

THIS IS SQUAT WE WANT!

Crass beat the system and play for free at London's Zig Zag Club. WINSTON SMITH was there...

WORD WAS out early last week. Crass (accompanied by several experienced squatting organisations) were occupying the Rainbow Theatre at Finsbury Park, and an all-day event was being planned for Saturday the 18th. Short, but sweet ...

Wednesday morning things had changed: Crass had been evicted and were searching frantically for an alternative venue. A hotline was set up and three days later, on the morning itself, the ansa-phone message was bold, clear and full of optimism: they were now squatting in the disused Zig-Zag club in London's Westbourne Park, and from midday until late it was round to Crass' new place, for the party of our lives ...

'Squatting this venue is not a last ditch stand to get a gig, the music business would love us all to be down at the Venue paying their bar prices: On the contrary, we hope that today's gathering will provide inspiration and impetus to people everywhere to take similar opportunities and open up and take back the property that belongs to us all ...

'We hope that today we will be able to demonstrate that together we can begin to reclaim that which is ours ... Freedom, free food, free shelter, free information, free music, free ideas ... Freedom to do whatever doesn't infringe on the freedom of others.'

By 2.00pm things were beginning to happen: a large group of people had already arrived and the free vegetable soup was on the boil and being distributed to hungry, happy young ragamuffins. Meanwhile down the Portobello Road, word was spreading like wildfire.

With no admission charge, no age restrictions and no dress regulations, the partygoers arrived in their hundreds: bags of chips, biscuits and all manner of booze piled up high in their hugging arms and rotting rucksacks.

AS THE first of many bands came on and the party really started to swing, police were waiting around outside, no doubt wondering just what the hell they ought to be doing about it all. Someone went in and gave them a leaflet, which they did seem to be genuinely interested in.

'... We have not employed security today, and we believe that no security will be necessary ... It is up to us together to make it work. Treat others as you would expect to be treated and leave the place as it was when you arrived. We can only claim the right to use places if we are prepared to take responsibility to see that they are well looked after. We are here to be creative; we can leave destruction to the authorities ...'

Everywhere the emphasis was on responsibility: posters cropped up all over the place encouraging the crowd to pick up litter, refrain from vandalism, and generally be sensible. It all seemed to impress the police who, putting an end to rumours of an imminent (unlawful) eviction/break-in, wandered off back to their station, leaving just a couple of friendly coppers behind to keep a (very) discreet eye on things.

... As the day turned into night, more bands took to the stage, some of them terrible and some excellent. People staggered around sharing food with complete strangers and getting drunk on free beer ... When the Mob came on, the event became *The Event*.

Everybody stood up for the Mob, and 'No Doves Fly Here' was the moment to treasure - the highlight of the day; They were wonderful.

By now the 'house' was packed, though not uncomfortably so. A rain of shredded Zig-Zag club tickets fell from the sky and the Poison Girls were doing whatever it is they do, which seems to be quite an acquired taste; although through the jubilant alcoholic haze 'Persons Unknown' just sounded so good, especially whilst persons unconscious lay slumped in exhausted heaps around the floor ...

'Anarchy In The UK' exploded from the midsts of Conflict's opening tape, and my God, never before had it sounded so magnificently right. The drunken hordes floated to the front and had a bloody great time, but this killjoy just couldn't see the appeal apart from the brilliant intro to 'Meat Means Murder', and even the subtleties of that soon disappeared beneath the bewildering Conflict wall of noise.

SO OFF they went while Flux of Pink Indians walked on and plugged in. An unusually murky sound tarnished their short set but, even so, the urgency and dynamic flexibility they've always possessed didn't go amiss.



STEVE IGNORANT of Crass

And so with the last of a genuinely harrowing succession of anti-nuclear films already screened, and with those mighty rows of peace/love/freedom banners hanging victoriously, proudly over the stage, it was soon time for Crass.

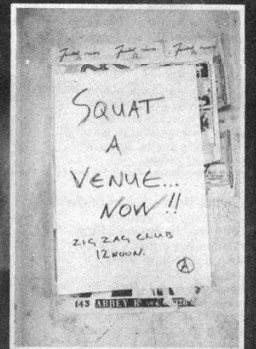
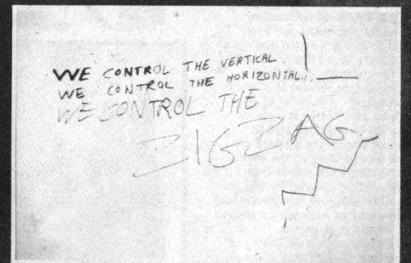
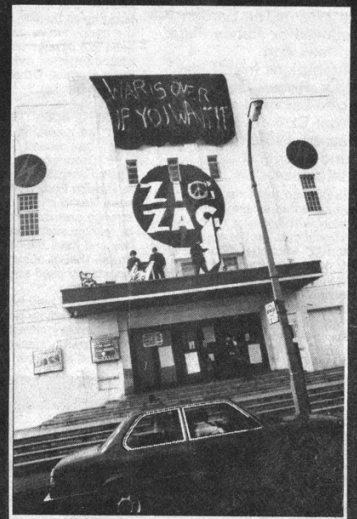
A woman's voice boomed from the speakers denouncing the sacrifice of young soldiers to war and then, like the legends they most definitely are, Crass were bathed in a flash of dazzling white light while they exploded straight into a dizzy 'How Does It Feel...'

For the crowd this was it, this was pure heaven. Sure, with some notable exceptions, 'Big A Little A' being one of them, it was mainly a monotonous racket but, Christ, Crass were impressive, and so utterly spellbinding, even when making the most horrendous of dins. Style, charisma and sheer impact: believe me, Crass had it all, in bundles.

'Do They Owe Us A Living' sent the hordes into a final frenzied boil, and then it was all over. The phenomenon had become even more phenomenal, and the dream, the dream only Crass and their companions had held any faith in, had come completely, magnificently true ...

NOBODY WAS hurt, no-one suffered, nobody ruled and no-one was governed. For 24 hours Crass had achieved their much-ridiculed vision of a peaceful, creative Anarchy in the most fantastically triumphant, clean, efficient way anyone could have ever imagined possible.

This was truly a Christmas on Earth. It won't be forgotten.



POISON GIRLS



FLUX OF Pink Indians

All pix by TONY MOTTRAM