



Afro and Reds conducted this interview with Refused when they played in Philly this summer. Refused latest disc is on Victory. Refused is from Sweden.

### POLITICS

**FOE** As far as your politics go...I know there's a lot of rebelling against the system, like in the song "Coup D'Etat." Tell us about as to your political beliefs?

**DENNIS** Basically we don't believe in authority, and we don't believe in the system we are living under right now. I don't think you can fight for human rights or animal rights or whatever if you don't fight the capitalist system which upholds everything. I mean we're definitely a socialist/anarchist kind of band. Even if not everyone calls themselves socialists or anarchists that's our political foundation.

### STRAIGHT EDGE

**FOE** Why are you guys straight edge?

**DENNIS** There are as many different reasons for us being straight edge as there are members in the band. I became straight edge 7 years ago and I definitely don't have the same reasons as I did 7 years ago. Now it's mostly political reasons and I don't need that bullshit in my life and I think I have a healthy foundation to build a revolutionary stance from. I feel that being drug free and being vegan is important for me being a revolutionary. I guess that's why I'm straight edge. We're all straight edge. We're all vegetarians, vegans. It's really important but as far as the REAL politics goes I don't think straight edge is going to change that much cuz it's just a scene of people within the punk rock community and mostly those are the people who don't really need a change. I mean there are homeless people all around everywhere and those are the people that really need a change, they don't give a shit about hardcore, punk rock or straight edge.

**DAVID** I get the feeling a lot, over here at least more than I do in Europe, that a lot of people see straight edge as some kind of end stage. That's it! When you're straight edge you're done. You've made your choice, you've taken your stand and that's it. For us, it's just the beginning. That's where you start out. That's where you build everything from.

**DENNIS** If you're sober and focused you don't have all that shit to deal with and it's just so natural for me to be straight edge. I mean I've been drug free for so long I don't really think about it. It feels natural.

**DAVID** For me straight edge just means the musical scene. Cuz the word never really meant that much to me and as far as wearing the T-shirts and wearing the "X's" never appealed to me. I never saw why I should, "T-shirtify" my culture or my personal stances. I feel stupid wearing a shirt that some other guy made. Cuz that straight edge, maybe that's on a Strife shirt or whatever, may not be the same straight edge that it is for me. Cuz straight edge can be something totally stupid and selfish. I don't feel that I really need to associate with a term like that, but if people ask me I'm like "Yeah, I'm straight edge." I'm not ashamed of it.

### PUBLICITY

**FOE** I read that Refused was nominated for a music award.

**DAVID** You've got to understand the situation in Sweden. Sweden is not a big country so it's hard to be a focused, good hardcore band and not get the attention. We never asked them to write about us in their corporate magazines or talk about us on their TV shows. They threw a Grammy nomination at us and we were like "Whoa!" At first we were insulted, like "Can they do that?" Cuz that's like some kind of acceptance from the music industry which we don't give a fuck about anyway. So it just felt weird. But we didn't get it. The biggest newspaper in

Sweden published the Definitive List of Swedish Rock Stars. The 100 biggest rock stars in Sweden, people like Ace of Base, ABBA, Roxette and all that stuff. Dennis was #33.

**DENNIS** It said that I've been in the media a bit too much but I'm still the hardcore king of Sweden.

**DAVID** He gets recognized at gas stations in Denmark. We go to adventure parks in Sweden and people in line behind him for water slides talk about him like "Hey! Dennis from Refused." He's like a celebrity.

**DENNIS** Anyhow, they nominated us for the Grammy, and all the local newspapers and TV stations were calling us up "You're nominated for a Grammy. How does it feel?" We don't give a shit. "Are you going to the Grammy party?" No! Then they were like "What?"

**FOE** So is that where all the TV interviews came from?

**DENNIS** No, not really. All the TV interviews came from the fact that we started playing shows and we were super outspoken about straight edge and veganism and revolutionary thoughts and people were surprised that, here comes music that's super hard and super tough and we really don't appeal to the rock and roll cliché of how we're supposed to be. We just did a lot of interviews about that. About how we're drug free and vegan. Then people started blowing stuff up. Like meat factories and shit. Then we had to do tons more interviews about defending ourselves for being vegan. We were like "But that's got nothing to do with us." It just got out of hand. Every fucking talk show in Sweden called me and asked if I wanted to be on.

**JON** It was in all the headlines "Refused: Animal friendly or terrorists?"

**DAVID** Even if we refused to comment, they pulled something out of archives. Like a live shot or whatever.

**DENNIS** The corporate media are not really there to support you. They're just there to make money and make headlines. They don't give a shit about what you're saying so we just decided, as far as politics go, never again. Mostly magazines in Sweden are right wing magazines anyway and I can't talk about anarchism with those people. They don't give a shit about that and they try to make it look like we're stupid kids or whatever so we just stopped doing interviews.

### ROOTS OF THE HOME SCENE

**FOE** In the liner notes on one of your CD's it says it was supported by The Council for Cultural Affairs...

**DENNIS** Yeah the first one. That really didn't have anything to do with us. The record label got some money from their community to start a record label I guess and we had to put that on the cd. That guy is a rich capitalist bastard right now. We were the 1<sup>st</sup> release and now he's got Millencolin, who are the Green Day of Sweden.

**DENNIS** So he's making all this money and doesn't need any support from the Council for Cultural Affairs.

**DENNIS** Sweden is really good at supporting alternative cultures and arts. It's not really easy, but you can get money for being in a band sometimes, and doing a record label and they help you out. It's kind of cool.

**DAVID** We haven't seen much of that in Umea though.

**DENNIS** No. Not where we come from. People don't give a shit about us. We have the biggest hardcore scene probably in Europe and people don't give a shit about it. Like as far as getting a place to play shows and stuff like that.

**FOE** You help run Desperate Fight Records (Dennis). Why haven't you released Refused stuff on Desperate Fight?

**DENNIS** Because Refused got started way before we started Desperate Fight and we got hooked up with all these labels. We saw that there were so many good bands coming out of our city. There was nothing, and then all these bands started popping up and me and Jose, that does Desperate Fight, we said that it's stupid that they should go the same way as Refused. Some big guy... some people in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, making money out of our scene. So we started Desperate Fight just to support our scene and do it for ourselves and it just took off.

### USA

**FOE** What do you think of the kids here in the U. S.?

**DENNIS** To be totally honest, with a lot of things in the States, I think it's a lot of surface. IT'S A LOT OF SURFACE. It's a lot of "cool" T-shirt, clothes and lots of "cool" dancing styles.

**FOE** Do they do the karate dancing in Europe?

**DENNIS** No they don't.

**DAVID** That's the weirdest. We walked in to the first show and were like "Is this Kung Fu practice?" "Of course they're practicing Kung Fu." And we're like "What are they doing that for?" And most of the time they're just watching each other. They just make this big hole.

### POLITICS AND DIRECT ACTION

**DENNIS** We met so many cool hardcore kids. So many awesome people but I get a feeling that a lot of times people are into it cuz it's the thing right now. But we met a lot of people that are totally dedicated and totally honest too. It might be me because I'm so politically focused and everyone I meet is not into politics. For me I



think that's an important part of punk rock and hardcore all the time and people don't really care about that. In Europe, even if you're not political you probably have more political awareness than the people here.

**DAVID** The step from words to action is a lot shorter where we come from. Over here when we talk to cool kids here they talk about vegan power but nothing ever happens. Where we come from, in our town this year there's been laboratory animals freed, and meat trucks blown up, which is kind of stupid, and...

**DENNIS** Shell blockades, Shell stations getting fucking smashed to pieces every once in a while.

**DAVID** And that's just in our town. In Umea. And there's only like 100,000 people who live there. It just seems like over here it's a lot of surface.

**JON** The actions are getting more and more positive in Umea. A year ago they were only blowing up stuff but now it's more focused.

**DENNIS** I think direct action is beautiful if it's done the right way not the stupid way. Our scene is so amazing cuz all the kids are into politics on a good level, there's all these vegan kids who aren't just talking, they're doing shit.

### SUPPORT THE SCENES

**DAVID** The thing that I like the most, it's not like here are the emo kids and here are the political kids and here are the vegan kids. Well... there's kinda like a vegan posse but there's really a mix.

**FOE** Here the scene is very divided. Straight edge kids generally don't go to punk shows and vice versa.

**DENNIS** We have a group of 25 or 30 straight edge kids that goes to every show. We go to black metal shows... We just go cuz if local bands are playing we go to support them no matter what. We go to every punk and hardcore show.

**FOE** Do girls play more of an active role in your scene?

**DAVID** Definitely! Our scene wouldn't be the same with out the female participation. We held out really hard, we stopped shows if dancing got to violent. Just to show respect. The girls have to grab a piece of it and the guys have to let them in. A lot of girls are starting fanzines, and that is great. Cuz I'm totally fucking tired of hearing the 18 year old straight edge boy's view of everything that concerns the hardcore scene.

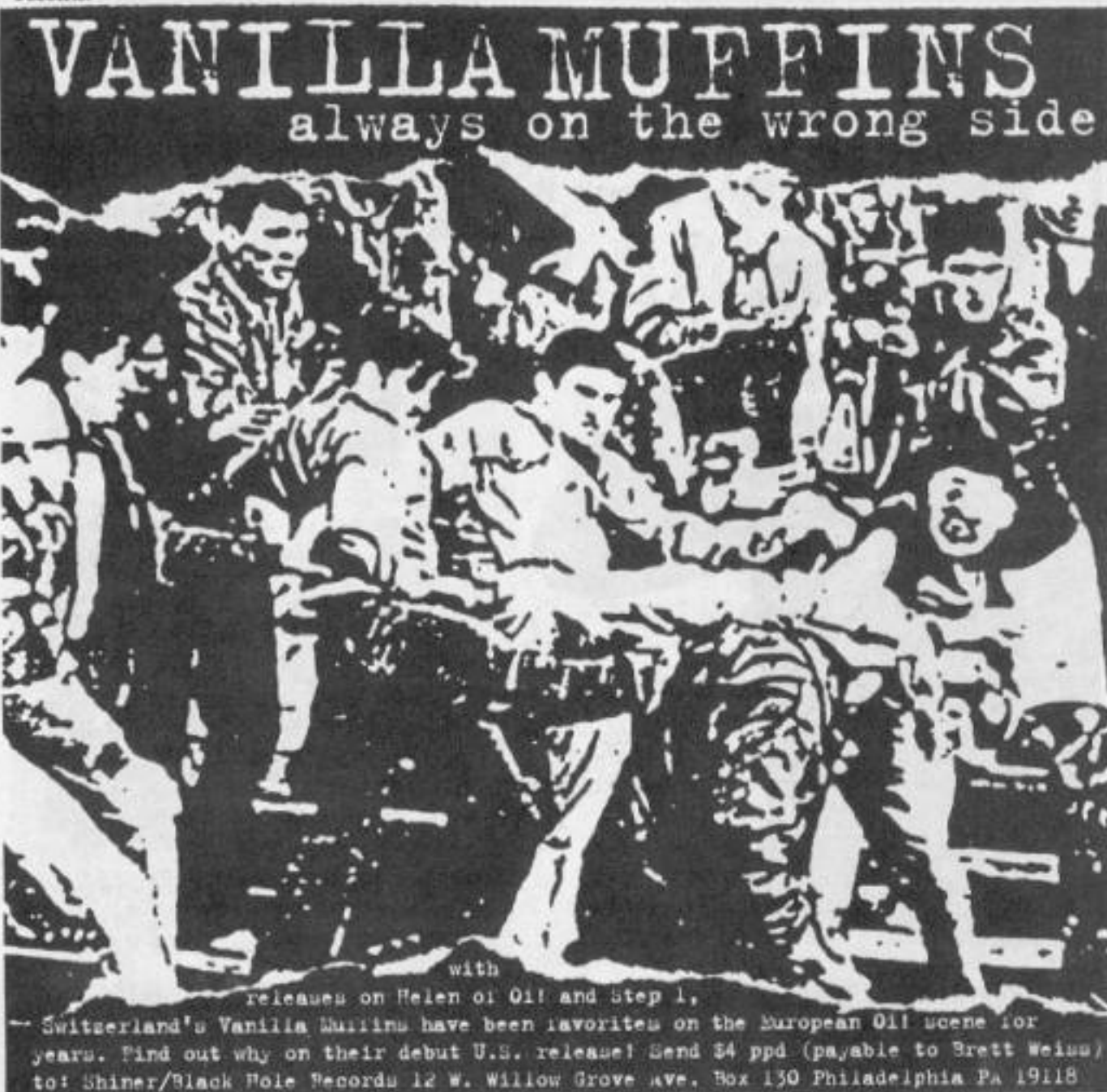
**FOE** Are your influences American, like Youth Of Today?

**DENNIS** Yeah, that's the stuff I was listening to. But as far as being dependent on it, I could never be. We had to do it ourselves. Start our own scene. Play shows to each other. That's why Germany doesn't have a good music scene, because they can go see their favorite American hardcore band once a month.

### GLOBAL POLITICS

**FOE** From my understanding of Sweden I get the idea that it's a pretty stable country...

**DENNIS** What you see happening in Sweden is... we have what's called a Social Democracy... I don't think it works because it has proven itself not to work constantly. What's happening is we're coming over to the States and we see how fucked up it is with all the class differences and stuff, and that's what Sweden wants to become.



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**DAVID** That's what Europe is competing against so they have to adapt.

**DENNIS** They have the whole European Union going which is an attempt to become American. Marketing and adapting the Swedish society for the 90's and shit like that. The people that don't need it are the people that get constantly kicked out. People that don't really have any money... Over and over again. Those are the people that get to suffer. I mean we're not as bad off as in the States but what we're singing about is a global thing mostly.

**DAVID** I've been feeling powerless being in Sweden and getting into politics because youth is so totally naive and apathetic when it comes to politics because politics in Sweden is so boring and there's never any real changes... But coming over here and seeing the incredible class differences and stuff like that has totally inspired me that there's stuff to do in Sweden. We still have a chance you know.

**DENNIS** One of the biggest problems in Sweden is that they look around Sweden and they get their welfare cut and they're starving and they say "Well... it's not as bad as over there." We're like "Well, what the fuck... that doesn't matter." We could have things so much better and if we had it better then people over there probably would have it better too because it would be a big socialist change. It's just about the whole picture you know. I'm a part of it. As long as I consume in the capitalist system I'm a part of people starving in Africa and a part of people getting killed by death squads in South America.

### SEKAC

**FOE** Do you guys sit around with your friends and talk politics?

**DAVID** This is kind of funny. We started... not as much a political action group but more of a discussion group called SEKAC (Straight Edge Kids Against Capitalism) which is mostly us and our friends hanging out and talking about all these issues to channel them in a way and to take part in everyone's view about it. And also as a forum for problems in the scene.

**DENNIS** I'm the only one in the band who's really active in anarchist organizations and stuff, but when we're doing demonstrations and actions, everyone in Refused is there and everyone is participating. But I'm the one that goes to all the meetings and listen to all the boring stuff.

**DAVID** Yeah, we held down a gas station.

**DENNIS** David was on trial a week before we came over here for direct action.

**DAVID** I had to handle my own defense. I got to interrogate my own cop. It was awesome. I made it cuz my story was really good.

**DENNIS** It's not illegal to lie in court in Sweden. You can lie as much as you want.

**DAVID** So I just went off. It was fucking awesome. I wish I had it on video.

**FOE** What is it like having a huge civil (Bosnia) war close to you.

**DENNIS** It doesn't effect us that much. People don't talk about it on the news cuz it's not interesting you know. There's no sensational value. No one's doing anything about it because no one's making any money out of it. I get a lot of letters from Yugoslavia... a lot of hardcore kids and they have a big hardcore scene. I'll write them and tell them "Just stay alive guys."

**JON** They say their show place got bombed yesterday.

**DENNIS** "We haven't had shows for a year cuz they bombed all the places we usually have shows." I was like "Whoa. All righty then. What am I complaining about?" I don't think that could happen in Sweden cuz it's such a fucking sissy country.

### SEXUALITY

**DAVID** I think what ignites the spark for us and really gets us going and gets us mad is the apathy of Sweden.



It's known, we all know it, all Swedes know it. They make movies about it. About how apathetic we are. That's what feeds my anger. Constantly, the incredible apathy. How people don't care. Swedes are known for being cold and boring. We don't talk to each other on the bus and it's not because we're scared of each other but Swedes feel it's embarrassing. I think that totally feeds us because we're into nudity. We just want to be nude. We want to be naked. The night before we left for the states, our friends. 6 guys and 5 girls, went skinny dipping. We do that all the time. We play football naked.

**FOE** Where does that come from?

**DAVID** Realizing that the body doesn't just have a sexual function. To be able to relax. It's personal liberation. Sweden is known to be for all these nude movies that came out and we were known for that stuff but it's not like that at all. People are so uptight about their bodies and so uptight about their space. We need to de-dramatize the human body. There's so much sexual frustration built up inside us that it creates problems with sexual violence. If we realize that bodies don't just have a sexual function and not be so hung up about it. We just get naked. It's nice to be around each other. It's weird for people. The only time they see a naked body is when they have sex.

**DENNIS** It's not really sexy to hang out with 5 naked guys and a couple of naked girls. Naked bodies are not sexy if they're not put in that context. We do all this shit naked just to be comfortable. It's also about being comfortable with your own body.

**DAVID** Of course it has to do with sexuality too. We all hug each other when we're naked. Us guys. To get over fear. Because some of us aren't as sure as perhaps I am, because I'm really sure about my sexuality. To be open minded about stuff like that. Because I'm bisexual.

**DENNIS** I think pretty much all of us realize we are bisexuals. I find it totally weird to only be attracted to girls or only attracted to boys too. I think everyone in Refused realized that it's totally natural.

**DAVID** I don't think we're all outspoken about that though.

**FOE** If you don't want us to print that, that's fine, cuz a lot of people here are really homophobic.

**DAVID** We totally want to provoke those people. We want to piss them off.

**DENNIS** Those homophobes are fucking assholes. When I started telling myself that it's not a big deal to look at boys and be attracted and think they're cute or whatever. It's gotten more easy. I've seen more cute boys in the states than I've seen cute girls which is pretty weird.

**DAVID** They're kind of cute when they do that Kung Fu stuff. (laughter)

**DENNIS** That's what they don't want to hear. (more laughter)

**DAVID** I've always felt... as a boy growing up I was always attracted to both. But then I spent puberty erasing any emotions towards the male kind and then since I realized that some feelings I've had are impossible to suppress.

**DENNIS** That's another thing about coming over to the states and being straight edge. Out of curiosity I asked a kid "So straight edge in the states, is it about not having sex?" and he said "Yes." Everyone in Refused said "WHAT!?" We all looked at each other like what's he talking about.

### FIGHTING

**FOE** In a lot of the big cities here like New York and Boston there are gangs that go to hardcore shows. Do you have problems with that in Europe in general?

**DAVID** No. Not in Sweden. Not in Europe either. We have DMS Berlin but it's not a serious thing. We don't really have fights in Sweden. There's no place for that shit. We don't have fights in Sweden because no one

accepts it in the hardcore scene. In Umea we had one fight and it got broken up right away.

**FOE** Have you seen fights at shows here?

**DENNIS** Yeah. We've seen kids taking guns out at a show in Florida. They were fighting in the pit and after the show they were in the parking lot and pulled out a gun. Most of us have never even seen a gun. We had one show that 4 nazi kids showed up in Sweden. They never showed up again. Ever!

**DAVID** We have a hard policy when it comes to nazis. We don't accept it. We confront it and if it goes too far we beat the shit out of them and chase them away. We have people that patrol the streets searching for nazis to kick the hell out of them.

**DENNIS** We have hardcore friends that walk around the streets and their mission is to beat up nazis. That's all they do.

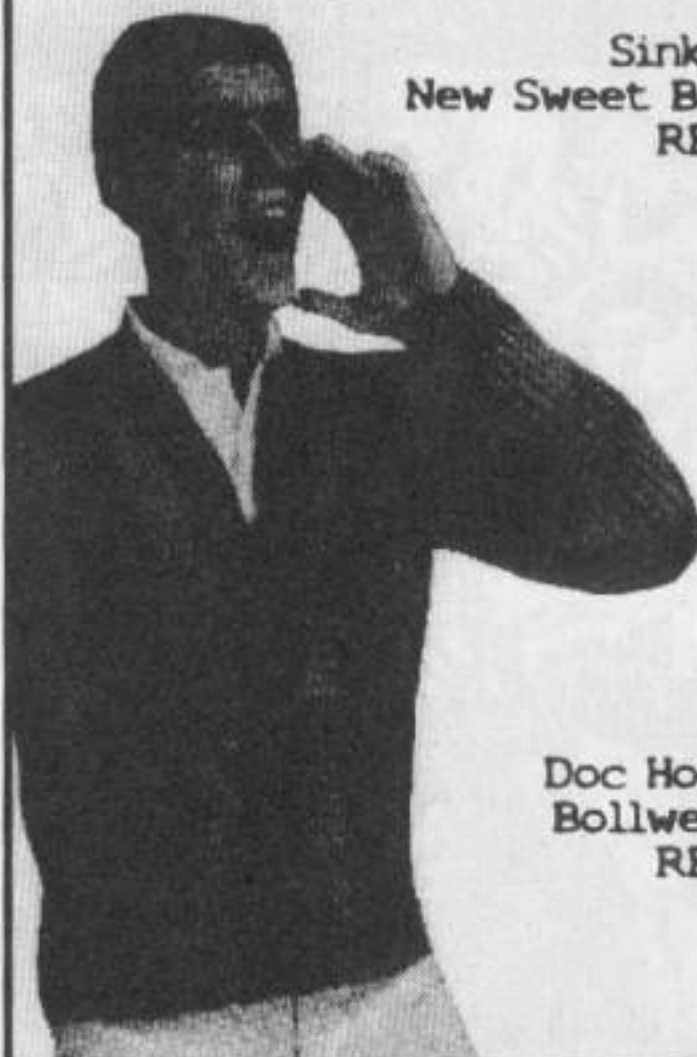
**DAVID** A lot of people have a problem with that though. They think it's oppression. But we see it as oppression of the oppressors and it needs to be done. It's not a solution to the problem, but we need to keep the streets safe cuz the power they get from controlling the streets is bigger than the power they might get if they beat someone up... We're lucky in Umea cuz it got nipped in the bud. They were never allowed the space to gain any power what so ever. There are cities in Sweden where they control the streets, pretty much, at night. We were hanging out with these girls in a town in the far south and we were walking around to find something to do. Everywhere we went people said "Don't go there. There's nazis." And that made us more sure of our convictions that you have to beat the shit out of them. They've got to be scared. They need to be scared. You shouldn't allow them to walk the streets without being afraid of getting beaten up. It's better for them to be afraid then everyone to be afraid of them... There's a funny story about friends of ours... We were playing a show so we couldn't go but... There's a day like your Independence Day but in Sweden. There was going to be a big nazi demonstration north of Umea. There were at least 30 nazis and there were 7 people who got in a minibus and went there with baseball bats and fake guns. They beat the crap out of 2 nazis and took their clothes and money. 2 of them got arrested, one was the drummer for Said I Was but he got off. I don't know what's happening to the other guy. It was funny cuz the headlines said "Vegans beating up nazis." Police in Umea have a certain branch... there's 2 cops totally focused solely on "Vegan Crime." Vegan crime by their definition is any illegal political activity committed by youth in Umea. That's "Vegan Crime." So when we have anti-porno demonstrations, when we held down the Shell station, we have anti-capitalist demonstrations, when we're at the circuses handing out fliers... it's vegan crime and they're there.

### SHELL SUCKS

**FOE** What's going on with Shell, because that wasn't a big story over here?

**DAVID** Shell are working closely with a military dictator in Nigeria. They were running their pipelines through poor people's villages where they grow food... The pipes started leaking and it was terrible environmentally. People were dying and getting sick. When the village's population turned against them, they sent in death troops to wipe them out. Rape the women and burn the children. Fucking horrible!

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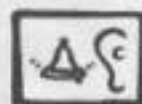


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**FOE** Who's they?

**DENNIS** The military dictator and the people supported by the dictator... There was a group called Mosop (sp?)... It's like a people's party or something... and the 8 leaders for that group were executed. And Shell admitted that they supported the Nigerian government with guns.

**DAVID** Then they shut the door. Like an iron curtain. No one knows what's going on there any more. One of the guys, Ken Sarawiva (sp?), got a Nobel prize in Stockholm months earlier for his humanitarian efforts and fight against the Nigerian government and Shell. Then he got hung with the other 7 leaders. There was an international boycott that we organized ourselves as a cell within Earth First. We went there and held the gas station for an hour and passed out fliers. We called the media and there were all these TV shows there filming.

**DENNIS** It was funny... We all went there, everybody in Refused. There were about 50 people there and we decided to stay in the background cuz we were going on a US tour in 2 months and we didn't want any trouble. All these film cameras come up and are talking to us and David just goes off. I see him in front of the cameras "SHUT DOWN THE FUCKING SHELL STATION!!!"

**DAVID** For about 15 minutes I was just talking to the cameras about everything. I had been fighting with cops over stuff and I had been building barricades. So finally they grabbed me. They grabbed me for inciting it. They arrested about 15 people and I was doing everything and I got off cuz I had a good story. I was happy cuz maybe if I had gotten convicted I wouldn't have been able to come here... We never saw ourselves as political extremists but coming over here we feel like we are. We're talking to people and we feel we can't really tell them what we're up to when we're at home cuz they'd just go nuts. We were involved in a demonstration against some fur guy while we were here.

### THE WHOLE THING

**DENNIS** Refused is so much more than just the music. We did a fanzine to our new record with politics in it.

**JON** It's not like we're 70% music and 30% politics. It's all about music and all about politics.

**DAVID** If the message was more important, if the message was even 55% and the music 45% we wouldn't play this kind of music. We would be doing some commercial music to make the people think. I totally see ourselves as part of the collective we were talking about earlier. We can totally relate to people like Jo Hill

(sp?), Swedish anarchist who wrote songs for the International Workers of the World in the beginning of the century. In the beginning of the century there were a lot of immigrant workers. It was easy for the bosses to divide the workers because they were from different ethnic backgrounds. His songs worked as a unifying war cry that brought them together. That's how I see our music too. In the scene in Sweden we're fanning the flames. The International Workers of the World put out a little red song book with his songs and a lot of other revolutionary songs and we can totally relate to that. The book is called "Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent" and that's why we named the record that.

**DENNIS** I think most important things happen outside the hardcore scene. But how can you do unify people and make a change if the hardcore scene isn't even united? We have all these little cliques and people talking shit about each other. That's one of the biggest problems, people say "I'm not gonna work with those guys cuz they're not vegan, and that guy he smokes pot so I'm not gonna work with him." That stuff totally divides. It makes people miss the real issues and the real changes that need to be done.

**DAVID** We work together politically with people who are not straight edge. If it's for humanitarian causes, it works out. You can't just draw the line right there. If you want to do something for people who are suffering you can't get involved with checking everyone's diet to make sure they're vegan. I think everyone should stop eating meat. But if people are eating meat and they're working politically and active and playing in bands and involved, I think it's cool. I won't condemn them. I could say "Everyone should stop eating meat," but if they do other stuff that's just as important, then I wouldn't be on their case for that. Also being around non straight edge kids and working for them, they snap up the straight edge ideas.

**DAVID** It can be enlightening for you too. Just because you're straight edge doesn't mean you know everything.

**DENNIS** You totally learn a lot from other people. Like every time someone talks about legalizing drugs I'm the first to get in the discussion to find out what they're about. But most of the time they say "I want to smoke it." Yeah, whatever.

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