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THE STATE IT'S IN – EDITORIAL

From the ashes..... the spirit of free festivals rises.

Until recently the idea that the once profuse UK free festival scene would ever recover its health seemed unlikely.

Decimated by culture-crushing legislation and paramilitary style policing, the UK free festival scene had been driven into a deep coma. All that remained in the vacuum (Glastonbury aside) were a few small eco-festivals forced to pay over the odds for policing, and a glut of festival parodies motivated and corrupted by commerce, and devoid of any substantial spirit or atmosphere.

And then along came the Free the Spirit Festival. Hosted on the Exodus Collective's Long Meadow Community Free Farm on the outskirts of Luton, the Free the Spirit Festival first began on August bank holiday, 1997. From the outset, Free the Spirit sought to re-establish the essential free festival vibe whilst at the same time protecting itself against reckless self-destruction.

In its first year, a small collection of experienced fezzie crews like SQUALL, Continental Drifts and the Kazbar joined Exodus to inaugurate what was planned to become an annual occurrence. The punters were mainly a Luton night club crowd who arrived in the evenings gobsmacked at the variety of entertainment on offer, and amazed not to be paying big entrance fees and bar prices for such a day and night weekend event.

Naturally the Festival grew each year to become what is now widely hailed as the best and most authentic festival of the year. This year a new milestone has been reached which may have a significant affect on the rejuvenation of the free festival scene around the UK. A licence without cultural compromise.

Whereas the three previous Free the Spirit Festivals have all been illicit, this year's festival is licenced. This fact alone does not necessarily qualify for unadulterated celebration. What does give just cause for jubilation, however, is the fact that the licence has been cut around the culture rather than the more usual scenario of the culture being cut by the licence.

The pedantic licencing stipulations

associated with festival organisation - which soar above and beyond legitimate interests of health and safety - have made public festivals immensely difficult to pull off without major finance. And yet commercial festivals, by their plastic nature, lack the spirit which made the festival scene such an attractive culture in the first place.

Whereas the organisers of the Big Green Gathering and Glastonbury Festival are required to pay £15,000 and £150,000 respectively to their local constabularies for policing, the Exodus Collective have managed to secure acknowledgement from Bedfordshire Police that the Free the Spirit Festival is capable of policing itself. The result? This free event is more possible because the organisers aren't forced to stump up the huge cost of paying the police. Plus..... festival goers can enjoy three full days of festivities without finding a uniformed police officer looming over their affairs. Ultimately this is also a better option for the police, not in terms of over-time pay obviously but in terms of community relations. The level of justified animosity which builds up in a community when a police force becomes too intrusive is destructively anti-social. Bedfordshire Police say they will simply take care of local traffic difficulties and only venture on site if there are major incidences. They have already acknowledged that the Exodus Collective's policy of preventing drug dealers from profiteering on the dance floor takes care of their biggest concern. This agreement represents an unparalleled precedent.

Furthermore, as documented in previous issues of SQUALL, Exodus have developed a significant dialogue with Lord Howland, guardian and manager of the 13,000 acre Woburn Abbey estate owned by Howland's father, the Marquess of Tavistock. The tangible consequence of this unusual dialogue is the free provision of a stretch of previously overgrown set aside land on which the Free the Spirit Festival can take place. Significantly, the

site is several miles away from local conurbations.

An all night mini-festival which took place on the land on July 29 (reported previously in SQUALL) passed off successfully, allaying local residents' fears and earning commendations from the local council's health and safety department. Once again the fact that the landowner is giving consent without seeking financial reward is a precedent in itself.

Some of the story of the Exodus Collective's relationship with Lord Howland has been shown on BBC 2's Country House series.

In episode two of the series, the TV camera's managed to record a revealing exchange between Lord Howland, his parents the Marquess and Marquessa of Tavistock and their Woburn Abbey estate manager.

"Will they profit share with us or not?" asks the Marquessa of Tavistock.

"No they're free," replies her son, Lord Howland.

"Free! What do you mean, 'free'?" interjects the Marquess, dumbfounded.

"They do it for nothing?" queries the Marquessa looking up from her embroidery.

"People just walk in," replies Howland. "They do not charge them anything to walk in."
"So what is their incentive to arrange it,"

asks the Marquessa.

"They enjoy it," replies Lord Howland. "It's the spirit of free festivals they want to rekindle."

"How lovely, people doing things for nothing," says the Marquessa

"They have price police my lord," adds the Estate Manager.

"They have what?" says the Marquess.

"They have price police my lord," continues the Estate Manager. "They allow people to come and sell coca-cola's and hamburgers and they have people wandering around ensuring these people are not charging excessive profit."

Next year, the stated intention is to organise a meeting of free festival groups around the UK with a view to encouraging different regions of the country to facilitate their own local Free the Spirit Festival on the same August Bank holiday weekend. Having achieved a licence on land donated by an aristocratic landowner in the Bedfordshire region, a powerful precedent has been fought for, won, and firmly established. Now perhaps that template can be applied all round the country. For all those who have aspired and worked for the furthering of such non-commercial community culture, the precedent established by this year's Free the Spirit Festival is one worthy of victorious celebration. Raise a toast.

A field of GM maize at Over Compton in Dorset being destroyed in a protest co-ordinated by SURGE - Southern Union of Resistance to Genetic Engineering. Seven activists were arrested. July 16 2000. Photo: Nick Cobbing.



Front cover pic:
Tim Allen

SURGE IN GM RESISTANCE

New legal challenge could force public consultation on GM crops.

Anti-GM campaigners in the South West have discovered a breach in planning law that could have devastating consequences for the Government's farm-scale GM tests.

Dorset's Natural Law Party has launched a legal challenge to the maize trial at Toll House Dairy, Over Compton, in West Dorset, scene of a recent anti-GM direct action.

"This crop is being grown for experimental purposes and not agriculture. Under planning law this constitutes a change of use and therefore requires planning permission," explained their environmental spokesman, Mark Griffiths.

A legal precedent was set in 1965 by Dow chemicals, who evicted a tenant farmer from land in Norfolk on the grounds that he was using it for agriculture, when it was licensed for research.

The 16 acre test crop of fodder maize is being grown by former Dorset National Farmers' Union chairman Brian Lock for agrochemical company Aventis, to assess the affect of its herbicides on biodiversity. It was partially 'de-contaminated' on July 16, by local residents who have formed the Southern Union Resistance to Genetic Engineering (SURGE).

According to the Pesticides Directorate, Aventis have applied to feed the GM maize to cattle to see how weight gain will be affected.

The Natural Law Party has demanded that the crop is "immediately destroyed" because of the risk of cross-pollination with a commercial maize crop only 50 meters from the trial.

The case has been brought before West Dorset District Council's northern area planning committee, which is awaiting legal advice before proceeding.

"If our barristers conclude there has been a change of use, the test site will be subject to planning control," said Dr David Evans, WDDC Director of Planning and Environment. "A lot of people are waiting for the outcome of this one."

Normal planning procedures include a period of public consultation, so if the challenge is successful, the Government could be forced to

consult locals on all new trials. Currently there is no system of consultation, which has angered many anti-GM campaigners and people living near test sites. "This could set a precedent for the whole country," said Luke Anderson of the Totnes Organic Group. "It would mean communities could affect trials like this, and that could be a problem for the Government."

"The community should have a say in trials," said WDD Councillor Stephen Fryer, who brought a motion to the full Council last week demanding that all trials be put before local planning authorities for approval. The motion will go before the Environment Committee on August 1.

If a breach of planning law is discovered at Over Compton, the farmer can appeal to the Department of the Environment. "The Government could reverse any decision on appeal, or pass new legislation allowing it to site trials where it pleases," said Griffiths. "But it may not want to stir up such a political hornet's nest so close to the general election."

The government have already altered their criteria for numbers of sites needed to make the tests viable, and have obsessively pursued the biotech companies' GM programme despite massive public opposition.

"We are very angry at the way this bogus scientific exercise has been forced upon us," said Yeovil-based organic farmer, Simon Fairlie, a member of SURGE.

Retrospective planning applications can be demanded though in Lincolnshire, West Lindsey District Council's planning committee will decide next week whether to GM testing constitutes a breach in planning law. They face the opportunity of testing the process over a GM winter oil seed rape crop due to be planted in August.

Like the Over Compton maize, the rape crop is being planted by Aventis to test resistance to gluphosinate, a pesticide banned from use in the UK between September and March because of its tendency to leech into the water table. The ban has been lifted for the trial.

"Gluphosinate is very toxic to all water life,

but there are no proposals to monitor the water environment. This could be a big problem as here in Lincolnshire we're all dikes," said Kate O'Connell of the Gaia Trust.

O'Connell is confident that as long as the planning committee agrees, the vast majority of West Lindsey councillors will back the demand for planning approval.

"Local authorities are keen to pursue this as they feel increasingly powerless," said Jean Saunders of Friends of the Earth. "But it's going to take a fairly brave council to take it to a higher level, as court costs are not cheap."

- Seven members of SURGE were arrested at the Over Compton 'decontamination'. One woman who gave her name as 'For the Future' was charged with criminal damage but was able to submit a personal statement and 27 scientific papers as 'evidence at the scene'. Police eventually identified her through fingerprints as Rowan Tilly - her statement is available from rowantilly@gn.apc.org. The other six have been bailed pending further enquiries.

- The maize crop at Over Compton has been declared as still viable.

- Nine farm scale GM trials have been destroyed or decontaminated since the start of June. Chris Pollock, head of the UK Scientific Steering Committee on Farm Scale Evaluations said he is concerned that the number of trials is running low and that 60-75 sites over a three year period were needed to ascertain if GM has any environmental fallout. (only 39 sites remain undamaged at present). As well as Over Compton the other damaged sites are in; Daviot, Scotland; Hutton Magna, Yorkshire; Chipping Campden and Kempsey, Gloucestershire; Hemel Hempstead, Herts; Wivenhoe, Essex; Headley Hall, Yorkshire and IARC Rothamstead, Herts. Eleven people were charged with criminal damage for the Wivenhoe action.



TOKER TROUBLE

Police, sniffer dogs and toupes at Smokey Bears picnic

Police sniffer dogs bounded out of the unmarked van as over 50 officers closed in on this year's Smokey Bears picnic in Portsmouth. Nearly 400 people gathered on Portsmouth Southsea Common in August for the longest running annual protest against the prohibition of cannabis. Despite most people arriving for the picnic clutching only dummy joints containing legal herbs, Hampshire police sniffer dogs targeted dozens of people. Police spokeswoman Susan Rolling later claimed: "Anyone who wore hemp trousers in an effort to confuse our sniffer dogs should not have been surprised to be temporarily detained". Using their own sense of smell, officers succeeded in arresting three teenagers for possessing cannabis as police cast their net beyond the protest and out to the public passing by.

Anarchist and 36 year-old shop manager, Jonathan Neil was arrested for making comments about a police surveillance officer's ill fitting wig. Police mistakenly reported to the press that his arrest was for drugs. "My name and address was splashed over the local media for being in possession of drugs when it is a total lie. I feel that the police really don't care whether the information they release on protesters is correct as it is difficult to raise funds to mount a legal case. This could either be an attempt at defaming me or sheer incompetence" said Mr Neil.

Hampshire police later stated that a mistake had been made but a public apology has not been issued.



THE REVOLUTION WILL BE FUNKY

Gil Scott Heron has been rolling out his celebrated blend of funk-jazz and conscious lyric for over thirty years. Hailed by many modern hip-hop MC's as the godfather of rap he has always been a champion of social justice; from the rolling funk of his anti-apartheid anthem 'Johannesburg' to the rallying rare groove of the 'Revolution will not be televised'. During a recent visit to the UK **Mike Powers** caught up the man to discover that street politics are still informing his grooves. Photo: **Ian Hunter**.

How's it been going this week?

It's not just been full houses, we've had good houses. The spirits are good. Last couple nights we was on fire. We're gonna do Glastonbury. Yeah, I got some mud boots that come way up to here, you know swamp boots. Glastonbury's gotta have rain. It's like Wimbledon.

In your poem/song Alien, you talk about the plight of illegal immigrants. What motivated you to write that tune?

I lived in California for a while, and all the guys downstairs were from Mexico. None of them had a green card. Every time they heard a police siren they thought it was coming for them. They came over to my house and I'd hear all about their lives. I heard stories of how they come over, you know, some of them came across in the back of trucks, or by sneaking through places where there was a hole in the fence, or snipped through the barbed wire. Some would come into New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, California, but they'd all have a hell of a struggle. The essence of their journey was that they had to. They had to come over to make money for their families... their families were starving..... they were bombed..... they were migrant workers..... they were people who had a chance and this was their opportunity to make some money. And they'd go back to western union and they'd send all the money back to the folks back home. They'd send all their money home and just have enough for two six-packs and all they had in the fridge and that's what they'd survive on for the next week. They'd come round to my house, eat, have a bottle of beer, knock it down and go straight back to work. Some of them were doing two or three jobs, except they weren't getting a lot of money because they weren't legal so they couldn't sign up for the minimum. They just had to take what was being given, but it was still more money than they could make back home. I heard about this story and said: 'Hey, that's the same thing I'm doing, I got a dream to hold on to, I'm trying to take care of my folks, we working on this together'. I spoke a little Spanish, they spoke a little English and so we communicated and got along very well and we became friends; allies in the struggle.

What similarities do you see between New York and London? You've been coming here for a few years now.

London is almost like New York. People burn out, lose it and, you know, I give people money on the streets. There but for the grace of god go I. I been down. Ain't no sense going into it now, but there it is.

How's the Mumia Abu Jamal campaign going?

We played a benefit for him back in September. We broadcast it on the Internet. We believe that he deserves a new trial, we don't think the old trial was conducted properly. We don't believe he did it and we're looking for some answers there. As long as he is alive, we'll continue to try and get him out, get a retrial and get the truth known. He's already been in there for longer than he deserves, almost 20 years. That's a long time to be anywhere you're not supposed to be. But he continues to be strong.

Have you ever been to jail?

I did three days recently, before my mom put up bail to get me out. They found two grammes (of cocaine) in the back of this cop car where I'd been arrested. They didn't find it on me. They searched me, they didn't find anything on me, cause I didn't have anything on me at the time. But they said later on that they'd found it in the back seat later on.

I mimicked the cops throwing it in the back seat, he misreads that I meant he was throwing it, then he said: "No, I was handcuffed at the time" I explain that I meant the cops and he nods: "I think that was it. I think they hated to give it up too."

I did three days for that but it's still under grand jury investigation so I can't talk about that. I been in different jails and I like the ones over here better. I did a night over here one night. I got busted at the airport. I was asleep and they asked if I had any drugs and I just said 'Yeah, here you are'.

Tell me about your poem/song King Henry IV (about Aids/HIV)

H is for the Henry, IV is for the fourth. That's street talk. It's street talk, it's street language. We're trying to educate people and sometimes the only way to educate 'em is to use the same kinda language they use. That's hip hop. That's off the streets.

Do you think the message you delivered to the hip hop community in Message to the Messenger has been heard?

By some yeah. About the time they started that 'Godfather of Rap' shit, a whole lotta youngsters started saying they prided their work after mine, and I just wanted to be sure that they understood that they knew where I was coming from. Cos I don't write no poems my mother and my daughter can't listen to. So, right, that's the standard. If you're saying things that are righteous, neither your mother nor daughter need be ashamed to listen to em. We're not for calling ladies a bunch of bitches, or for calling them a bunch of hos. We'll call them ladies and treat them that way. And if you got one that ain't that way, then don't call her it at all.

What's your view on Puff Daddy and the latest strands of consumerist hip hop?

I think flash and dash in the community will get you washed. I think that'll get you pulled into one of them alleys. Somebody will unload you with that shit. We don't flash and dash around our folks. We got it like that sometimes, and if they need it we'll lay it on them, to help them out. But that's not the object of what I'm doing. I coulda been there and done that. We may be flashing, but we ain't wearing it. We ain't trying to spend it. We're trying to share it. There are billions and billions of people trying to make a living. It's a blessing when you get it like that. If you get a break and hit the numbers, then stand on out there and help everyone else out.

Some people see success as material

Yeah, and they show their insecurity that way. I feel successful no matter where I am, and my music has gone way beyond the boundaries that I originally saw.

What did you think about the WTO demos?

They stopped it. They bought it to a complete halt. They assigned themselves to keep the money from joining the money and that's what they did. The WTO is like a mega-corporation that holds on to everything, and they're trying to break that down and I'm in favour of that. Those people don't need to be hurt like that. We gotta get some respect for the workers, co' we the ones doing all the work.

In one of your songs you say "Back in the days of the non-violence I was the only non-violent one." Have your ideas on that changed as you've grown older? And what about the recent spate of killings by cops in New York? We gonna square that up. We're gonna be the last ones to get hurt this time. We got something for their ass. They shot somebody in the Bronx, downtown, and they done some of that shit in Brooklyn, but they ain't come to Harlem with it yet. We'd burn that sumbitch down if he come here with that shit.

You've written songs about the environment, so why did you do that voiceover for the new wheel from Goodyear?

They came to me and asked me to advertise it and said it was a green thing, you know, and it does use less fuel. You gotta have respect for mother nature.

What wouldn't you advertise?

I wouldn't advertise anything for the military or the monetary. Anything for the NRA (National Rifle Association).

Why do you think you are you still popular?

I think the literary things, the language. People can hear what's going, with the melody and they can get the message too.

POTENT MIXTURE BREWING IN PRAGUE

Prague gears up for clash of the ruinous suits and the righteous kids

The Czech capitol is gearing up for social disorder on a scale not seen since the 1989 fall of the communist state regime. Over 20,000 delegates, bankers and hangers-on are expected in the city for the September annual meetings of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Up to twice that number of anti-capitalist activists, intent on shutting down the shindig, are expected to flood in from all over Europe and beyond.

Along with a raft of small scale protests, a massive co-ordinated action has been called for September 26 - tagged S26 - by INPEG, a loose Prague-based coalition of social justice activists, environmentalists, anarchists and Christians. September 26 is the opening ceremonies of the board of WB/IMF governors which protesters intend to close a la the WTO meeting in Seattle last year.

Eleven thousand extra police and a 5,000 strong back-up army unit have been drafted in for the occasion and the FBI have set up shop in the city. Schools have been closed and children are being evacuated from the city.

The Czech Interior Ministry (Home Office) has issued a statement telling people: "Do not get involved in opinion exchanges with protesters" and to "respect police directions even if they limit personal

freedoms". It also warns citizens not to watch dramatic developments on the streets "because police will not be able to discriminate when suppressing violence and riots".

The overall message from the Czech authorities is similar to that adopted by the UK media in the run up to the anti-capitalist demo's on Mayday this year ie. to alienate citizens from activists by creating a dramatised climate of tension and fear.

Protest organisers are advising people not to get too excited about the scare mongering, reminding those who care enough to come that they'll be standing shoulder to shoulder with tens of thousands of like-minded people.

Despite having been repeatedly jailed as a protest leader by the previous regime, President Valclav Havel has ordered the closure of all theatres in case they are used for rallying opponents of the WB/IMF.

Hospitals are also readying themselves, as it is expected training and advice from US authorities will mean that Czech riot police attempt to emulate the Seattle's police force's heavy handed and heavily criticised approach last year. Seattle's Chief of Police was forced to resign following a barrage of 'robocop' accusation subsequent to his force's liberal use of pepper spray and an assortment of other weaponry.



Non-emergency surgery in Prague hospital's has to be postponed and entrances will be designated for pro and anti-capitalists. "If you have policemen in one room and demonstrators in another they could fight in the corridor," said Dr Mark Zeman of the Kralovse Vinohrady Teaching Hospital. In case any of the delegates gets a migraine, a team of doctors will be on constant standby.

Three hospital rooms will be made "especially comfortable" if Gordon Brown (UK governor of the IMF), Clare Short (UK governor of the World Bank) or any of their cronies should need hospital treatment.

For a full examination at the what's coming up in Prague check 'Prague a go go boom' on www.squall.co.uk and visit the website during the demonstrations for up to the minute Frontline Communiques and photographs.

WHAT THE PAPERS WON'T LET NUJ SAY

UK local newspaper giant tries to prevent new employment rights

A British newspaper giant has warned its staff not to take advantage of recent legislation allowing more trade union representation.

In a memo to staff entitled 'Don't turn back the clock', the managing director of Bath, Mid Somerset and Clevedon Newspapers, Heather Wozniac has listed ten reasons "why trade union recognition would not be welcome".

Under the Employment Relations Act which became law on June 6, union recognition becomes automatic if 50 per cent plus one members of a bargaining unit, of any scale, vote for it. The law also improves terms for part time staff, parental leave and unfair dismissal.

"The only [job] security any of us has is in the strength of the company, the shareholders support, our own ability and willingness to be flexible," says Wozniac's document. It goes on to bury the "misconception" that "Unions help resolve disputes" warning staff that representation could slow procedures down and that "the relationship everyone has with his or her manager is important and more often than not fundamental in resolving issues". Other revelations include the Union's "agenda" to gain more members to get money to pay officials and can fine, suspend and expel members for not turning up to meetings.

Jeremy Dear, national organiser for the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), said he

has fifty versions of the same document from every British paper owned by the Northcliffe group, to which these papers belong. Others in the region include nearly all of Bristol, Gloucester and Exeter's print media, the Cornish Guardian and the Torquay Herald Express. Nationally Northcliffe control publishing (dailies, weeklies and freesheets) in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Notts, Hull, South Wales, Grimsby and beyond. Northcliffe also hold major radio and cable TV interests. The company is part of the Daily Mail and General Trust plc. which has an annual turnover of over £1bn, and includes London's Evening Standard and Metro newspapers.

"This is a deliberate attempt to intimidate people," says Dear. "So many things in the leaflet are just a lie. By law, we cannot punish people for not attending meetings, unlike

a golf club or Masonic lodge. We have numerous examples where we have improved terms and conditions."

The NUJ has responded with its own document which dismisses Northcliffes' allusions that membership could harm careers, citing BBC director Greg Dyke and Channel Four's Jon Snow as former active members. "Why does only one national newspaper have seven weeks holiday, an average wage of £44,000, a nine day fortnight and no redundancy policy. Because 97 per cent of its staff are union members," it says.

Recognition claims have been submitted to three Northcliffe titles. All have been refused.

Wozniac chose not to speak to SQUALL. Dear says that since Northcliffe issued the documents the NUJ recruitment of staff on their publications has increased significantly.

SQUOTES

"Much of today's prevailing received wisdom is that we have endless information, we don't. We just have a lot of the same thing over and over again. A barometer of this is my own newspaper habits. I was a voracious newspaper reader, and this was the country for it. I no longer am. I skim the Guardian, period. I've got better things to do. There are books to read, there are all the other sources of information that I subscribe to, that I need to read. I can't be bothered endlessly having to deconstruct the media. ...It's either me or them and I've got a feeling it's them."

Journalist and broadcaster John Pilger interviewed by SQUALL. Full article available on www.squall.co.uk

FRONTLINE COMMUNIQUE

Warren Makepeace was among a number of festival-goers none too impressed with the policing strategy at one of the UK's more established summer festivals....

If your idea of fun is having police and security guards constantly peering over your shoulders then the Severn Revels Festival was for you. Tucked away in the Forest of Dean with a capacity of just three thousand this family-friendly event had the feel of a village fete. The dance tent on Saturday night resembled a wedding reception, with babies and grannies largin' it on the dance floor. Yet Gloucester Police's reaction to the Severn Revels can be best summed up by one local who complained: "The police came prepared for war rather than a summer music festival."

On arrival you had to run the gauntlet of jack booted cops in blue boiler suits at the gate pulling vehicles over and searching people for drugs. Once inside, police and security made their presence known. During the weekend they nicked 40 people, the vast majority for possession of cannabis; a victimless crime.

Eleven thirty PM was curfew and the police made sure this was strictly enforced. At one point they threatened a stall for selling post curfew tea and coffee, while a lone acoustic guitar player was warned that his strumming was in breach of the license! They even threatened to nick someone for breach of the peace for having the cheek to get a petition together complaining about police heavy handedness.

To say the Severn Revels festival organisers have never had it easy is an understatement. Last

year's event was cancelled in part because the cops told them they would be charging nearly £15,000 a day for their services. The year before, 58 people we're nicked for mainly drug offences. However, Gloucestershire's finest don't seem as keen on this zero tolerance approach when it comes to policing the rest of the county.

At a recent stormy public meeting the Chief Constable heard locals complain that they were sick of excuses about a lack of manpower being blamed for the long delays in responding to reports of crime. Especially when the police managed to dream up so many for the festival.

Another resident, Roger Price, accused the cops of putting fears into the minds of residents in the neighbouring villages in the run up to the festival. He added: "During the festival there was an incredibly heavy-handed attitude by the police. They really were very, very aggressive to people."

Local Forest of Dean MP, Diana Organ, has now written to the Chief Constable telling him that she had received several reports from organisers and constituents saying the policing of the festival was "aggressive and provocative"

Another Labour MP, Dawn Primarolo, who went along to the Revels, commented on the "large and threatening police presence" particularly compared to festivals in Bristol. While Paul Knowles, one of the Revels licensees has

asked the police why the event had not been policed in the same low-key way as the Coleford Switched-On Festival which had happened a few weeks earlier just a couple of miles down the road from the Revels.

So why the police reaction to an event which is a culmination of the Revels Community Programme, where many of the artists and performers at the festival took part in 30 workshops at schools and special needs centres throughout the area? Why the reaction to a festival which receives funding from the Forest of Dean District Council, the National Lottery, and the public service union UNISON?

Some people reckon the powers that be are worried that it is the 'thin end of the wedge' and could become another Glastonbury. But maybe a local doctor hit the nail on the head: "It was fortunate that the over-policing did not spoil the good natured and happy atmosphere of the festival."

Unfortunately for many the policing did seriously spoil the atmosphere. Maybe the over-the-top policing was a deliberate policy in making organisers and punters have such a miserable time that they won't want anything to do with the event ever again. But the most depressing thing is that the Severn Revels experience isn't a one off. All too often festival organisers up and down the country have to put up with this kind of unjustified treatment.