developing their own way of doing things. They've got their own ecomony, their own culture, their own spirituality. You only have to look around...'

Miss Pod had been feeling thoroughly disillusioned with the 90s and all the recession gloom and this is just what she wanted to hear. So she followed the free-spirit's advice, caught a train to the underground and went to look around. What she saw made her smile and smile. This issue is the result of a six month (p)odyssey into the vibrant but virtually invisible world of DIY culture. For all its diversity, the DIY message is clear; however much crap is being thrown at the individual and the planet, there is hope. As the Conscious Collective says, You Can't Kill The Spirit.

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COVER: ZERO GRAVITY  
PICTURE BY: ALAN SHELDON

FOR ADVERTISING AND EDITORIAL CALL (081) 469 0814 OR WRITE TO POD HQ, PO BOX 23, LONDON SE4 1SW.

MANY THANKS TO: STEVE HARPER (POD ART), ALAN SHELDON, CARL BALDWIN, TINA LINDSAY, MARTIN LAPTOP, DAVE RAT, SARAH CHAMPION, STU PURE, PETER RAINBOW, SPI, LUCY CIDER, NATHAN RAINBOW, ZERO GRAVITY, MAD MIKE, MARTIN COVENEY (TRSE), GUILF.I.N. AND ALL THE FREE-SPIRITS OUT THERE.



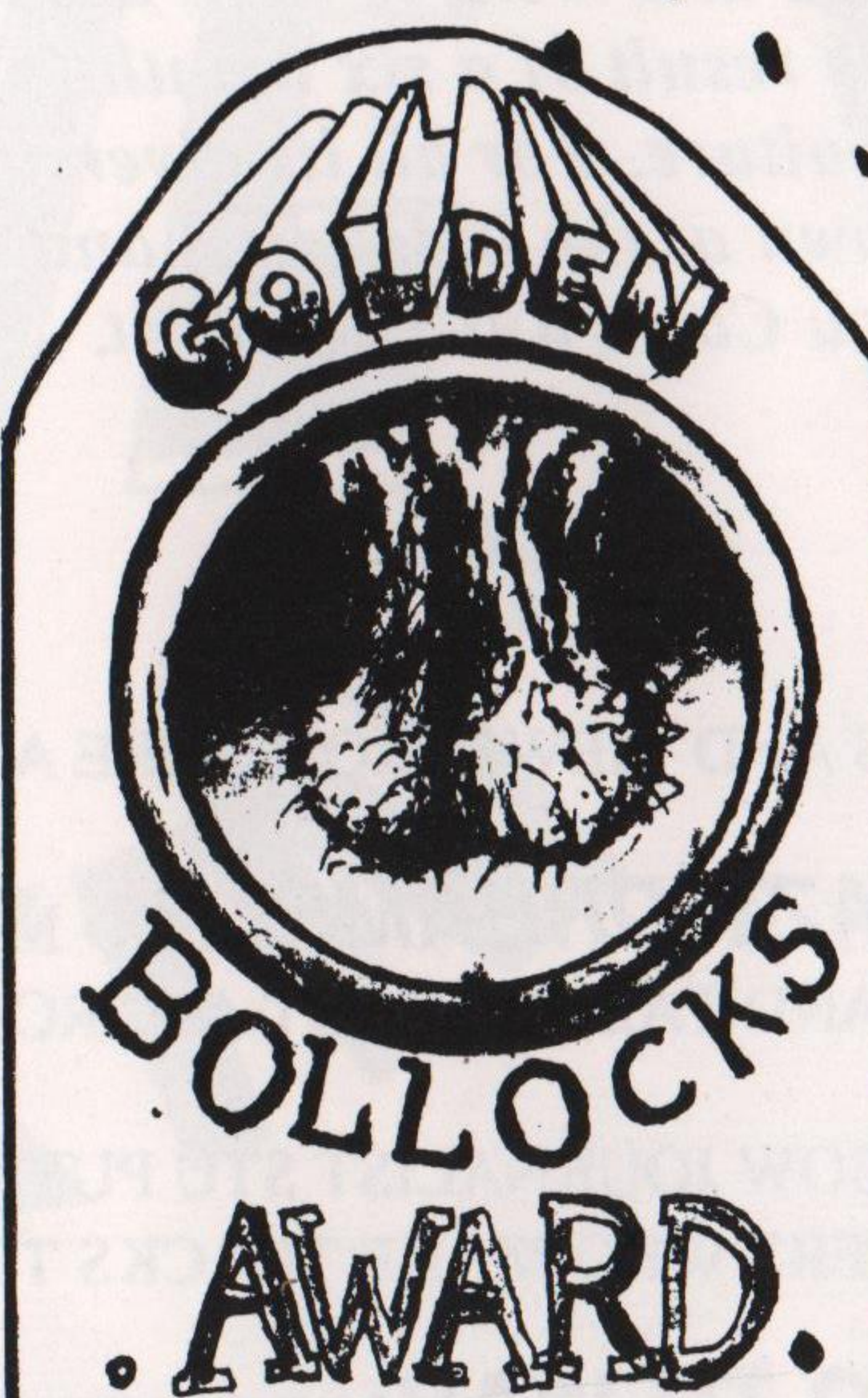
## NOW WHO'S RAVING?

Ex-Mutoid Waste sculptor Kenny Diesel recently took his prized art-from-scrap creation 'The Mean Mutha Fucker' to Lechlade Festival. He and his mates had just arrived when police swooped onto the site and confiscated a large amount of equipment. This included the Mutha Fucker who was 'arrested' and taken away for being what the police termed, 'a piece of rave signalling equipment'!



## WAFFLE KILLS TREES

We might be sailing a bit close to the wind here but.... The first group of people to be banned from wasting paper ought to be PR companies. For some reason Pod got a huge glossy package promoting Charles Jourdan's latest scent or fragrance as they like to call it. Inside the bright pink folder were no less than five cards whittering on about ... well, read for yourself. An extract goes like this, "Elegance of a sparkling flight, a soft and gay but resolutely fruity appeal. Soft and delicate, the peach breaks into abundance, soon intermingling with the freshness of the mandarine. They embrace each other, compliment each other and then scatter to unveil a heart beat to meet with a spray of flowers." I'd rather look at a tree any day.



## LET'S FABRICAT8!

After much deliberation, the judges of the first ever Golden Bollocks Award for the music industry's most prolific and imaginative hype-merchants have decided on a winner. It was a closely run race. The hottest contenders were Phill Savidge and John Best, the duo behind the publicity campaign to imprint Suede onto the eyelids of every impressionable teenager in the country. The pair's efforts were so successful, Suede became the hottest band around and Savidge and Best won the Music Week award for the best publicity campaign of 1992. Pulling strings is one thing but imagination quite another. So, in the end our Golden Bollocks judges decided that Mark Mortimer and Birmingham-based Network records' inspired creations took the biscuit. Their crafty fact-fiddling operation guaranteed 18 months of media saturation for the label's band Altern 8.

Described as two post-Chernobyl cartoon characters hiding behind yellow industrial mask, Altern 8 were purported to have been caught up in a series of unlikely adventures. Needless to say the press fell for them all. Their scams included:

- \*Playing raves in a hot air balloon; driving around in 'Hong Kong riot police tanks' and setting up a firm to market 'disco biscuits' and 'mini rave air horns'.

- \*Standing for Parliament in last year's General Election. Chris

Peat, one half of the duo, put himself up for a manifesto which included making Altern 8 masks compulsory and forcing policemen to dress in '88 acid-style clothes.

- \*Winning a belly-dancing competition while on tour in Turkey.

- \*Delivering laced 'Brand E' Christmas puddings to the needy 'OAP techno-crats' of Stafford via their hot air balloon.

- \*Ritually burning the master tapes of their 'Frequency' single and forcing studio engineers to wear A8 chemical warfare suits despite Mediterranean temperatures. Several were allegedly left needing medical attention for heat exhaustion.

- \*Arranging for a tribal witchdoctor to be on stage at a rave in Stafford in order to cleanse the venue of rock music.

A few months ago, Network suddenly came clean, claiming that they'd been thumbing their nose at the music press all along. "Altern 8 was always a joke against the corrupt, fat music industry. Unfortunately the self-appointed guardians of the dance were too stupid to understand." Mmmm. The same 'joke' helped give the band two top ten singles and a 'massive selling' album. A classic case of Golden Bollock if ever there was one. (Two twinkling testicles on their way to you Network.)

## SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

Thumbs up to the theatre Royal, Stratford East - possibly London's most progressive theatre - for their recent production, One Step Beyond. Strung together with songs by Madness, the musical told the story of a group of homeless people who end up squatting the ideal Home Exhibition! Stratford East is well-known as a theatre for the people and true to their word, they put on a free performance for all the vendors of The Big Issue. Nice one. (Can't see it starting off a trend in Theatreland though, can you?)



Here's the winner of this issue's biggest spliff comp. A tanner to this lassie from North London. Apparently it's nt the length that counts, it's the width!

# FOCUS

## News and views from here and there

### STOP PRESS - LATE DUB/ AMBIENT DATES AND INFO RECOMMENDED BY POD

**JULY**  
22nd: ZION TRAIN join JOI at the Bass Clef, N1. (Joi there every Thurs).  
24/25th: T.V.C. FESTIVAL, Brighton.

26th: Official release of L.S.Diesel/Digidub's first album South-East Of The Thames. For mail order write to Unit 207, Skillion Building, Lomond Grove, London SE5 7HN. or tel:071 231-4946.  
New video single "Purple Boy" out soon.

31st: FORDHAM PARK URBAN FREE FESTIVAL. See ad.

PLUS: OXLEAS WOODS CELEBRATION AND SOLIDARITY DAY. To mark the withdrawal of DTP's road-building plan. Says spokeswoman Jessica Currie, "We're still wary. This event is a celebration and a show of people power. We're still here and we're not going away. Come the next road scheme we'll be out in force."

**AUGUST**

1. Watch out for Pod Party coming soon.....

2. Keep your eyes peeled for Root Sauce Productions' play A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHTMARE. (right-on and meaningful!). Performances in Lewisham area and central London between 7-14 August.

12th: APHEX TWIN v. TELEPATHIC v. SEEFEEEL at the Dome, Tuffnell Park (to be confirmed).

14th: LANTERN FESTIVAL, Oxleas Woods. Fire sculptures, wind chimes, candlelight parade. Starts 6pm.

14th: COOL TAN: Poetry On Walls exhibition and live poets!

16th: ZION TRAIN release The Chase EP. Devon Russell sings roots classic. Mail order: (081) 880-1926.

20th: T.W.A. (Travellers With Attitude) party at the Rocket, Holloway Rd. Circus Irritant join Vox Populi, L.S.Diesel/Digidub (?) sound systems and DJs Easy Groove (Circus Warp), Pig Bag, Liberator, Chaos and Dog Scrap. (To be confirmed).

22nd: COOL TAN: The Dragon Group present the Radical Green Magick Workshop. Studying the symbiotic magical relationship with nature. 10.30am-6.30pm.

28th/30th: EARTHBEAT URBAN FESTIVAL, Sefton Park, Liverpool.

**SEPTEMBER**  
5th: ZION TRAIN presents The Trancemasters EP (acid). Mail order (081) 880-1926

## PARANOIA V. PRONOA

Fraser Clark, the first generation hippy behind Evolution records and mag Encyclopaedia Psychedelica has come up with an interesting observation about the recession. "We're brought up with so much paranoia," he says. "You know; jealousy, competition, winners and losers. But I've come across strong signs of 'Pronoia' out there at the moment; this great feeling that people are actually conspiring to help you!"

## COOL TAN REGULARS.

372 Coldharbour Lane SW9.  
(Also HQ for Lambeth and London Green Party.)  
TUES: Live drawing class 7-9pm.  
WED: Hand drum workshop 7-9pm.  
Vegan cafe open all night.  
THURS: Accoustic Cafe:  
All welcome, three course meal.  
FRI: Meditation 7-9pm.  
Moonshine Cafe open in evening.

## BE PODITIVE!

POD has now started a mailing list. Give us your name and address and we'll drop you a line to tell you when the next issue is out. When you get the reminder, just fill in the coupon, return it with £2 (inc p+p) and we'll send you a POD. We'll also let you know when the next POD party is happening. Please fill in the form below and send it to POD HQ, PO Box 23, London SE4 1SW. (please write in capitals)

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

TEL.....

WHERE DID YOU GET POD 4 FROM?

## Dub-struck

Lee Digi, one of the members behind the excellent Digidub/L.S. Diesel sound system got a stropo letter from the council the other day declaring him, 'bona nulla,' and threatening to send him to prison if he didn't pay his poll tax. "I was far more upset with being called bona nulla than being threatened with jail," Lee tells us. "It looks like it's the Latin for 'Good for nothing' and it's a bloody cheek. Who are they to talk!"

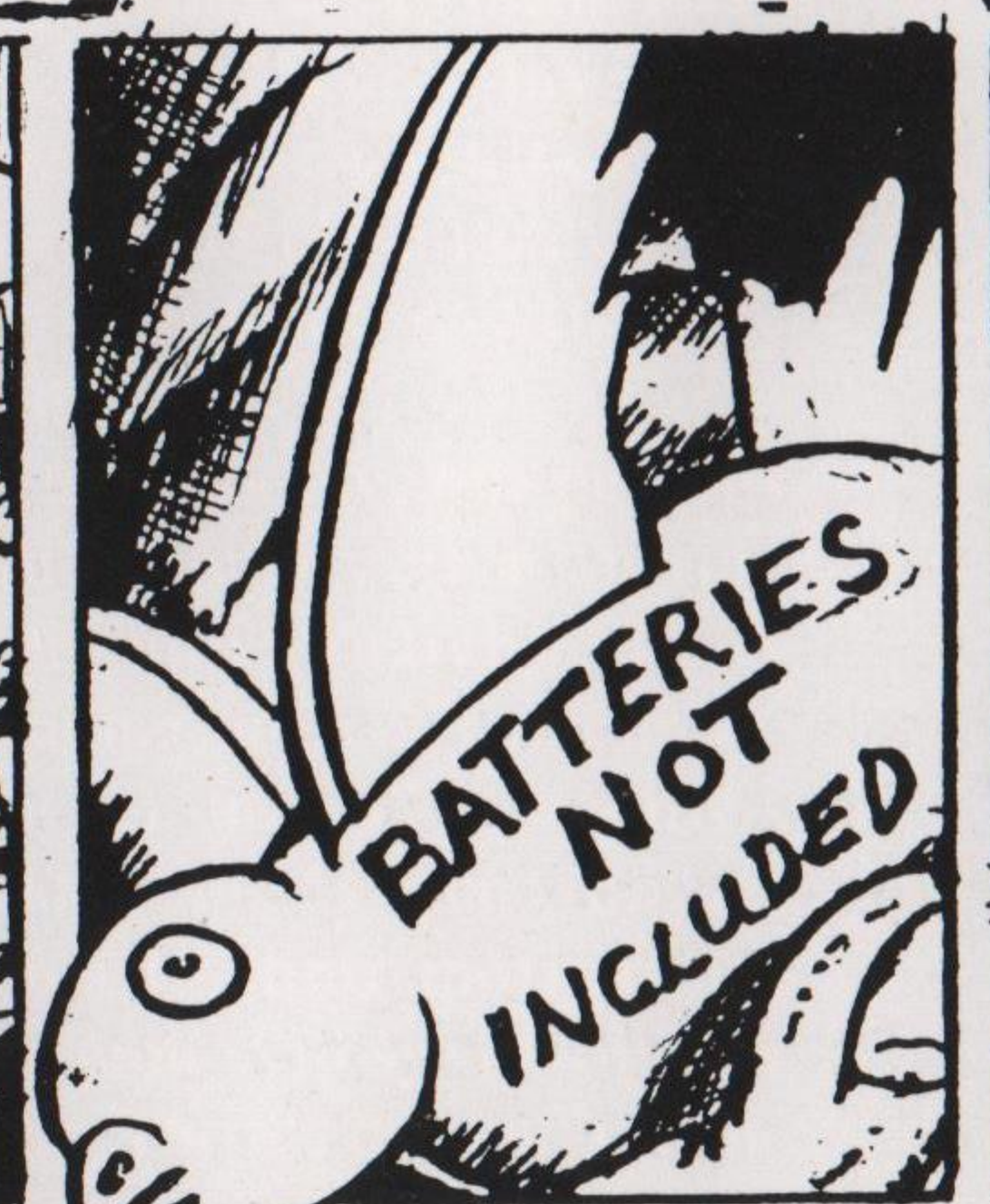
11th: AMBIENT ALL-NIGHTER at the George Robey, Finsbury Park, including Astralasia and Irresistible Force.

**OCTOBER**

1st: ZION TRAIN: play with TVC promotions at the Penny Theatre, Canterbury. (roots night).

31st: HALLOWE'EN - COOL TAN'S MEETING OF THE TRIBES. ALL POSSES, COLLECTIVES AND WARRIORS WELCOME FOR A TALK AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND IDEAS. CHEAP BOOZE AND FOOD. For more info call: (071) 737-2745.

me  
Personal  
History



BATTERIES  
NOT  
INCLUDED





### YOU'VE BEEN FESTI-ED!

Talking of hippies, Miss Pod's had an interesting chat with Manchester-based Mike Don, editor of the 70s underground paper Mole Express. Mike now runs a sci-fi mail-order business but he's noticed the free-spirit movement is picking up again. "I still think the ideals of the 60s were right. It's heartening to see them coming back again," he says. So where are all the first-generation hippies now? Mike recently did a ring-round to find out what had happened to his contemporaries. "Almost without exception," he says, "The real radicals; the Maoists, the Marxists and the like, have all become solid pillars of the establishment, card-carrying Tories. All the more mellow hippies are still living in their communes or have moved abroad."

One event Mike remembers well was a massive open-air festival at Bickershaw, just outside Manchester, which was organised by one Jeremy Beadle. "I don't think you could have described him as a hippy," recalls Mike. "He wasn't laid-back enough. He was quite smooth. A little hustler, zipping around all the time. It didn't surprise me that he ended up on TV."

### GO THERE, JUDGE PICKLES

*Following on from Legalise Cannabis Week, the Trojans' Gaz Mayall has just released a weedy little single called The Great British Spliff. Complete with a home-made video of Gaz skinning-up in his front-room, the song tugs at the heart-strings of many a toker. Here's an extract:*

*I'm standing up and using my right of free speech,  
luckily it's still legal to voice an opinion,  
I'm advocating the legalisation, at least  
decriminalisation,  
of my favourite weed marijuana.*

*Now there's nothing like returning home and taking off  
your shoes,  
and sitting down to a cuppa,  
rolling up a spliff, sitting back relaxing, thinking,  
that it's time they legalise marijuana.*

*Go there Judge Pickles, Go there  
Wake up the nation, Judge, Shake it up.  
I'm talking about the right to the great British spliff.*

### THEY SHOOT SQUATTERS DON'T THEY?

Didn't you always think that Denmark was one of those places like Holland, Sweden and Norway, where the Government has a respect for freedom of speech and a liberal form of government? Pod certainly did. So it was a big shock to learn that during the riots that followed the Maastricht 'Yes' vote in Copenhagen, three people were shot.

True to form press over here laid the blame for the unrest squarely a minority of 'troublemaking' squatters. In this country it seems the government has a more softly-softly approach. First you outlaw mass protest and then you sent the boot boys in to sort out the radicals.

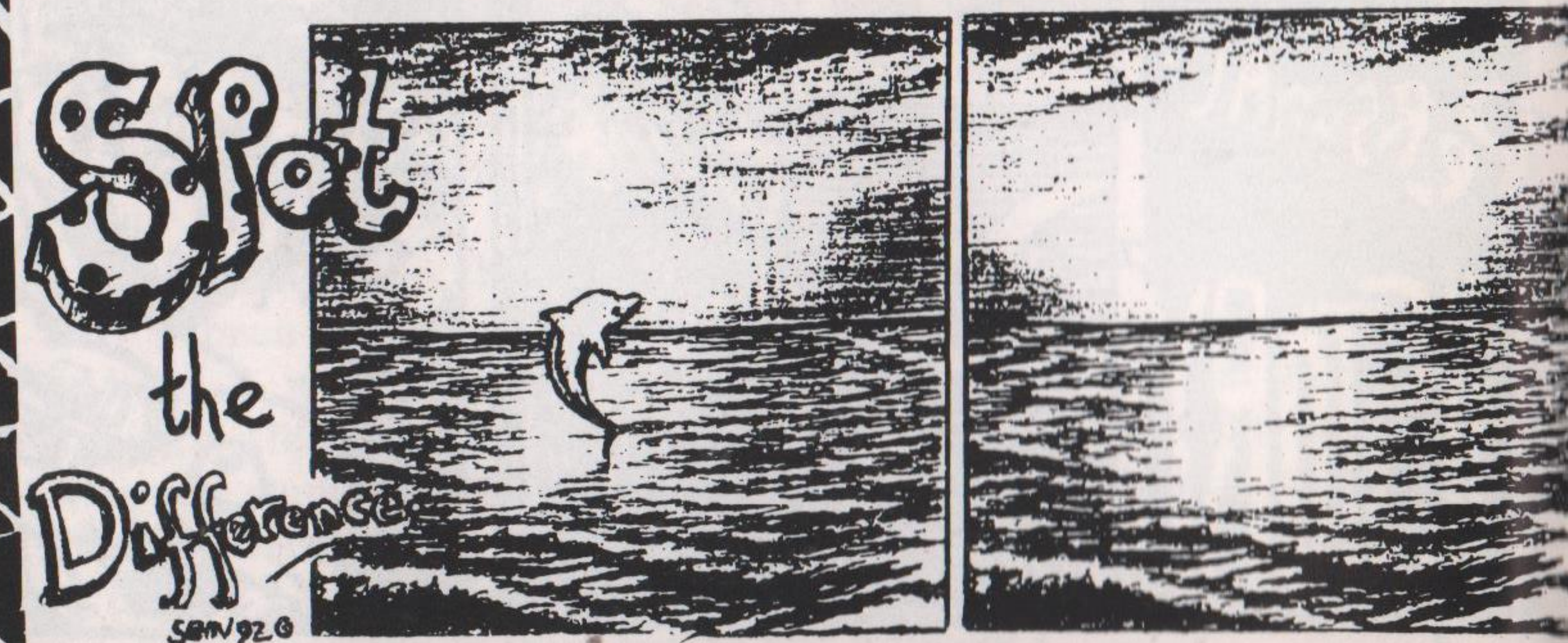
Conspiracy theorists have been having a field day with this one. They reckon that neo-fascist fuckwits like Combat 18 (C18 as opposed to dull old E17!) are getting funding from certain quarters to have a go at squatter 'anarchists'. The blame for a recent firebombings at both Freedom Press in Whitechapel and a 'activist' squat in Brixton's Railton Road was laid squarely at the fascists' door. Makes you think doesn't it.....

### NOT SUCH A GOOD TRIP

*His Supreme Ambience, Mixmaster Morris, was noticeably absent from the crowds who turned up at Hyde Park to celebrate the 50th anniversary of LSD recently. Almost as well-known for his psychedelic dabblings as his spacey mixes, Morris was, in fact, out in Basle, Switzerland; home of the Sandoz pharmaceutical factory where chemist Albert Hoffman first synthesized L.S.D.*

*Morris was DJing at a special acid convention for what he describes as, "mostly old profs and sort of hairy boffin types." But things didn't go as well as he'd hoped. First, the other DJs insisted on playing hardcore techno all night. "They didn't even play any acid-house," he moans. To add insult to injury, someone helped themselves to almost a dozen of His Ambience's tapes - all with unreleased mixes on them.*

*Morris did however manage to bring back a happy memento of his trip - the brass name-plate from the gates of the Sandoz factory.*



## HIGH IDEALS AND CRAZY DREAMS

YOU CAN'T HELP BUT  
SMILE. OUT OF  
RECESSION AND  
ADVERSITY, THE  
FREE-SPIRIT  
IS RISING...

"I don't think there's ever been a sub-culture like it before," he said. "The media is being driven crazy because they can sense something is going on but they just can't put their finger on it." My heart began to beat faster. "The thing is," the voice went on, "They're expecting a band or something to be at the front of it. But there's no front, there's no middle and there's no back. It's just loads of people who are thoroughly pissed-off with the way things are going in this country and they're developing their own way of doing things instead."

It was a big claim to make. But for those who missed both the 60s free-spirit movement and the 70s punk anarchy, the rumblings coming from the underground must feel like the biggest thing ever.

The voice had asked me not to identify him. I sensed that the culture he was talking about wasn't too keen on attracting media coverage anyway. "It's playing with fire. Most people who deal with the press end up getting burned," he explained. "It's better to let things develop at their own speed."

Perhaps it was inevitable that there would be a backlash against the 80s get-rich-quick ethos and the politics of a government with a small mind and giant hands that seem intent on silently smothering the voice and rights of the ordinary man (and woman) at every level. So, what are we left with? A huge undercurrent of frustration. A society that feels helpless and, most important of all from the government's point of view, isolated.

Ok, it looks pretty grim out there but dig down a little and wow, there's something extraordinary happening. It's like strands of energy that are quietly merging together to form a free-flowing current of... what? High ideals? Anarchy? Crazy dreams for the future?

After my conversation with the voice from the underground, I set out on a mission in the hope that DIY Culture was more than the trickle of activity I'd first thought it was. What I found gave me a buzz like I

don't think I've ever felt before. For six months, it seemed like I was caught up in a journey into the other side - with regular stops for tea, tokes and talks.

Perhaps because of the very feeling of isolation a growing number of what can only be described as 'tribes' have been popping up quietly all over the country. They may not be tribes in the true sense of the word, but there's certainly a tribal feeling about them. Have you seen them? Have you come across these tribes from Mars; these close-knit collectives who work, rest and play together.

It's hard to say, but perhaps these collectives are at the core of the quiet anarchy that is spreading around the country. Although they all have different identities and aims, when it comes to their motivation, these groups all speak with one voice. They talk about a resurgence of the free-spirit movement, a personal anarchy. Not

so much yer smash-the-state anarchy but more a mellow-mindedness, a quiet dignity that refuses to be caught up in the fast-track of winners and losers, fashions and fads - or to fall in with the resigned ranks of mediocrity.

Who knows when this spirit began to speed up from a trickle to a wave but certainly in the past few recession-hit years, a network of the skint but proud has slowly been falling into place. The result has been a creative epicentre built on energy and idealism; a pooling of resources to create something out of nothing. Mariola, a 22-year-old member of environmental squatter group, the Rainbow Tribe sums up the collective feeling. "I think people are looking for a way out. They're going back to a village type set-up; small communities making their own decisions rather than being told what to do by conglomerates and the government."





"There's huge number of young people out there who have grown up with nothing positive to believe in, so they're getting together and doing their own thing instead." Harry DIY

Sunday May 9th this year marked an important day in the DIY calendar. A group of 10 friends showed just what can be done through collective effort when they put on the first Hackney Homeless People's Festival in Clissold Park, Stoke Newington. Many of the members who came together to form the Hackney Homeless Project live in squats. Other have worked directly with homeless people. "We'd found that there was no real link between the groups involved in the different issues connected with homelessness; from refugees to families living in bed and breakfast to people sleeping on the streets," explains Finnuala, a core member. "The idea was to provide a platform. To give everyone a voice with the hope of creating a network between these different groups, as well as making people aware of what homelessness really means." With no previous experience of organising a festival and no funding, the group got together last December and started to organise a string of benefit gigs around London. A combination of mellow planning and goodwill from DIY culture's driving forces (and the traditional festival brigade), produced five music stages, two circus areas, stalls, exhibitions, sculptures, fire-juggling, a huge fire sculpture, a children's area (no bottles or dogs), sensible stewards and a minimal police presence (two!).

The day of the festival started out pretty bleak; rain, followed by cold winds and grey skies. Then, by early afternoon, the clouds dilated, the sun appeared and people started to smile. The chestnut trees were in full bloom, the deer kipped in their enclosure and 10,000 people bumped into old friends, skinned-up and mellowed-out to the opening of London's alternative season. The event's main purpose was to spotlight homelessness. But it was also a convergence of nearly all the elements at the heart of DIY culture. They came from near and far. Direct-action campaigners the Dongas Tribe from Hampshire, sculp-

tors and musicians Circus Village from Wales and free-spirit party-people and mellow sound system DiY floated in from Nottingham. The London-based tribes/collectives came out in force too. From north London came Zion Train who opened the back of their lorry to reveal some goodly reggae sounds in conjunction with Joi. Tribal Energy got their own corner of the field into gear by putting on a party from an ancient green double-decker with DiY. From south east London came Camberwell-based L.S.Diesel and Digidub who spent most of their time making hay in the back of a horsebox (complete

with fresh dung) while sculptor Sam Irritant watched over his big wheel framed by huge contorted faces that seemed to be squinting into the sunlight. The SE London contingent was strengthened by the Conscious Collective's Julian Rudd who was working with the Club Dog stage. (The Conscious Collective have held their own highly popular urban free festival in Fordham Park, Deptford for the past three years.) In fact SE London was showing its best side with offspring like Back To The Planet, The Sea and The Co-Creators all in their element and coming on strong. From East London, Zero Gravity and cinema squatters DHSS rubbed shoulder with members of the fluffy-love faction including north London's Rainbow Tribe.

This new breed of non-conformist may be direct descendants of the 60s free-spirit experience but it shies away from labels. DIY culture is about as far as many of them

are prepared to go. Perhaps the best way of describing the feeling came from the appropriately name DiY collective. "DIY is our philosophy," says Harry. "Fuck doing it the way it's supposed to be done. If you don't like what going on out there, go out and do it yourself, in your own way."

"Our motivation come from the love of what we do, not the financial reward," Harry explains and you believe him.

"Too many people are doing things because they think they can make a fast buck, rather than giving people something back; a bit of imagination and value for money."

On the surface, DiY's main focus is parties, playing at festivals and contributing to the new wave of mellow, more ambient-orientated sounds coming from the likes of The Orb, Mix Master Morris, east-London's Zero Gravity and the Aphex Twin. But they also reflect the hefty disillusionment with 'The System'.

**"We don't really get trouble from posses at our parties. We weird them out!"**

"Everyone's feeling the same way," says Harry. "They're getting fed up with the constant erosion of people's rights. They can feel the screws being tightened all the time." Harry reels off a list of 'hostile' government policies; the Public Order Act (changing the legality of demonstrations and gatherings); the clamp down on travellers and festivals; health and education cuts; the curbs on legal aid funding. "It's a kind of divide and conquer thing," reckons Harry. "Split all the people up, make them feel isolated and they'll keep quiet. But there's huge number of young people out there who have grown up with nothing positive to believe in, so they're getting together and doing their own thing instead."

## THE CAMBERWELL CLAN

Camberwell, South-east London is probably the most consistent area of underground activity in the capital. A curious mixture of dred-territory and Little Bohemia, Camberwell is home of the hard core element, an almost impenetrable community that's difficult to track down and even harder to describe. You may not see them but they're definitely there, often using their mystique to protect them from outside forces. As Peter Projector, a member of L.S.Diesel pointed out, "We don't really get trouble from posses at our parties. We weird them out!"

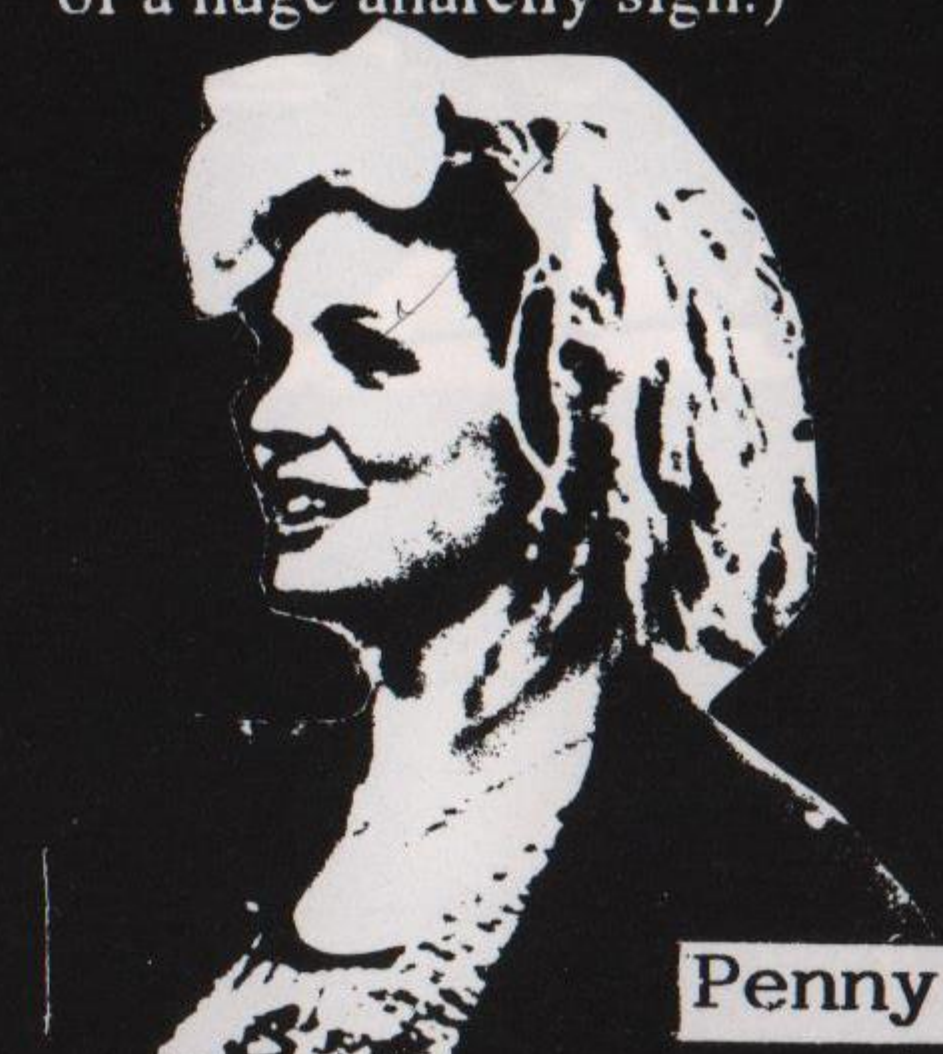
**"You have to keep your head down if you don't want trouble. The more noise you make, the harder the authorities come down on you. Spiral Tribe have learned that lesson the hard way."**

What's for sure is that it's a stronghold with its own anarchic system within The System. Three former members of the robocop meets robochef sculpture-cum-party outlaws, the Mutoid Waste Company have set up separate camps in the area. Ex-Mutoid Dave G and his mates Micky and Jane run the local squat bar in an old warehouse. The bar is quite a good example of squat life in Camberwell. It's kind of loose and laid-back. There's no real organisation but somehow when the time comes for an event, everyone gets together and pulls it off.

At the bar, the beer is cheap, the decor unusual and the entertainment free. An unusually diverse range of people turn up for the sporadic parties, music free-for-alls and quizz nights based on drug culture (first prize a free trip). 'It's a space where people can entertain or be entertained without the normal rules and regulations you have to put up with,' says Micky. Dave and Mick also cooked up a free lunch for 30

people last Christmas and more recently held a benefit for the Hackney Homeless Project.

At first glance, much of the local activity seems to be male dominated. But there's a strong female presence working behind the scenes. Not far away from the squat bar is Scarecrow Tiggy, a squat shop and cafe run by Penny, Torna and Bel. Until their electricity got cut off, the basement cafe provided a meeting point for local alternative types and offered cheap, substantial meals that knocked spots off the cafe across the road. Upstairs, the shop still provides an income for local artisans who can sell their work here for a nominal commission. (Bel and Jane got together to build a fire sculpture for the Hackney Homeless Festival in the form of a huge anarchy sign.)



Penny

Down the road, Kenny Diesel, another ex-Mutoid, lives in a squatted railway arch which also acts as HQ for the L.S.Diesel collective. Purveyors of some of the finest squat parties in town, the Diesels are now spending most of their time working with Lee Digi who runs his own recording studio round the corner with the help of Jim LaunchDat and several friends. The music this alliance is producing is one the best kept secrets in London. Heavily influence by the great dub master Jah Shaka, the group fuses the raw power of traditional Jamaican roots and

**Scarecrow Tiggy**  
redistributes  
**Art & Tat**  
THE UNDERGROUND  
COMMUNITY SHOP



Jenny

culture with their own stock of strange and beautiful digitally-created sounds and samples. So far, they've brought out two singles and a compilation cassette under their own steam. Their first album 'South East Of The Thames' (nice to see someone sticking up for south east London) came out in mid-June. The name the collective has given to their label is the same as Lee's studio, Digidub, but they still haven't decided what to call the alliance.

"Being an anarchic set-up, nobody can decide whether it should be L.S.Diesel or Digidub," explains 30-year-old Lee. "So we'll probably just call ourselves both!"

Like many other music collectives, the Digi/Diesels are a diverse collection from all background and ages but can probably be loosely described as the twentysomething generation. Their main motivation, they say, is survival. Some say the dole is a vital safety net, others manage to get by without it. Some, like Kenny and Harry (creator of his own brand of music called Thracid) live in squats, the 'lucky few' have council flats or live in housing co-ops. 'You just survive the best way you can,' says Lee, a mellow bloke with a ready-smile and a holey cardigan.

The collective regularly take their sound system out and about and from time to time, they transform two of the railways arches into a party paradise filled with mellow, experimental lighting and slides by Peter Projector and sculptures including Sam Irritant's giant fibre-glass heads and Kenny's mutant exhaust-pipe tree.

Working according to the DIY system, dates for the parties are put out by word of mouth only. "You have to keep your head down if you don't want trouble," says 21-year-old Nick.



"The more noise you make, the harder the authorities come down on you. Spiral Tribe have learned that lesson the hard way."

Spiral Tribe has been facing a growing underground backlash. The feeling is that for all the Spiral's free-spirit rhetoric, their policy of playing as loud as possible for as long as possible brings on trouble not only for themselves but for everyone else.

**"If you live by the hype you die by it."**

Early on in their existence, Spiral Tribe got a handy £10,000 deal with Big Life. But the Digi/Diesel's aren't rushing to join the queue for record company hand-outs. Their music projects are mainly funded by Lee who hires out the studio during the day. It attracts all sorts but mainly techno-kids who come up with weird tracks like 'Leave It Out' and 'Tear Off Your Chest.' In the evenings, the collective moves in and works according to its own DIY plan. Although their work has to be some of the most interesting and experimental around town, the collective has a single-mindedness and mistrust of the music-industry that seems, on the surface, to be self-defeating. They've already turned down offers from two labels and shy away from media interest.

'Record companies just make you jump through hoops,' Lee shrugs. 'If you live by the hype you die by it. Sure, we'd like a bit more dough 'cos we're skint but we're doing it our way; building up our reputation slowly and above all, keeping our creative control.'



In reply, record companies might dismiss the Diesel's set-up as a good excuse for being too lunched out to get it together. 'You could see it that way,' says Nick. 'Or you could see it that we're doing things at our own speed, the way that suits us. We're not going to be pressurized into doing something just because that's the way the music industry dictates it.'

Like the DiY collective, the Digi/Diesels reflect a deep mistrust not just of the music industry but 'The System' in general. This feeling is often captured in their lyrics, from



Sam Irritant's Big Wheel

'Dirty Babylon' (England is one vast dump) to 'Struggle Through': (All I do is work for the rent man. And the tax man. Struggle through). But their antipathy is probably best captured in the words of Heart Like A Lion. 'I know them want to conquer I,' sings Ivor The Voice. 'With all their tricks and conniving ways. Break my heart with all their lies. Jah spirit is not of the material world.'

Down a back street, not far from the Diesel HQ, ex-Mutoid and sculptor Sam Irritant lives in a caravan in a squatted 'yard'. A tall, formidable looking bloke, Sam's surprisingly softly-spoken. His lifestyle revolves around squatting in yards during the winter and joining the festival circuit in the summer. 'I've always lived my life independently,' he says leaning against one of his giant fibreglass 'rubber' ducks. 'I've always squatted. I have tried to rent once or twice but I could never afford it.' He doesn't side with any particular philosophy other than that of the free-spirit. 'I'm a great believ-

er in individualism. We're all different and if you don't find your niche to express yourself, you'll end up dead frustrated. Dead inside.'

Sam's sculptures have appeared everywhere from large-scale raves like World Dance to progressive squat parties. His ideas range from his alternative big wheel (seen at the Hackney Homeless Festival), to fluorescent mud-wrestling. 'I've also set up this company with Harry (Diesel),' he says with a grin. 'It's called Wasteways; Lunched Out And Lost The Plot. That's our dying excuse for things not happening. Blame it on Wasteways!'

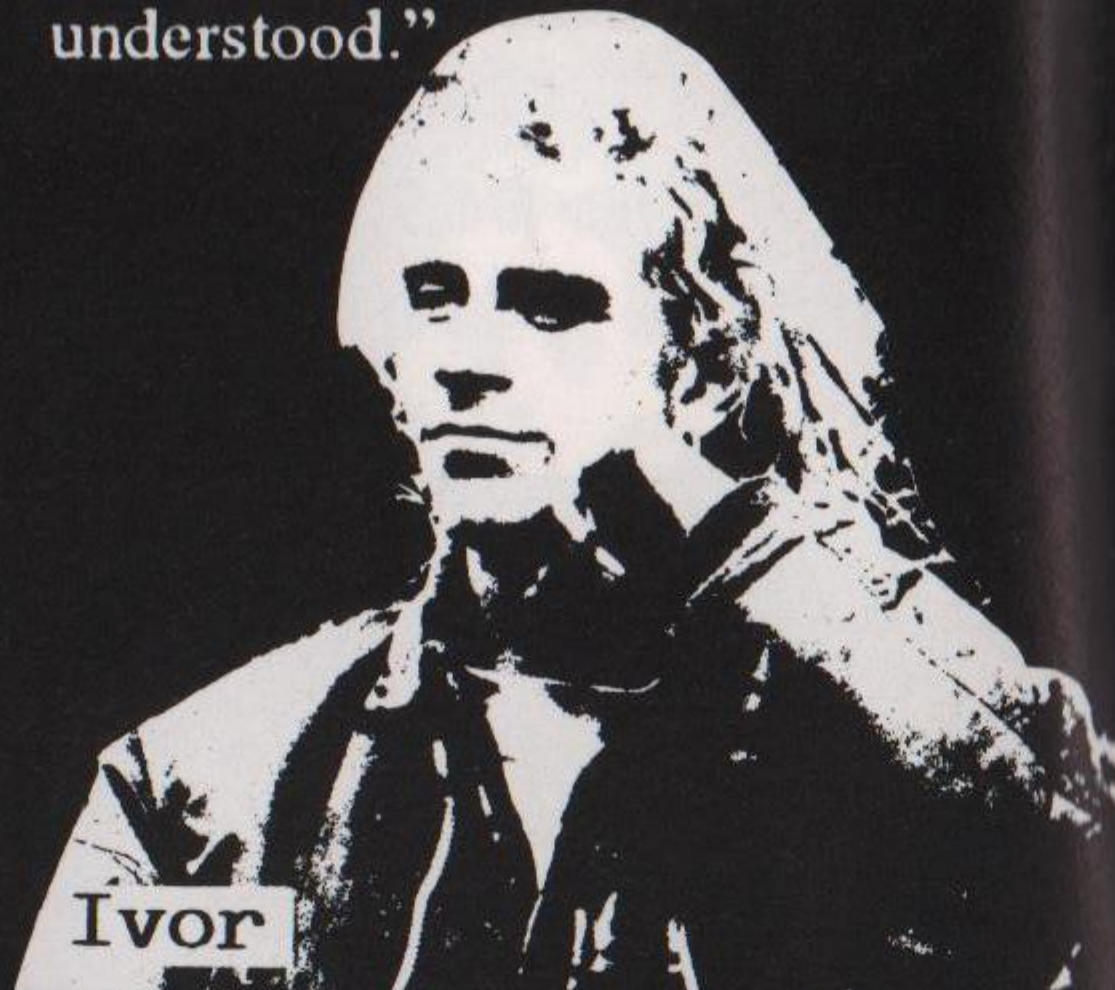
**"To criminalize an alternative way of life is in itself a criminal act. It's treason to the spirit of individuality."**

Although not politically motivated, Sam's chief concern is what he calls 'the silent strangulation of the free-festival circuit.' By the beginning of May, the underground grapevine was already buzzing with news of travellers being blocked into their sites and police stifling the start to the festival season. 'Nothing's changed,' says Sam. 'The police can't be a brutal as they were at the time of the Battle Of The Beanfield, so they're taking the softly-softly approach instead.' He sees the clamp down on travellers and the impending Reform of the Caravan Site Act of 1968 as the final straw. 'To criminalize an alternative way of life is in itself a criminal act. It's treason to the spirit of individuality,' he says.



Harry

Civil Liberty Agenda. The National Council For Civil Liberties' newsletter also has strong views on this subject. In the spring issue it points out, "One of the tragic lessons to be learned over the last 50 years, is the need to respect minority rights, when the minority is vulnerable and powerless. For us, the attack on travellers' rights illustrates the problem of living in a culture where fundamental human rights are not enshrined, respected or even understood."



Ivor

The American psychedelic academic Terence McKenna gave a grim warning when he came over to lecture in England at the beginning of the year. He said that past civilisations had begun to fall apart when they stopped supporting the less privileged parts of society, leading to gradual decay from within.



## THE PIRATES OF PARK LANE

While most collectives operate from the Capital's more depressed boroughs, the Rainbow Tribe has an eye for more up-market accommodation. Their first stop was an empty bookshop in the middle of swanky Hampstead. The site had already been the subject of public outcry when wealthy locals learned that McDonald's wanted to turn it into a hamburger bar. Fearing it would 'lower the tone' of the area, they called for a ban on the golden arches. Meantime, Peter and two friends moved in and set up the first 'One World Rainbow Centre'.

True to form, an eviction order soon appeared. Peter fought the order, telling the court that he had been given the keys by a mysterious benefactor called Father McDonald. 'He's the kind of bloke who gives out crowbars to all the homeless kiddies at Christmas,' Peter chuckles. Believe it or not, the story succeeded in delaying their eviction for several weeks but the friends were finally forced to move on last October after two months.

Undaunted the trio, now joined by two other friends, quickly resurfaced in what was formerly the Mayfair branch of the fraud-ridden Bank Of Credit and Commerce International, on the corner of Park Lane and Oxford Street.

This was a more ambitious project incorporating an artisan's market and vegetarian cafe in the basement and a bric-a-brac section on the ground floor. Upstairs, a meeting centre was set up, pulling in different groups from all over London. The tribe was beginning to get the place up and running when problems set in. Following an article in the Evening Standard, the fire exits in the basement were mysteriously concreted up. A couple of days later, the fire brigade arrived and pronounced the basement and first floor unsafe for public use and the Tribe had to move out.

Peter Rainbow is a real live wire. The 22-year-old talks ten to the dozen and his flow of ideas is so constant you can almost see the little light bulbs over his head. A few years ago, he was living a more conventional lifestyle with the grim job of selling advertising space on commission. 'It was soul destroying,' he says. 'Just spinning and weaving and



Photo: SPI

telling lies. It wasn't as if I was making a fortune either. Some weeks it would be good money but then you'd get times when you'd be earning nothing at all.'

In the end, Peter found it so hard to make ends meet, he moved out of his £50-a-week flat and into a friend's squat. His experiences in the world of Squatterdom led him to encounters with a large number

of groups who had ideas for projects but no affordable space to set them up. 'That's why we wanted to squat in central London, so that all these different groups could have a central base,' he explains.

The article in the Evening Standard produced a conflict of ideals for Peter and the growing number of people who began to merge into the Rainbow Tribe. 'I regret talking to the papers

now,' he says. 'It is important for people to know that we're not into trashing places, we're into setting up environmental and creative community projects. The way I see it, we have to attract publicity because time's running out. Greenpeace say we've only got 15 years to save the rainforests and they're making squatting illegal. But the Standard called us a hippy commune and it must have



the same old story. The government is only interested in making the rich richer and the poor poorer. The worst thing is,



"I'm not a subscriber to any of the New Age ideals," says Glasgow-based journalist Stu Pure. But when Stu came down to London to meet **Zion Train** recently, he had to admit he was moved.....

Prejudices. Preconceptions. Misconceptions. Stereotypes. We carry them wherever we go, most often unwittingly. It can be like being bent double by a crippling backpack and not realising you're carrying it. That's what this (highly personal) piece is about. It's from the heart. It's an outpouring that might at times seem unnecessarily over-effusive. Or plain ridiculous. Sure, we all have those 'had to be there' experiences. But I'm going one step further. I'm going to tell you about me and mine. Hang in there. You're also going to hear about a bunch of musicians who make music that matters. There may well be many more out there of equal or greater talent than North London's Zion Train. But there won't be many afternoons as genuinely enlightening for me as the one I spent in the company of Neil, Colin C, Dave and Molara. Welcome to one man's adventure. And everyone else's chance to discover.

*"It's crucial that you do something that'll spark some imagination in others. It's absolutely elemental to making music." Colin C. in interview.*

As a music journalist based in Glasgow, it's only inevitable that you tend to suffer from that old 'big fish in a small pond' complex. Although the geographical distance between London and Glasgow is approximately a mere 400 miles, those of you immersed in the counter-culture of the Capital would no doubt be shocked how staid, nay reactionary, Scotland's largest city is by comparison. There's a negligible amount of squatting; no record stores that sell more than a token amount of dub or reggae; the nightlife is dominated by the House scene and anything remotely underground or illegal is either small-scale or busted. It's a great city, don't get me wrong. But imagine if you had one of those kiddies' kaleidoscopes and you thought that the colourful patterns were great but never realised you could shake it up and get a million other fantastical possibilities. That's Glasgow.

So. The music I cover is principally anything from the great expanses of 'dance music'. I'd always loved dub and stuff but I'd never had anyone to get inspiration or advice from. So apart from some LKJ, Perry, Marley and mostly On-U sound stuff, my knowledge of the scene was microscopic. Names like Manasseh, Alpha and Omega and Jah Shaka were exotic distant names from an alien realm of music. Nothing fascist you understand. Just an undercurrent

of suspicion that it revolved around a scene inhabited by your usual media-portrayed 'crusty' stereotypes who were actually revelling in their supposed state of penury. I'm not a subscriber to any of the New Age ideals, nor do I associate myself with any political parties or beliefs. I'm also deeply suspicious of people who will have nothing to do with you, unless you're avowedly 'one of them'. When I listened to Zion Train's music for the

first time I loved it. But I was wary. If I went to see them, would I be welcome? As an obvious outsider not only to their genre of music but also to the whole consciousness movement of which the band is a vital cog, my intention was simple. Meet the band, get a few quotes, don't hang around and above all don't let's get into any of that 'weird New Age spacey-hippy-cosmic-thought shit. (Preconceptions. I warned you I had them.) Especially as so few of the

interviews I'd done in my year and a half's reporting had been any more inspirational or thought-provoking than a stoned perusal through a telephone directory.

*"Now what we're about is the use of some skill that you have to promote some consciousness in other people, some awareness. Whether that's merely by making a sound that makes people go, 'Fuck me. I've never heard that before,'*

*or whether it's actually like the verse to our second single: 'A roof over your head and food for yourself and children/These are the basic human rights for everyone.' Now that is like a freedom fighter cliché or whatever but we range from that to the concept of being able to learn from sound. With the LP (the highly recommended dub feast Passage To Indica) we've got a free sheet that goes inside with facts about the homeless, about government housing, and*





**NO conclusions, no summarizations from us. Just 'these are the facts, have a look at them'. That's all."** Colin C.

Zion Train share the same two-up-two-down industrial cottage as both Fraser Clark's Evolution organisation and an asian tailor. One box-sized room crammed with buzzing, diode-flashing equipment is the studio where all the music is made. The other is the office where Colin sits cross-legged on the floor battering away on a not entirely state-of-the-art typewriter and visitors are liable to find themselves gradually succumbing to the tea, the joints and the feeling that 'midst this well-chilled ambience and laid-back vibes, a whole lot of thought, creativity, activity and discourse is going down. I've been there, hovering between the two rooms like a butterfly high on spring-time pollen for some three hours now. I haven't even started the interview.

I'm listening, absorbing, sometimes contributing and nothing else seems important. For what could be two hours or two minutes we listen together in the tiny studio to a catalogue of tracks that ZT haven't even released yet. There's Dave Shakra, Drum Club and Mike Dog remixes of "Follow Like Wolves". There's collaborations with Studio One veteran Devon Russell. There's an ongoing project with their vocalist Molar, who's just signed in her own right to Big Life subsidiary Skunk. (Apparently, they listened to these same tapes and signed her on the spot. I'm not surprised.) We've been chatting about Muslim fundamentalism, about the music, about nothing and everything. Miss Pod has arrived, all a-fluster and several hours late.

*"It's moving forwards. The whole thing about the train to Zion in classic reggae is the train to the freedom land but without*

*any of the religious connections. It's a very good analogy to life. You know, the train is something people step on board and join in with what's going on. You're heading toward a good place."* Neil this time.

And then it happens. As I remember it, I'm spread-eagled on the floor, there's more weird and wonderful sounds drifting from the studio monitors and Miss Pod gets up to leave. She wants to know if I'm going to come with her. From nowhere (I swear it wasn't a sentence I consciously voiced) I feel myself smile and a voice, MY voice says, quite simply, "What's the rush?" And then WHOOOOSH, it's like something just lifted that rucksack from my shoulders. Life and how to live it, suddenly became that little bit clearer, brighter and crucially, more important. Existentialists would call it my 'Moment of Awareness'. I felt like I'd woken from a stupor or that someone had just removed blinkers I'd never even known I was wearing. It was time to start the interview.

*"The concept is just thinking, making people think. And the thing I am certainly aware of is that there are people living in Peterborough or Glasgow or wherever who WANT to think but there is no stimulus. They want to think but there's only Philip Schofield and Jason Donovan."* Colin C, of course, in interview.

It was, like I said, one of those moments. I can't guarantee an afternoon spent in the company of ZT is gonna do it for you. Anyway, 'nuff of the confessional. How about some information on who ZY are and why they're so damn fine? The origins of ZT lie in the original Wobbly Wobbly World club from 1989 which was a

kinda ahead-of-its-time Club Dog with bands, house DJs, dub sound systems, massages, brain machines, computers and the like. It was run by Dave and Colin, who were also in the process of setting up their own studio when Neil brought his Zion Train sound system to one of their club nights and the alliance was forged.

"Neil met up with people who could make good music and we met up with someone who could give us credibility," says Dave, perhaps referring to Neil's already established reputation in London's reggae circle.

What makes ZT's music so good is the way they straddle both the hardcore roots scene and the equally demanding House/rave scene, both with skilful results. Firstly, they'll record a pure roots record, either on their own or with vocalists such as Molar or Devon, which your average dub vendor has no problem selling to his strictly roots crowd. But then, they'll take the same track and experiment with random drum loop patterns over the top to fit the track in with the more house side of things. Thus far, the records have, frankly, been remarkable. "Jah Hold The Key," the 1992 collaboration with Devon Russell of which only 800 were pressed was voted Echoes' top British reggae track of the year. Meanwhile their housey "Follow Like Wolves" single was getting itself onto the play list of top DJs like Drum Club's Charlie Hall and Leftfield's Paul Daley. At the time of writing, the album "Passage To Indica" has already sold out its initial run.

And just wait til you hear those "Follow Like Wolves" remixes. It's music for a divided nation to come together as one tribe. Innovative and challenging, every person I've played ZT stuff to has been overwhelmed. Get out there and find it!



# WHEN TWO TRIBES GO TO WAR

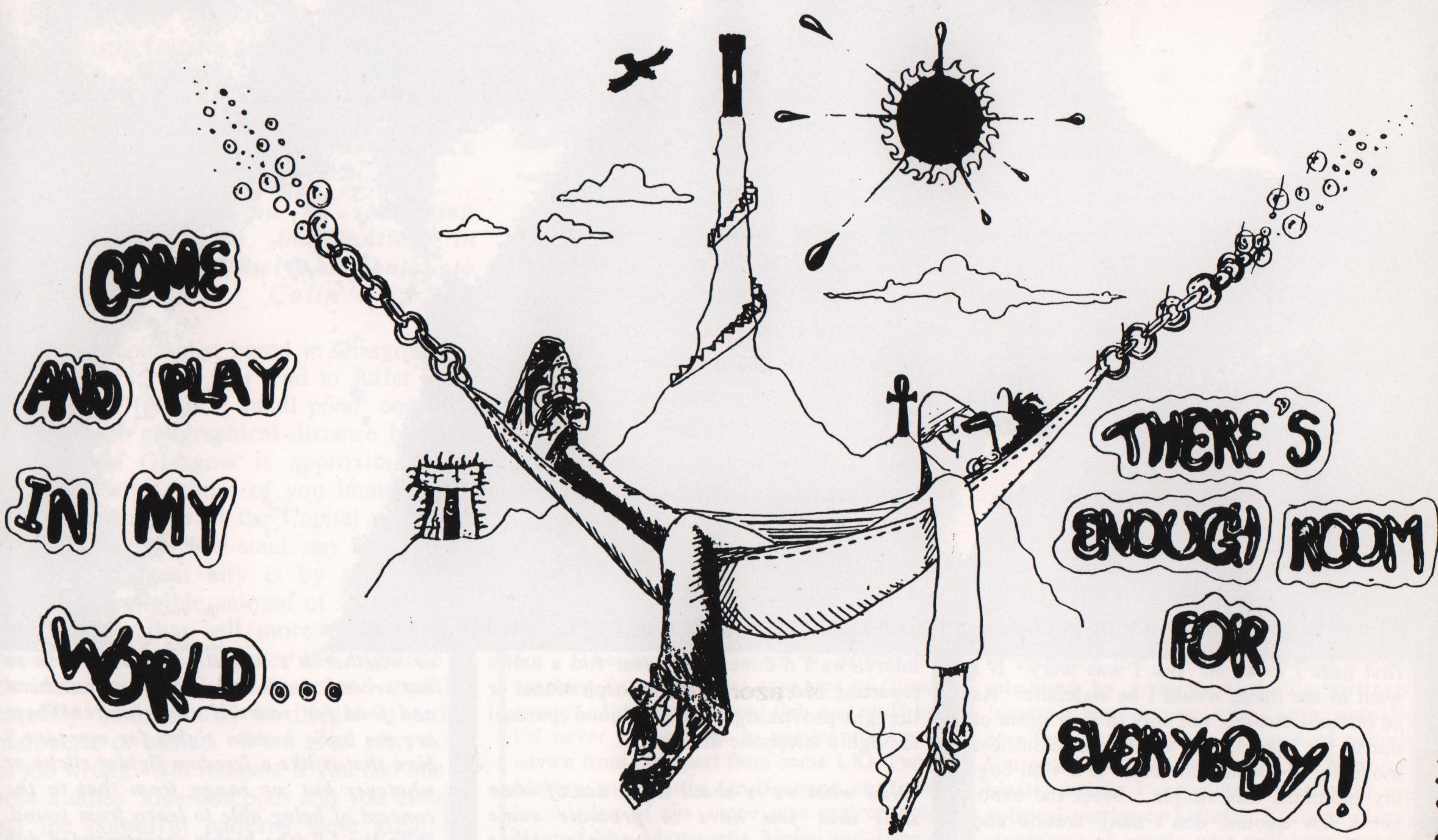
## THE DONGAS TRIBE V. THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

This site was once part of Twyford Down, a Designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the most important archaeological landscape in southern Britain. For 20 years, campaigners have fought against plans to build a six-lane extension to the M3 outside Winchester which includes a cutting 100ft deep and 400ft wide. The road will rip through Twyford Down and two Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Last year the protest took a new turn. A group of some 20 kindred spirits gradually came together and set up a small village of tepees and benders on the Dongas, a pre-medieval system of tracks, some as deep as 15ft, at the heart of the Down. The Dongas Tribe, as the group came to be known, managed to stop bulldozers starting work on the motorway for almost three months using non-violent direct action.

Then, last December, the Tribe felt the Department of Transport's boot full in the stomach. An estimated 80 Group 4 security men, later backed up by more than 100 local police, were drafted in to remove the Tribe from the area. A bitter confrontation, later dubbed The Battle Of Twyford Down, went on for two days before the Tribe members were finally overwhelmed.

Today, the site is fortified with coils of razor wire up to 10ft high while bulldozers gnaw away at the last piece of undeveloped chalk downland around Winchester to save motorists just seven minutes journey time. Unbowed, the Tribe are now camping up the road and are more defiant than ever. But is there any point in continuing the protest now that the Down has been carved up? Miss Pod went to meet the Tribe for a pow-wow.....



Cartoon by Nathan (Rainbow Tribe)





It was bitterly cold. The fields had been covered in frost all day and as we walked up a narrow mud track, the puddles squeaked and fractured under foot. It was a strange old group sliding along that track. There was Mike, (a green-campaigner since the days when green-campaigners were all branded looney left-wing lunch-outs), Will, an astrologer, a 65-year-old gypsy called John and me, a townie with a dripping nose.

The track came to an end at a small wood. We pushed our way through the low branches and undergrowth to be greeted a board saying, 'Dongas Autonomous Territory.' There was little sign of life except for a couple of old 'sit up and beg' bicycles and what appeared to be a discarded sling. Round the side of a hill the path opened out into a small clearing and suddenly we found ourselves in the middle of Dongas country.

The scene was sort of King Arthur meets Tonto. The centre piece was a large, slightly mildewed tepee. Spread out in little clusters around it were small benders (willow poles bent over and covered in tarpaulin)

with long silver funnels sticking out the entrances like turned-up nostrils. A group of four or five people sat huddles around a communal fire in the centre of the 'village.' Nearby, a goat stood chewing a piece of bark under its own specially constructed piece of tarp.

**"First of all it was a battle of wits. But when they started to lose money it got dirty and violent."**

The goat, I soon discovered was called 'Spik.' Perhaps the Dongas Tribe aren't as 'right-on' as I thought they were.

In the snug of bender at the bottom of the wood, we sit down and warm our hands and knees around a burner while Rowe and Paul, two Tribe members dressed in numerous layers of wool, brew up tea. Rowe (short for Rowena) registers my surprise at the name they've given their goat. "She's got a sister called Span," she explains with a smile. "But Span lives with a friend up in Wales."

It was only a few weeks after the Tribe were forced off Twyford Down and I expected them at a low ebb. I brought a peace offering of a bud of skunk to cheer them up but it turned out they didn't need it. As the sun went down, the temperature

If you go down to the woods today...Left: Tribespeople brew up outside a bender. Right: 'Spik' the goat. Far right: Group 4 guards shelter in a plastic 'tepee'.

dropped a few more degrees but Rowe and Paul's cheeks glowed as they recalled the bitter events of the 'Battle of Twyford Down.'

"It's like a game of chicken, only the odds are more serious," says 22-year-old Paul explaining the tactics of direct-action. "The most effective way of stopping a bulldozer is to lie down in its path. Only you've got to make sure they see you doing it first!" Over the three months that construction group Tarmac attempted to start work on the Down, the tribe would follow various methods of action. "Sometimes we'd just talk to the Tarmac people and ask them if they realised what they were doing to the countryside. Other times we'd sit and hold hands around the bulldozers before the drivers arrived for work, so they couldn't go anywhere," says Paul pulling at his goatee beard.

**"After a lot of yelling and screaming they managed to pull me out. I had my jumper and shirt pulled off in the process and I ended up lying half naked in the mud."**

But as the weeks went by, the Department of Transport began to work out how much money they were losing (an estimated £20,000 a day) and quickly tired of the Dongas' games. "First of all it was a battle of wits," says Rowe, also 22. "But when they started to lose money it got dirty and violent."

The Tribe woke up one morning to find a stream of Group 4 men surging towards them. Paul takes up the story. "We just did what we could. I headed for the nearest bulldozer and climbed underneath it. They spent about three-quarters of an hour trying to get me out. I think I must have kicked quite a few of them in the head. After a lot of yelling and screaming they managed to pull me out. I had my jumper and shirt pulled off in the process and ended up lying half naked in the mud."

"Everyone in the tribe was running about shouting, forming rings around the 'dozers, fighting off the sea of yellow coats that were grabbing people left, right and centre. But we felt strong. It wasn't just the Dongas we were defending it was our home. Sam and Steff (founder members) had been living there for seven and a half months we'd all grown to love the place. It felt very special. I've been to Glastonbury Tor and the Avebury Circle but I've never felt the same kind of power as I felt on the Dongas."

"It turned into a running battle. There

were bloody tribe members being dragged over bushes and mud away from the site. The Group 4 security lay on people's stomachs and chests to hold them down.

**"My home was a wasteland surrounded by razor wire."**

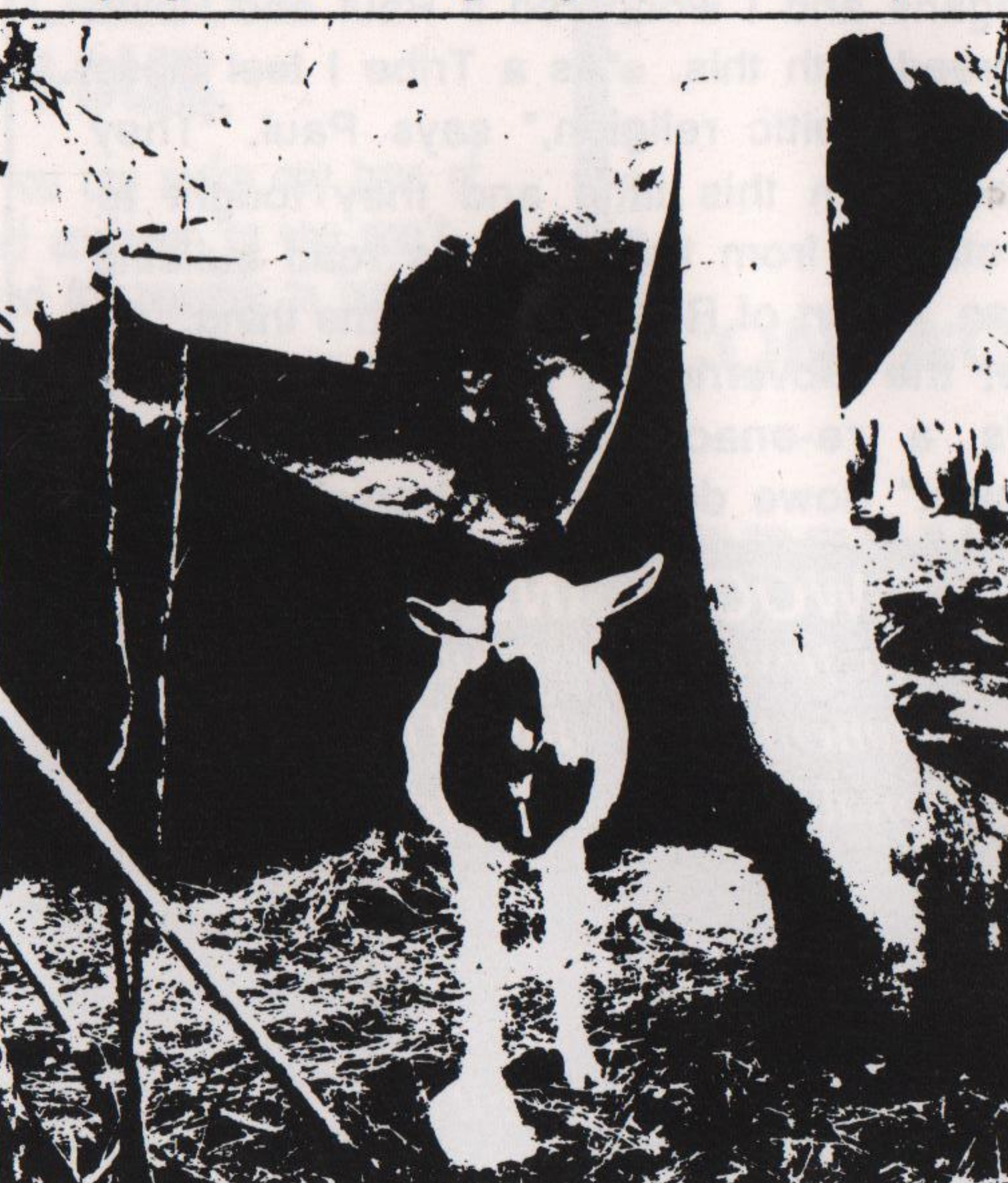
Everyone was exhausted but somehow we managed to keep going. I felt like I had a whole army behind me. It went beyond the limits of what I know my body can do. I could feel the thousands of people who passed through that place over the centuries giving me strength." By early evening, most of Group 4 had returned to barracks and the Tribe were left to lick their wounds. Their benders had been destroyed, the neat willow fence around their village smashed but the Tribe were still intact. "That night was a lunar eclipse which was an important event to us and we had a party. Word had got out like lightning that there was a battle on the Down and loads of people turned up. We climbed over the wire they'd put up and there we all were partying and playing the drums. It really unnerved the guards!"

Day Two saw the return of Group 4, this time re-enforced by more than 100 police. Again the Tribe, swelled by friends and supporters, fought back, forming rings around the trees or climbing up into them. Rowe takes up the story here. "I was wearing a jacket with a cord-pull round the top. A policeman yanked me by the back of the jacket and the cord was pulled up tight against my neck. I was dragged along the ground, I don't know how far. I started to choke. I couldn't speak. I was struggling for breath and in the end I passed out. I was unconscious for about 20 minutes." Rowe was later taken to hospital and X-rayed. Doctors found the ligaments in her neck had been torn, several muscles pulled and she had heavy bruising around the tops of her arms: it explained the sling I had seen when we arrived.

As Paul cooks up soup and dumplings on the top of his burner, he reflects on the Tribe's final defeat. "Naturally, we're very upset that the Dongas have been destroyed but it's a weight off our shoulders. When we were living there, we were on edge all the time. You'd feel guilty about going away and having a good time. Even when I went into Winchester to earn some money busking, I'd feel bad." Paul returned to the site after the bulldozers had started work. "When I saw that the whole of the woodland had been destroyed I was in tears. My home was a wasteland surrounded by razor wire. There was a long line of police looking at

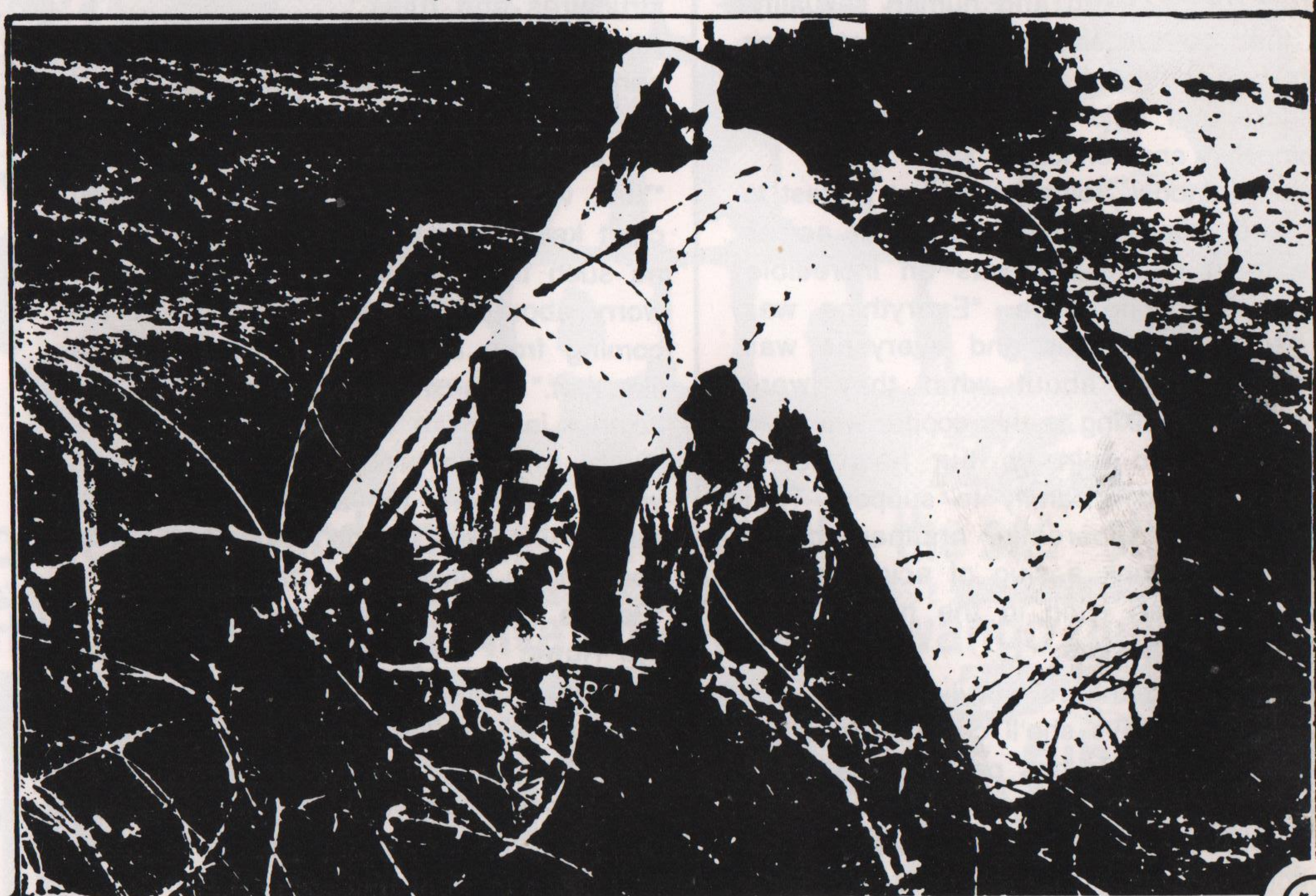
me and smirking."

The Dongas' commitment to saving one small part of England from the remorseless tide of tarmac may have been admirable but at the end of the day, have they really achieved anything? Paul sees a positive side to their activity both on a personal and environmental level. "Living on the Dongas was the most profound experience of my life. I came out of living in a bedsit and working in a pub and staying on the Dongas got me on the path



to understanding who I really am and what I want out of life. I lived there for seven months and I became part of it. I remember sitting playing the drums under the full moon and feeling the happiest I've ever felt."

When Rowe visited the Dongas Tribe for the first time last summer she was so impressed, she decided to give up studying to be a teacher at University to join the



**Dongas autonomous free territory**

Tribe full time. "None of the people here was a traveller before the Tribe formed. We're all just ordinary people who've gone back to the basic lifestyle of living with the land. It attracts creative people

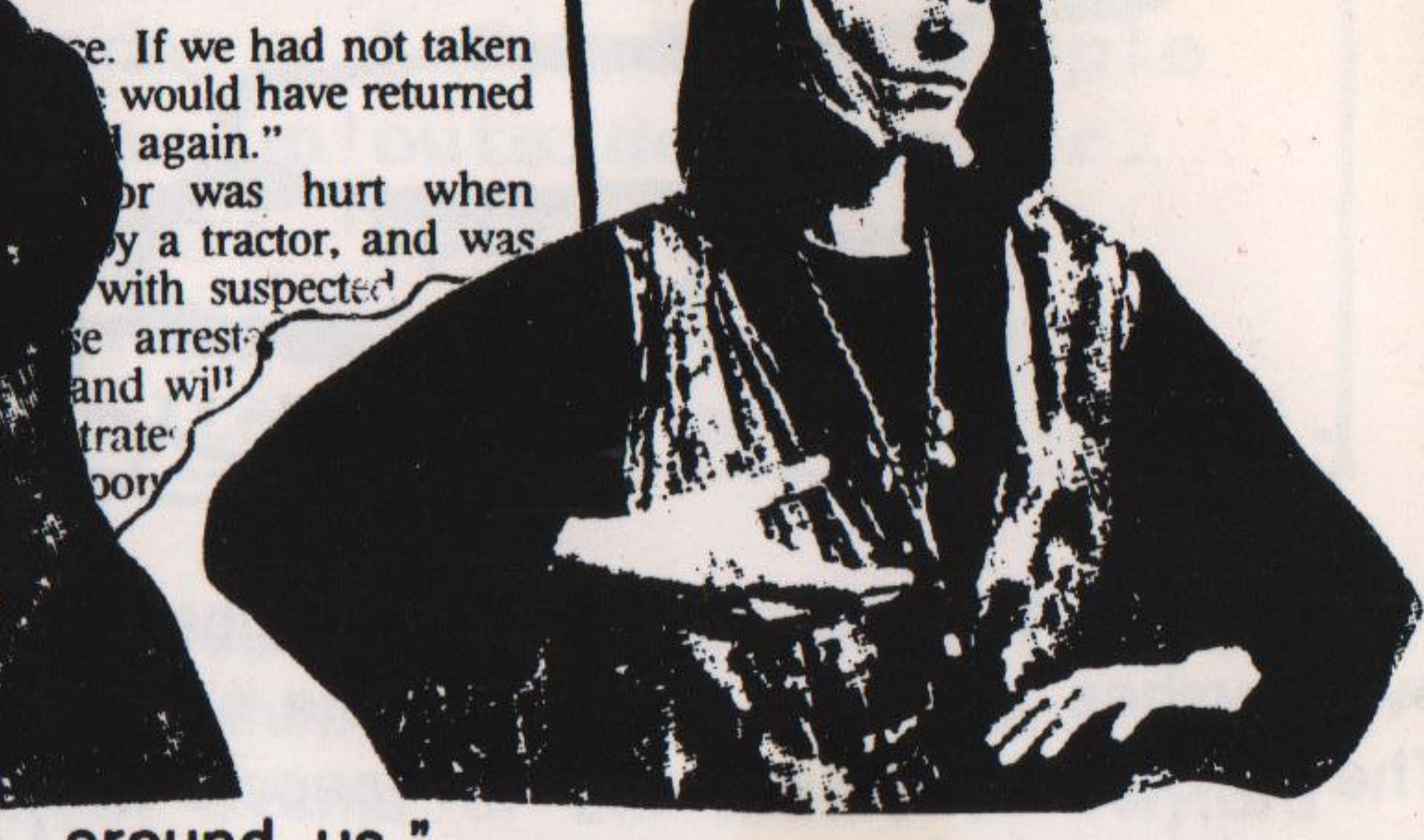
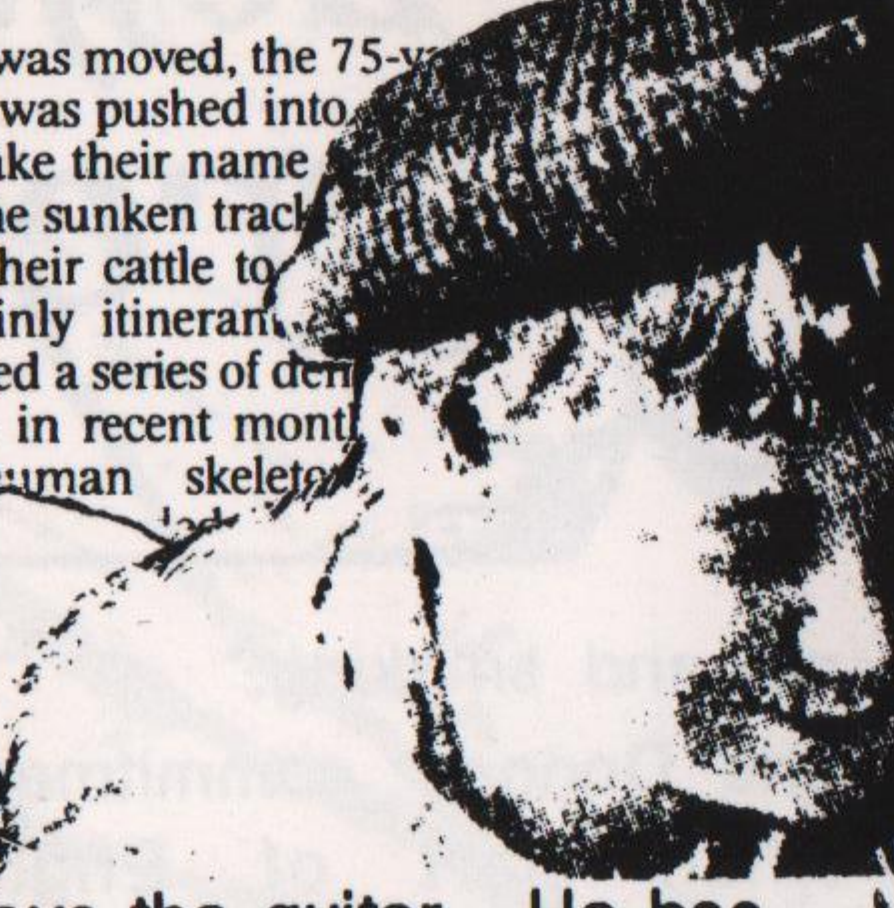
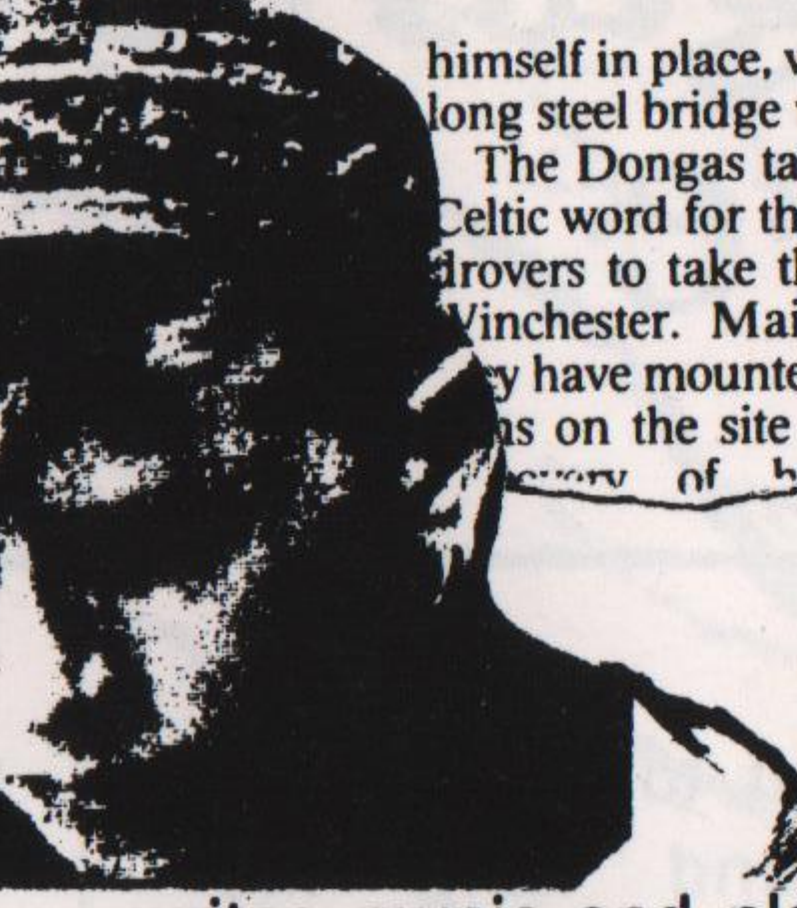
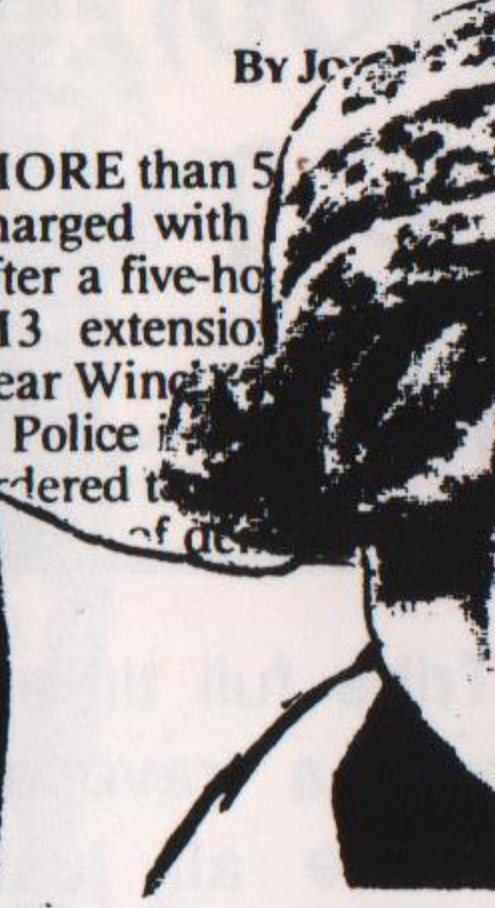
**"The American Indians used to plan for the generations ahead. What have we got? 60-year-old farts planning things for their own advantage."**

as well as bringing out the creativity in people that they never knew they had it. We've got poets, musicians (some make their own instruments), carpenters, herbalists, all sorts." (Several members have also mastered the art of poaching!) From the offices of Whitehall, the Dongas Tribe might seem nothing more than a flea on the camel's back but Paul believes they have left egg on a lot of faces. "Their planning backfired. It brought us together as a group and we've come quite a long way, and influenced a lot of people. (From Oxford academics to local MPs.) The whole road-scheme reeks of corruption and back-handers."

Last year, the EC environment commissioner ruled that work on the M3 link should not be given the go-ahead because of alleged breaches of EC law. A full assessment of the road's environmental impact on the local area should have been made before any work was carried out. Somehow the EC ruling got pushed to one side. Some say the EC turned a blind eye as part of a deal to secure support from the Maastricht Treaty. The group can list a dozen example of alleged malpractice and



# Police arrest 50 at Twyford Down sit-in



downright flouting of the law. "If nothing else, we've made people realise what's happening to our countryside," adds Paul. "If the road building continues, this country will be one big spaghetti junction. The American Indians used to plan for the generations ahead. What have we got? 60-year-old farts planning things for their own advantage."

There is no doubt that Winchester suffers from a severe congestion problem. Several alternatives to the M3 link have been put forward including a tunnel under the downs, (a project the DTp say is too expensive) and an upgrading of the existing by-pass. "The way we see it is that the government's got it all wrong. More money should be put into improving public transport and cutting down on pollution rather than building more and more roads which just attract more cars," says Rowe.

The DTp may have hoped that the bitter weather might finally kill off the Tribe's activities but they maintain they are getting stronger all the time. Their numbers have grown from 20 to nearer 40 over the last six months. Since my visit, the Tribe has had to move on several times but they hold regular

protests back at the site, bringing larger crowds of supporters each time. On May Day, they held a Beltane festival, the traditional time for bringing together the forces of fire, earth and human sexuality. At their current site, they have set up an info-bender and communal tent for visitors and hold benefit events both in Hampshire and London.

Peter Rainbow joined a recent protest to try and stop a bridge being built across the main cutting. "It was an incredible experience," he says. "Everything was done by consensus and everyone was really positive about what they were doing. I got talking to this copper who said he'd like to join us but he's got a mortgage and a family to support. That said it all." Apparently, another copper accidentally took a slug of acid tea and was last seen lying in the middle of a field, counting stars.

The Tribe members survive in various way. Rowe says she'll continue to claim the dole until she has paid off the debts she ran up at university. She recently got a publishing deal for an environmental children's book she has written. Paul

writes music and plays the guitar. He has written a song called The Ballad Of The Battle Of Twyford Down and supports himself by busking. Rowe also plans to set up a market stall in Winchester to sell the Tribe's wares. Other members support themselves with their different skills, a minority claim benefit.

The Tribe is sometimes described as neo-pagans and I wondered if Paul and Rowe agreed with this. "As a Tribe I feel close to the Celtic religion," says Paul. "They were from this land and they fought to protect it from the Roman's road building plan. A sort of Romans Go Home thing. To us, the Government reeks of Romanism. It's a re-enactment of that all over again." Rowe doesn't call herself a pagan

**BRITAIN'S WOODLAND FACES THE CHOP**  
*Britain has among the fewest forests in Europe, covering only 10% of the country. Government watchdog, The Countryside Commission, believes our traditional woodland is vanishing at a faster rate than an Amazon rainforest.*

*Our receding forests are blamed on motorway building, changes in farming, Dutch Elm disease and the hurricanes of 1987 and 1990. London's ancient woodland, areas that can trace roots back before the 16th century, are most threatened of all. It's estimated that there are only 185 fragments of ancient sites left in the city, including Oxleas Wood, Greenwich and Scratchwood in Barnet, both threatened by motorway development.*

but she says it's close to what she feels. "I don't like to worship and idol, I worship the land because I live on it and I can feel the energy from that. I don't like structures and rules."

As we talk, the sounds of a guitar and a penny-whistle drift across the cold night air. These people seem healthy, happy and content. But there must be a down side. "Yes, when the wood gets wet and you can't keep warm!" laughs Paul. "There's no such thing as a stress-free life. We worry about where the next bit of food's coming from and keeping warm. Things like that." Doesn't he ever miss the little luxuries in life like TV and a nice hot bath. "Sure, if you're brought up with luxuries you miss them for a while but really things like that aren't important. The good things outweigh the bad here."

"People look at us and say we're lazy," says Rowe. "They say we don't work, we don't pay bills, we're running away from life. But we've gone back to the essence of what life is all about, living with the land rather than destroying it. We've learned to appreciate the basics things like the warmth of a fire and the natural world

around us."

We are joined by Gary, a 25-year-old ex-screen printer from West Yorkshire. I'm talking about politicians dismissing the tribe as drop-outs. "It's not a matter of can't conform," says Gary. "I could do

**"People are realising that they can be themselves rather than being a number on a clock card."**

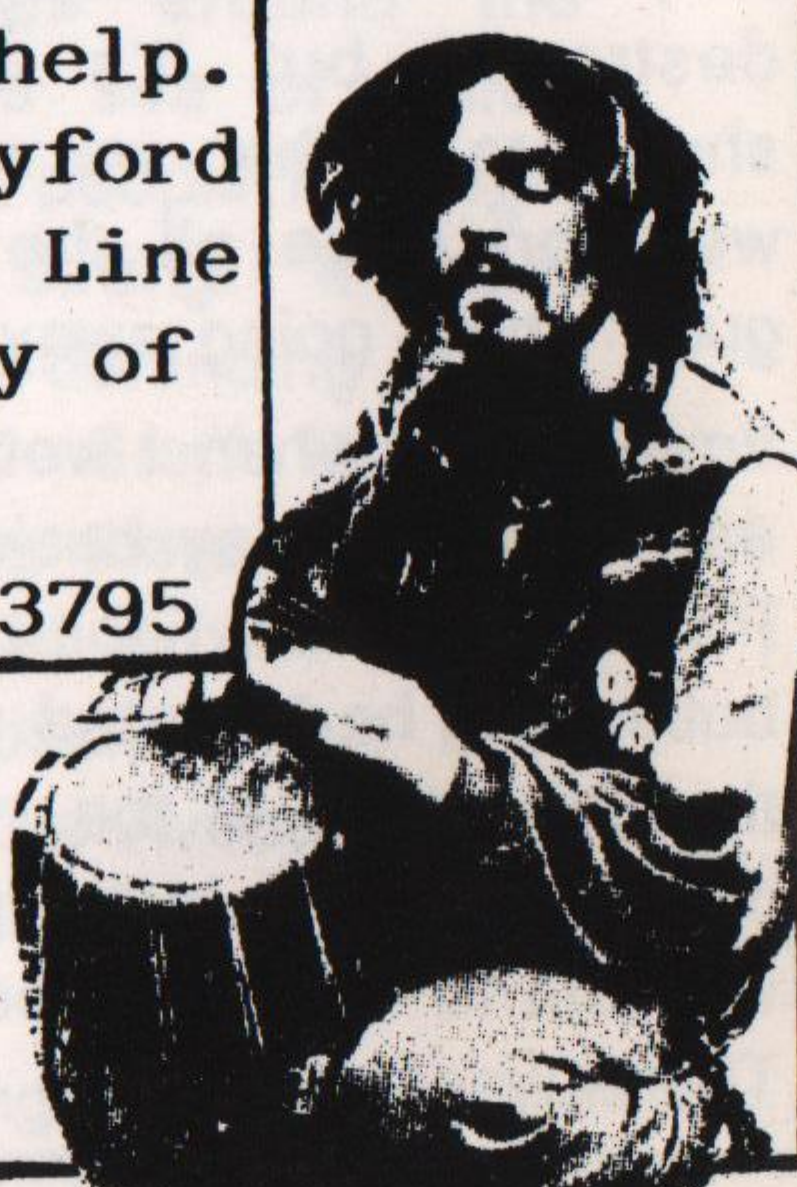
any job in printing but I've decided to give myself time to find out what I can do. giving up my job was the best thing I've ever done. Here, you can get fit and get yourself together. I'm living all year round rather than waiting for the weekends. The important thing is you're your own boss. People are realising they can be themselves rather than being a number on a clock card."

Do they have a political feelings after everything they've been through? "I don't think we really believe in politics," says Rowe. "Our internal politics is that every one does what they want with respect for everyone else and the land

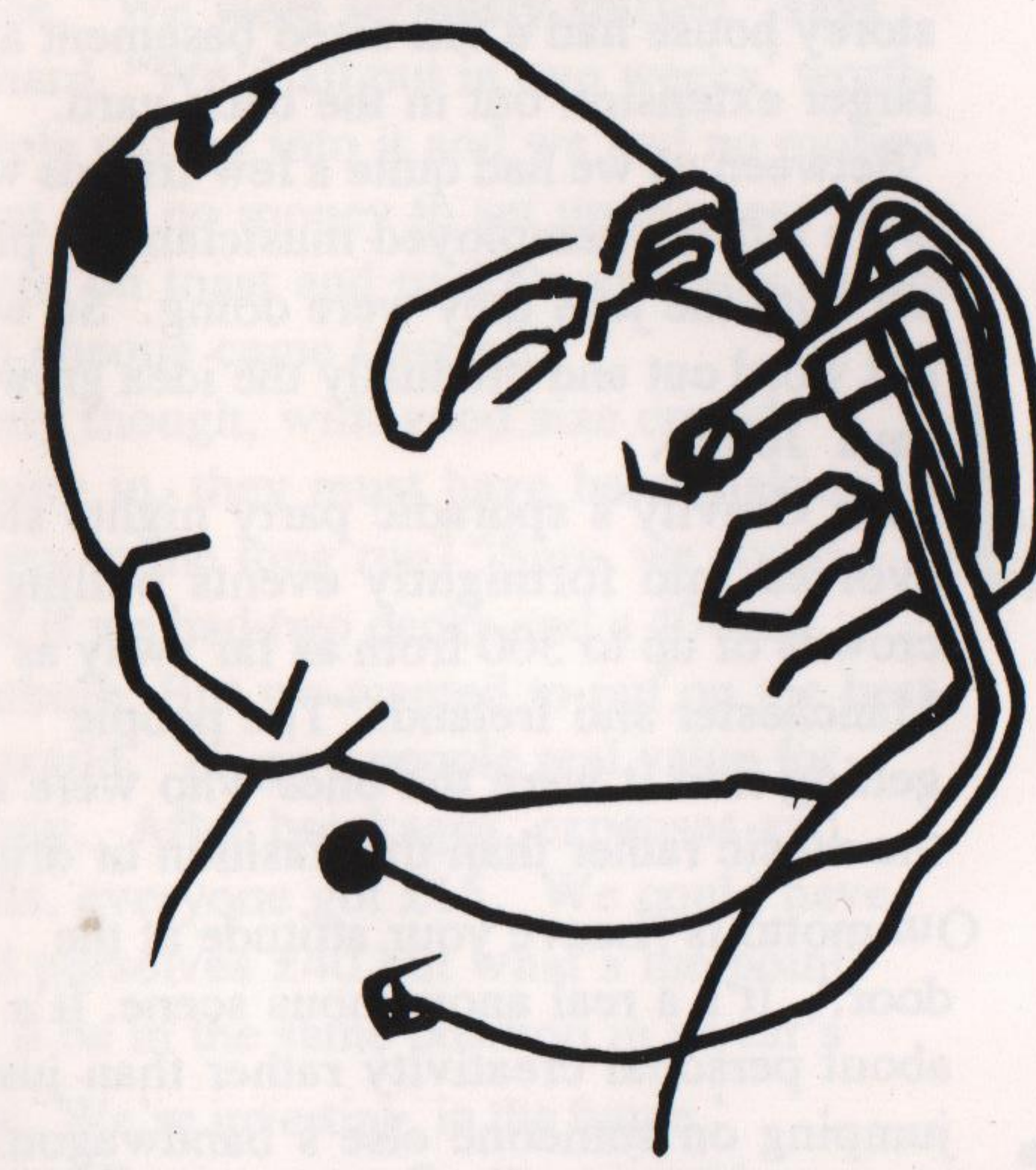
they live on. Looking on the outside, I think everything has become too centralised. A few bods in London controlling area they've never even seen. Local areas should be controlled by local communities."

On an environmental level, there's a depression undercurrent of feeling that mankind has already gone too far to repair the damage we have a done but Paul remains optimistic. "It's not too late," he says. "I'm not risking my life crawling under bulldozers for nothing."

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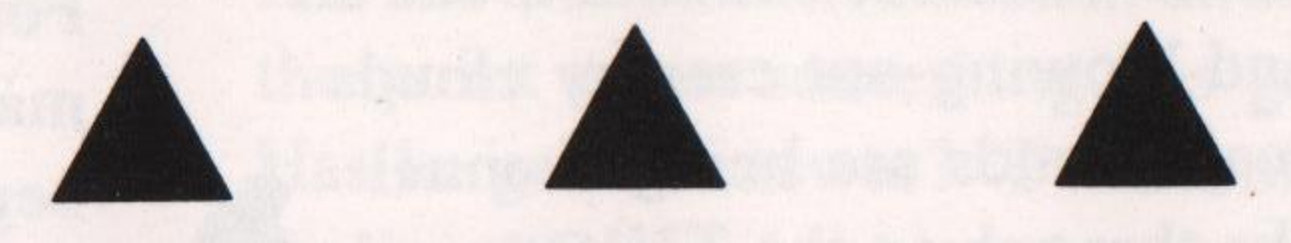
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# FORDHAM PARK-SAT JULY 31st NEW CROSS



The front door is pretty foreboding. Over peeling paintwork and a boarded-up glass panel, a large anarchic 'A' has been sprayed next to a poster saying "No Poll Tax Here". You could almost imagine Lloyd Grossman pointing a limp finger and drawling in condescending tones, 'So who lives in a house like this?'

Who indeed. Who would be moved to make their door speak in such a way? The bell doesn't work, so shouting through the letter box seems to be the only way of getting any attention. After a few minutes a bloke with a baseball cap and a large grin appears. 'Welcome to the Zero Gravity HQ,' he says and guides me in.

The sitting room is made up of a mish-mash of second hand furniture, blanket for curtains and walls unable to make up their mind if they're red or yellow. This is in stark contrast to the shiny decks and heavy duty record collection in the far corner. I sit on a sofa, nearly disappear through it and find myself looking at a semi-circle of eight faces, some bearded, some not, but all sipping tea and blowing out creamy clouds of puff. Spacey sounds are being channel from the decks through to the TV's stereo. 'So you can have your own soundtrack to anything you're watching,' Johnno, the grin, explains.

So, the door. Some people wear their heart on their sleeve. Do Zero Gravity have their heart on their front door? "It's something we inherited from the previous tenants. But it's OK by us. It says quite a lot." Johnno explains in a weird half west country, half public schoolboy lilt. He pauses before

letting out a stream of an explanation. "For a lot of people the introduction of the Poll Tax was seen as the final insult to the ordinary person - the ultimate symbol of prejudice against the poor. At the same time it was also a catalyst for the new anarchic movement that is trying to put as much distance between itself and the system as possible."

For the next three hours we talk. I get that warm buzz when you come across people who see the world through similar coloured glasses and the tea flows and the puff rotates and by the end of the evening I learn that Zero Gravity can float but they've also got their feet firmly planted on Earth.

The collective's base is on the wrong side of the Docklands. The crumbling 1930's block looks over the spotless, virtually deserted expanse of Canary Wharf and the pristine, Legoland housing developments around it. Down their end, things look a lot more grim. The collective have been told that the Great Plague started off in their street. It isn't hard to believe. But the collective maintain that they're actually on the up. Things looked a lot worse 18 months ago.

## THE STORY OF HOW ONE COLLECTIVE GOT

1991 wasn't a good year for Johnno, aka DJ Quark, and Richard alias DJ Cloggie, the two founder members. Richard had just finished a year's employment training as a sound engineer at Covent Garden's Rock Garden only to find that his job had finished too. "It's the usual thing," he explains. "They get rid of you and bring in another trainee so they don't have to pay you a proper wage."

It was while Richard was working at the Rock Garden that he first met Johnno. "I thought he was a bit of an asshole DJ and he thought I was some weirdo hippy from the sticks," says Richard whose wispy beard and long locks give him a strange likeness to one of those picture book drawings of Christ. Despite first impression the two became good friends.

By the end of the year, Johnno was facing problems. First he was unceremoniously dropped by his DJ management company and then he was evicted from the flat he was sharing with Richard. "They wanted to turn it into yuppie flats. They rushed the whole thing through court and we had two weeks to get out. We had no choice but to shift."

For Johnno, his expulsion from the mainstream world of DJing was the beginning of a radical shift in his personal values. For four years, he'd been in the fast lane, working with Boys Own and then with his own manager. he was about to sign a deal with Perfecto records when he was dropped. "When I first started, I believed all the music industry hype about the glitz of clubbing and DJing. It didn't take long to see how shallow the whole thing is."

Johnno pulls heavily on a cigarette and continues, "DJs have become modern day pop stars. It's all to do with attitudes and egos and lines of cocaine, not about music at all. No-one's a true friend, there's no commitment to other people, only yourself. For a while, I turned into one of them, on a huge ego trip but then I realised I wasn't being true to myself. I started saying what I really felt and people didn't like it. In the end I just got frozen out."

Jobless, homeless and without enough money for a deposit on a new place, Johnno and Richard were at rock bottom. It was then that a friend suggested they have a go at squatting. They were introduced to some Yugoslavian refugees, a Belgrade rock band called "Blockout", who were living in a derelict house in Clerkenwell that had once been a clock shop. "The Yugoslavians really saved our bacon," says Richard.

"They gave us a couple of spare rooms and sorted out the plumbing and electricity for us. There was no bathroom, just a dripping cold tap. It took a couple of weeks before the rooms were habitable; we had to shift pile of rubbish and rubble. But it was a question of survival and when you're in that position, you adapt to circumstance. Anything is better than nothing."

Faced with the prospect of eking out an existence on the dole, the pair, both in

their mid-20s, came up with the idea of combining their skills to set up an underground club - literally. The four-storey house had a fair sized basement and a larger extension out in the back yard.

"Between us we had quite a few friends who were either unemployed musicians or pissed off with the jobs they were doing. So we put word out and gradually the idea grew," says Johnno.

Zero Gravity's sporadic party nights slowly evolved into fortnightly events pulling in crowds of up to 300 from as far away as Manchester and Ireland. "The people getting into it were the ones who were into the music rather than the fashion or drugs."

Our motto is 'Leave your attitude at the door.' It's a real anonymous scene. It's about personal creativity rather than just jumping on someone else's bandwagon."

The rapidly expanding collective (which includes several university graduates and Rob, a former member of grebo band Gaye Bykers On Acid;

also known as alter ego Lesbian Dopeheads On Mopeds!) pooled their dole cheques to lay on lighting, good quality PAs and cheap drink.

The spacey

home-made backdrops were a good background to the collective's swirls of ambient soundscape and progressive dance mixes.

They site their main influences on a slide scale from ambient masters like The Orb to dub-rooted families like Adrian Sherwood's On-U sound and Jah Shaka. "These are all people who've gone off and done their own thing outside the mainstream and have still been successful. That impresses us as much as the quality of music they produce," says Richard.

One thing, the collective didn't want to be called was a rave outfit. "To us rave is a dirty word," says Johnno. "It stand for big money and sell-out and crap music. We don't have raves we have romps. Romp On, Romp In and Romp Out! "

## TOGETHER AND WHY THEY DIDN'T FALL APART

But it wasn't all plain sailing. There were a few hairy moments along the way. Not least when an early party was aborted by the police. "We were seriously stuffed," says Richard. "We'd all put in two weeks' worth of dole money into it and we had no money to eat and no money to set up the next one. I lived on toast and packets of crisps 'til the next cheque came through."

Surely though, with good size crowds coming in, they must have been making money in the long run? "Sure, we could have if we had two decks and a 40 watt lightbulb. But we wanted to put on the best we could. To give people real value for money. After breakages, expenses and thefts, everyone got £15. We could have paid ourselves £40 but what's the point? We'd be in the same position in a year's time. We're investing in the future."

The collective were finally evicted last December.

Rob, aka DJ Organic, believes the collective's internal support framework is what has kept them together. "We've come together as a natural family. It's a meeting of like-minded people who can give each other the creative and emotional support they need. Sure, everyone goes through bad times, but you know you're not alone, there are people gunning for you. What we do isn't just a job, it's a lifestyle. It's freedom to be creative and express yourself without restrictions."

Today, the collective has a pool of 15 DJs, musicians, percussionists artists, and sound and lighting engineers. They see themselves as a music mutation for the 90s. "Sound systems are replacing rock bands," says Rob. "We're a band of people rather than a band of musicians. It's the same sort of thing but with different instruments and new technology. You tend to stand and watch a band. What we do is all around you."

When Zero Gravity first started, they thought they were alone. Over the past year, they've come across a growing number of free-spirits getting into DIY culture. "There's just no opportunity for people out there, so they're making their own opportunities instead," says Johnno. So what does Zero Gravity see in their future? Do they want to cross over the tracks and join the world of air-conditioned offices, big money and fame? "I've been through all that," says Rob. "And fame doesn't attract me at all. I think DIY culture is staying underground because no one

wants it to get that big. You lose the spirit. There's already a false surfacing. Spiral Tribe are responsible for about 30% of that and the rest is taken up by record labels trying to manufacture free-spirit groups. But the true spirits don't want to know. They understand that the more fame you have the more freedom you lose."

Here Johnno chips in. "I think all of us want a cosy lifestyle but there's not a huge need for material comfort now. We're putting our energy into building the future. What we'd like to work towards is recognition for doing something that's good."

Zero Gravity's own brand of space-sound is created in two bedroom studios and distributed through independent record shops and Club Dog's Woof distribution. "We're not giving people high expectations about the sound quality," says Johnno. "But it's the best we can do. To sell, you have to shop around and find like-minded people to help us. We're also think of doing a four track EP with three other groups so that we can split the costs. A kind of K-tel Crustie!"

Talking of crusties..... "NO," says Richard. "We're not. Personally, I'm fed up with the whole sub-culture being written of as crustie. It's an insult to the positive, creative elements that are the majority. To me, a crustie is a no-hoper, someone on a downward spiral to self-destruct. We're all

individuals involved in doing things. Crusties are aggro. They're not so much Do It Yourself as Do Yourself In!"

Still, a lot of people are going to write off collectives like Zero Gravity as drop-outs, the ones who can't play the system. "It's a matter of personal values," says Johnno. "I don't think you can do anything to change some people's minds. To me, if people are trapped, it's because they've trapped themselves. I'm not running away from anything. I've spent years trying to find a rhythm of life that suits me and now that I've found it, I'm running to it."

Between the 12 core elements in the collective roughly half now claim the dole. Their views on whether this is ideologically sound vary. "I don't see it as financial gain," says one. "I see it as survival." Other like Rob say, "I want as little to do with the government as possible. If I can get by without it I will." Jack, a sort of intellectual looking type, shifts the conversation to the future of...well, us. "We're all surviving in a situation that isn't going to get better. In

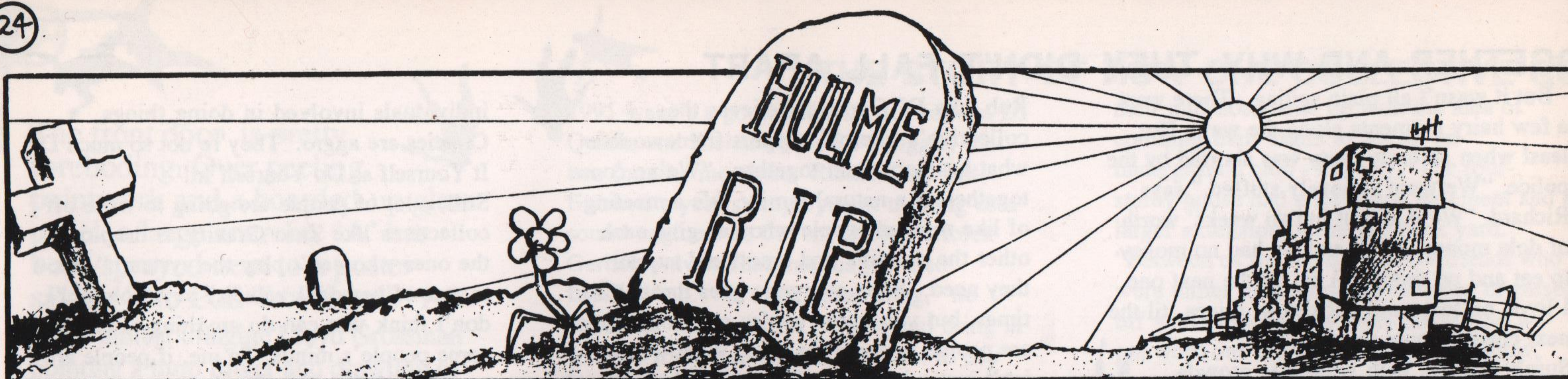
the end we're going to run out of resources. It's a world of consumerism and it's got to the point when something has got to give." Has he got an answer? "Permaculture," he replies. "Going back to the natural balance of man and land. But as a collective I think we've got to put our own house in order first. Our angle is that it's not about ripping people off, it's about positivity. If we can help people we will. It's the same with squatting. We respected the Clock Shop. We didn't trash it, we repaired it, rewired it, did the plumbing."

With their talk of alternative life, does Zero gravity think could be interpreted as subversive? "The system has forgotten that a society is an evolving thing and it has to adapt and change," says Richard. "At the moment it's like it's stopped, stuck in a scratch on a record with a boot keeping it in place. There's so much wrong thinking: like BT laying off hundreds of staff for the benefit of a minority ie the shareholders."

"Subversive is a negative word," say Johnno. "We're happy the way we are and we're trying to spread a positive message. I don't see why we should have to conform to a system that's got nothing to offer us."







### What the fuck is going on?

Outside the Nia Centre, an Afro-Caribbean arts centre in Manchester's Moss Side, a clump of Arts Council bods are looking bewildered - standing there dressed for a night at the theatre in suits and ties. The big-wigs are all here too: David Plowright, former head of Granada TV and various City Council chiefs. After all, they've put £30,000 into the Dogs of Heaven and they want to know where it has gone....

It's freezing cold and everyone stands watching the field opposite where members of drunken anarchist circus Original Gravity attempt to breathe fire. They're so pissed they keep falling into the flames. There are 'crusties' and travellers everywhere; they've come from all over England in their converted ambulances and trucks to be here. (Hulme has become something of a squat mecca in recent years.)

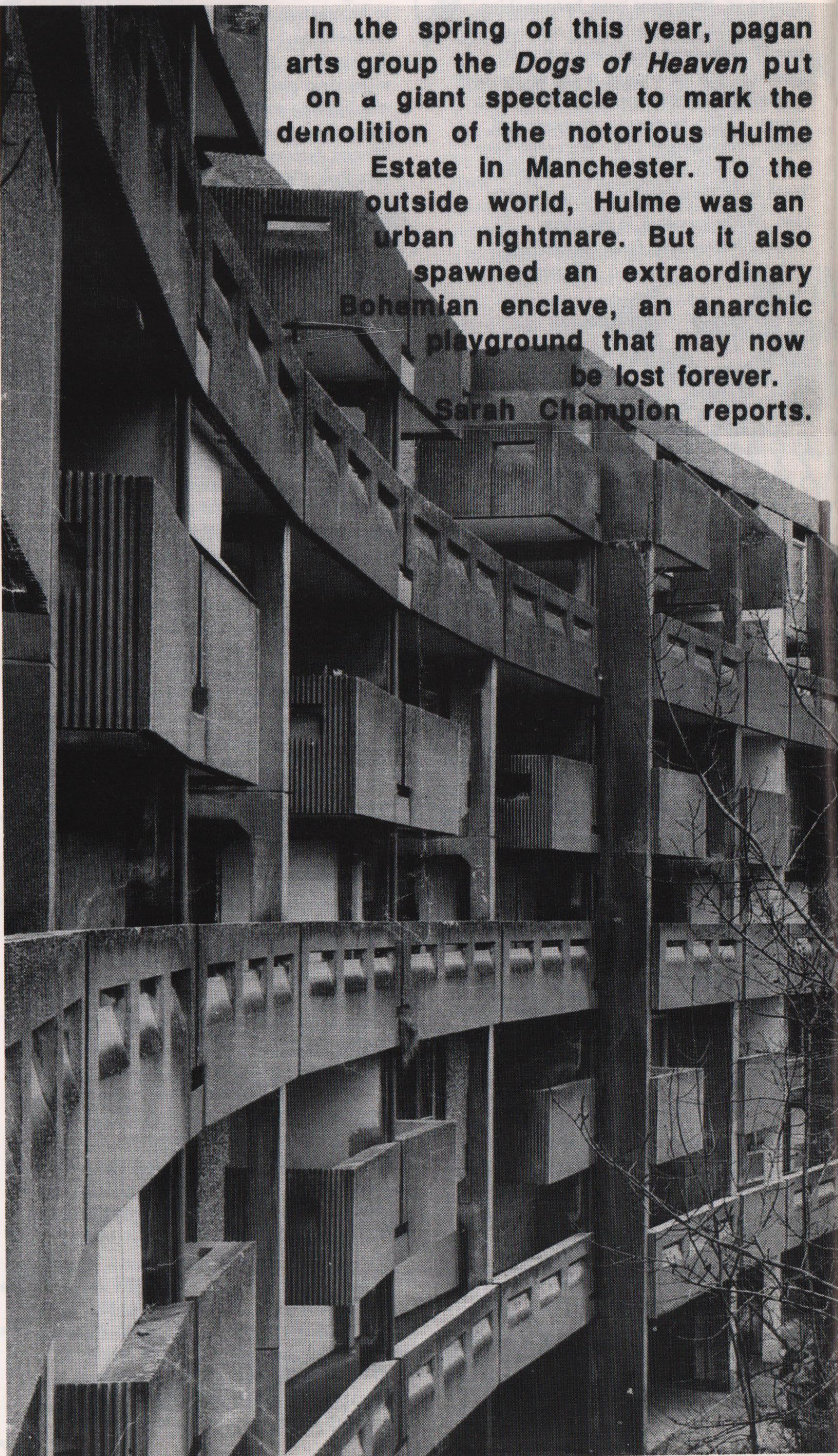
The Dogs of Heaven are a disparate mix of Hulme dwellers with time on their hands. Their art is punk circus similar to the likes of French troupe Archaos and the juggling, fire-eating folk who perform on the festival circuit. On November 5th '89 they did their first show - a Hulme bonfire in the shape of the Houses of Parliament. A year later, they burnt a gigantic effigy of Maggie Thatcher. Eleven days later she resigned.

It was in '91, that the Dogs really began to go for the grand spectacle - burning a huge Viking long-boat (made from the floor-boards of empty flats on the estate) and dragging it through the streets of Hulme. Last year, they took their fire-show to Glastonbury, this time torching a huge pagan Wicker Man. Now that they've managed to win big Arts Council backing, what can they do?

Outside the Nia centre, it's cold. Hundreds of people are standing around getting impatient. The suits are starting to complain. Finally, everyone begins to walk towards William Hulme Crescent, the most notorious of all

In the spring of this year, pagan arts group the *Dogs of Heaven* put on a giant spectacle to mark the demolition of the notorious Hulme Estate in Manchester. To the outside world, Hulme was an urban nightmare. But it also spawned an extraordinary Bohemian enclave, an anarchic playground that may now be lost forever.

*Sarah Champion reports.*



Hulme's blocks. Built in the 60s, the four giant crescents at the centre of the estate were based on the grand architecture of Bath. The style was heralded as the flagship for progressive council planning but the blocks and crescents were so badly built that within four years, the estate was already beginning to decay into an urban hell.

Gradually the families were moved out and single people, many either homeless or discarded psychiatric patients moved in. In the end it became a no-go zone where milkman and postie feared to tread. But Hulme also became a haven for creative free-spirits and an arts community gradually sprang up out of the wreckage of 60s city planning. Now the future of this 'anarchic' free-spirit community hangs in the balance. Manchester has 'won' some of Michael Heseltine's City Challenge cash and the infamous blocks are now being pulled down for redevelopment.

Back at the show, two punks in hard hats pull back the fencing erected to keep people out of the demolition site. Within half an hour, there are several thousand people gathered on the grass at the centre of one of the doomed crescents. Welcome to "Safe As Houses" a celebration of Hulme's demolition.

On the skyline behind us, there are tower-blocks, lit up by an orange-pink sunset like something out of a Philip K. Dick novel. Meantime, the entire crescent has been turned into a circus arena. Sound echoes from huge speakers set all round the spectators. Images are being projected onto a screen, sixty foot high.

The effect is instantly hypnotizing. For half an hour or so we hear whispers...Robert Adam Crescent, Otterburn Close, The PSV, Bonsal Street, William Kent, The Kitchen...the names of Hulme places, many already demolished. On the screen, are projected images of Hulme. Children playing in the streets; graffiti-walls with slogans like "Eat More Acid"; the squalor; the celebration; the newspaper headlines.

For the next hour, the story of Hulme is told with an amazing, anarchic assault of lights, performers and fire. The sound-track charts Hulme's history as a creative epicentre beginning with the punk parties which took place every weekend in the early 80s when bands like Inca Babies and Big Flame ruled. Then came flashes documenting The Kitchen, a legendary recording-studio-cum-after-hours-club. The parties are



'I light the fires while the city sleeps...' Final preparations before a giant crucible is torched and a car crashes to earth.

simulated with dancing shadows at the windows. A Guy Called Gerald's Voodoo Ray, partly recorded in a Hulme bathroom, echoes round the Crescents. Local poet Lemn Sissay reads his verse. The sounds of a demolition is sampled and then the arena erupts into a visual orgy. A skeleton four storeys high, is symbolically burnt. Cars lifted up by cranes are pushed from the roof of the William Kent block by anarchic joyriders. There are dancing skeletons on the ground; crusties clambering off the hoods of trucks. A mechanical digger drives around menacingly. The evil of Hulme is symbolised; dancing demons; ghosts walking along the landings holding burning lanterns; fire-crackers symbolising shootings; jiving ten-foot cockroaches bringing shivers of recognition to former residents. Using spotlights and sound, helicopters are simulated to symbolise the raids of the early 90s.

The Dogs of Heaven capture more than anything the deranged, anarchist spirit of this housing estate where families moved out and punks moved in. A white-suited Dog attempts a high-wire act, sailing down a rope from the very top of the crescent. Another dare-devil is lowered down on top of a car.

The finale is a funeral of fire - the ground is set alight, while demons dance in and out of the flames. On top of the Crescents is a huge Olympic crucible. (Manchester is bidding for the 2000 Olympics and Hulme's redevelopment is part of the plan). Flames shoot upwards and cascade

down into the side of the Crescent like molten lava erupting from a volcano.

Melodramatic? Yes! After the spectacle, the suits head home, many bewildered. Former Hulme residents troop back to the Nia Centre where there's a free reggae party and talk about the old days. Dancers go to the PSV where Nottingham's DiY sound-system is playing. Meantime, on the field opposite, travellers and punks sit by Original Gravity's bonfire, drinking cider and getting stoned.

So what happens next? Where do the Dogs and their fellow free-spirits go now that the bulldozers have moved in? From the council's point of view, the plan is to incorporate the local community's ideas into the area's redevelopment. One residents' scheme put forward includes a recording studio and a permanent performance area. Only time will tell how far the council will honour their commitment. Even if Hulme is recreated with the local community's approval, will it capture the same collective spirit as before?

For the moment, it's RIP Hulme: home for many years to a bohemian community of painters, poets, writers, squatters, photographers, drug dealers, graphic artists, jugglers, rock musicians and DJs. The buildings may have gone but perhaps the spirit live on. As one resident said during the performance, 'The sun is going down over Hulme now but you can be sure that it will rise again. No doubt about it.'

THE END?





# THE RACHEL RANTER COLUMN

## IT'S NO HONOUR

How wonderful that John Major has changed the honours system so that anyone can now send in nominations for the Queen's Birthday and New Year lists of medals and knighthoods. That will really shake the foundations of life as we know it in 1990's Britain. In fact it's just what we need. More outdated ranks and honours for worthy citizens will do a whole lot more for ordinary people in this country than, say, really getting to grips with the still-surviving power system of Whitehall bureaucrats whose sole purpose in life is to make sure that nothing changes.

## SOD 'EM ALL

Seems there's been some sort of a mix-up over the government subsidies to help bail out Londoners with the new council tax. I'm sure I'm not the only one who doesn't understand exactly how, but apparently Wandsworth is claiming £28.3million - almost a third of the total cash subsidy set aside for London.

That means that wealthy homeowners in Wandsworth whose properties are worth £320,000 and over will only have to pay £229 council tax for the year. Lucky them. The rest of the cash the council needs is being paid out by the government - that means taxpayers.

I hear that Whitehall was thrown into a bit of a tizzy after discovering that there was no ceiling on how much Wandsworth could claim. I don't see why Wandsworth is a Tory flagship council, and has surely followed Conservative ideology perfectly in this case, by claiming as much as they can and sod the rest of the country.....

## STINKING THINKING

Brilliant! After weeks spent struggling to get my brain around the 'Green' budget, I've finally cracked this Government's rather individual idea of environmental colour coding.

Ex-Chancellor Norman Lamont assured us that he was slapping VAT on our fuel bills in an effort to save the planet. Great! I guess the existence of all humankind is more important than leaving the landing light on. You can't argue with that.

But hang on a minute - these are the bad guys. The ones who've been dragging their heels over bringing our beaches and water supplies up to basic European standards, the ones who've been trying to wriggle out of enforcing environmental laws on their chums in industry, the ones who want us all to use our cars more, and who see the trading future of the nation in processing yet more dangerous industrial waste. I couldn't help thinking that these matters ought to come under the 'green' umbrella too. And I couldn't shake the idea that when the cold weather really sets in, Mr and Mrs Volvo are going to turn the heating up anyway. After all, they'll be able to afford it with their savings on income tax and the profits from their shares in British Telecom and the water companies.

Wacking huge VAT penalties on fags and booze hasn't stopped anyone drinking and smoking, so no, - stopping your middle-of-the-road punter from putting the radiator on in the spare room couldn't possibly be the point.

And then I got it. Bloody brilliant! I remembered Peter Lilley's jolly poem at the Conservative Party Conference in September last year, all about which members of society he'd like to see the back of. All we need is a couple of really bitter winters, and all those scrounging doleys, whingeing pensioners and single mums will simply freeze to death. Then they won't be using any greenhouse gases at all, and the rest of us won't have to worry so much about the environment while we're queuing to get on to the M25. Now that's what I call green thinking.

## SAVE THE PLANET - DRIVE A CAR

Bloody car ads! Centuries in the future, way off in science-fiction land (if the human race survives that long), archaeologists will discover films of our car ads, and think they've stumbled across what actually destroyed our present society. They'll presume we believed that trees and fields and mountains and dolphins and so on actually grew out of the ends of exhaust pipes, and conclude that's why we strangled the planet with roads and suffocated it with fumes.



## THANKS MR BUNNY

There was a news feature on TV a few weeks ago about the terrible state of the health service in Russia. Lots of medicines - some quite inexpensive ones - are simply not available there, and people are dying as a result.

Not so long ago, the communists used to claim that the Soviet health service was one of their greatest triumphs. Sounds familiar? The scale may be less frightening, but the song remains the same. A quarter of our hospitals beds have been closed since 1979, and there are practically waiting lists for waiting lists.

The feature went on to say that much Russian healthcare would now be dependent on charity; even more familiar - individual fundraising has been papering over the cracks in this country for years. I feel angry every time I pass the bloke dressed as a pink rabbit who collects for one of the children's cancer wards around London's stations. How the hell did we come to elect a Government which entrusts the healthcare of the country to the hands - or should I say paws - of a large, pink bunny rabbit?

## BARKING?

My friend Mad Dog has come up with a way of solving the problems in Northern Ireland. 'It's simple,' he says. 'Both the Protestant and Catholic churches should go on strike. All the churches in Northern Ireland should refuse to open their doors until the IRA agrees to peace talks.' He noted my raised eyebrow and continued, 'That way, if the IRA continue with their bombing they can't call it a religious war because religion would have been withdrawn from the argument. It'll show them up to be extorting, arms-dealing multi-million pound mafia business that it really is. The IRA wouldn't agree to peace talks if God himself organised them.'

## HAVE A HOLIDAY IN BOSNIA

Here's another solution that has popped up from two completely different quarters recently; how to sort out the insanity in Bosnia. This is how it goes. Organise a mass peace migration from Western Europe into the former Yugoslavia. Individuals and families would go over and stay with households out there for, say, two or three weeks at a time. This would be done on rota so that you'd have thousands of people flooding over there at any one time, showing their support for peace, talking to individual people and demonstrating a huge surge of anti-war people presence. Sounds completely impossible to do but wouldn't it be incredible if it happened.

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## MAD HATTER WRITES THE RULES

Someone, somewhere in Whitehall has rather clumsily dropped this country's housing policy straight through Lewis Carroll's looking glass. This is the only possible explanation I can find for why no one's noticed that the Mad Hatter and the March Hare have been writing all the rules. Like the one about those council cash grants - up to £25,000 in some cases - which can be paid to financially comfortable council tenants to enable them to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and buy houses of their own. What a wonderful idea! These people obviously desperately need council/government cash, and it sure beats the hell out of starting up a programme of building and repairing low-cost council housing to help out the homeless and the country's housing crisis.

## HIGH PRICE FOR JUSTICE

Legal aid? Remember that system which meant that ordinary people could afford to get justice, and be represented in the law courts of the land. I really don't understand why everyone got so upset when they changed the rules. For a lot of people, it was a bit like losing your right to free tickets to a performance of Schopenhauer's Greatest Works in Chinese. What justice did you get anyway? Every other area of our society is obsessed by money so why not justice too? Privatised the courts, I say!

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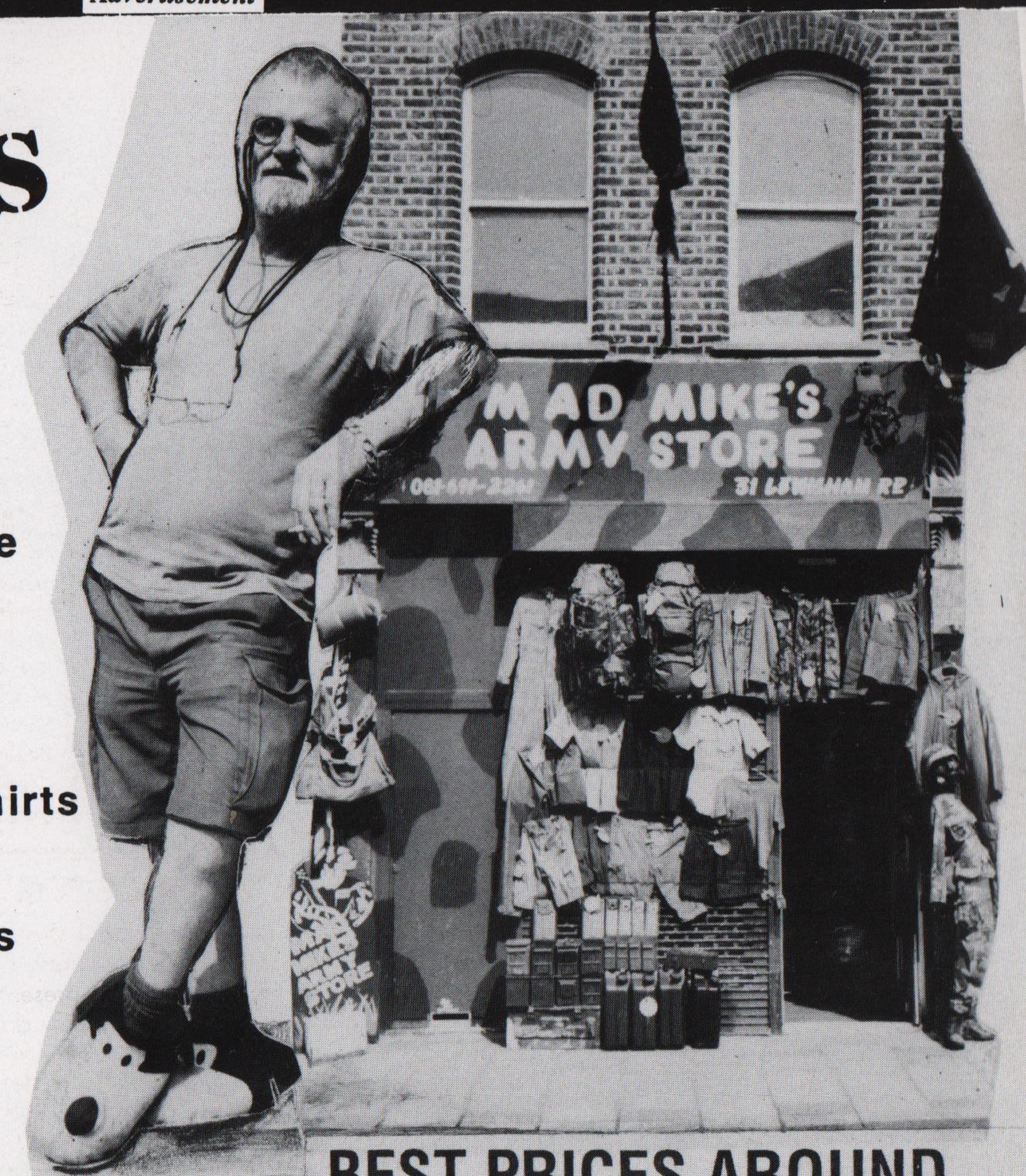
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