

# LOCAL NEWS

## 2 Neighborhood Factions

# A Fight for the Soul of the Haight

By Sam Whitting  
Chronicle Staff Writer

When 29 people were arrested for distributing free food at Haight and Stanyan streets on Monday, it was symbolic that members of a rival Cole Valley group were across the street, watching with glee from the patio of a McDonald's restaurant.

What began eight months ago as a loose Cole Street homeowners' effort to rid the neighborhood of nomadic Deadhead bus residents and their bumper-stickered buses has evolved into an organized battle for the soul of the Haight.

On one side is Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Coalition, which seeks to preserve the free-form tradition of the Panhandle. On the other side sits the Cole Valley Improvement Association, whose members do not particularly like the words Haight and Ashbury when combined to connote free love, free food, free money and free rent.

The warring factions have fought it out through the mayor's office and the courts, and they fought it out Monday at the Haight Street entrance to Golden Gate Park over a weekly food distribution program called Food Not Bombs.

### Enormous Political Odds

Not since merchants persuaded police to sweep the street of hippies in the late 1960s have two groups been at such enormous political odds over the future of the hillside neighborhood adjoining the park Panhandle.

The Haight-Ashbury coalition claims to be the voice of Haight-Ashbury history and wants to maintain the neighborhood's reputation as a haven for the counterculture even if that means putting out a welcome mat for society's indigents, such as the people who live in buses along the Panhandle.

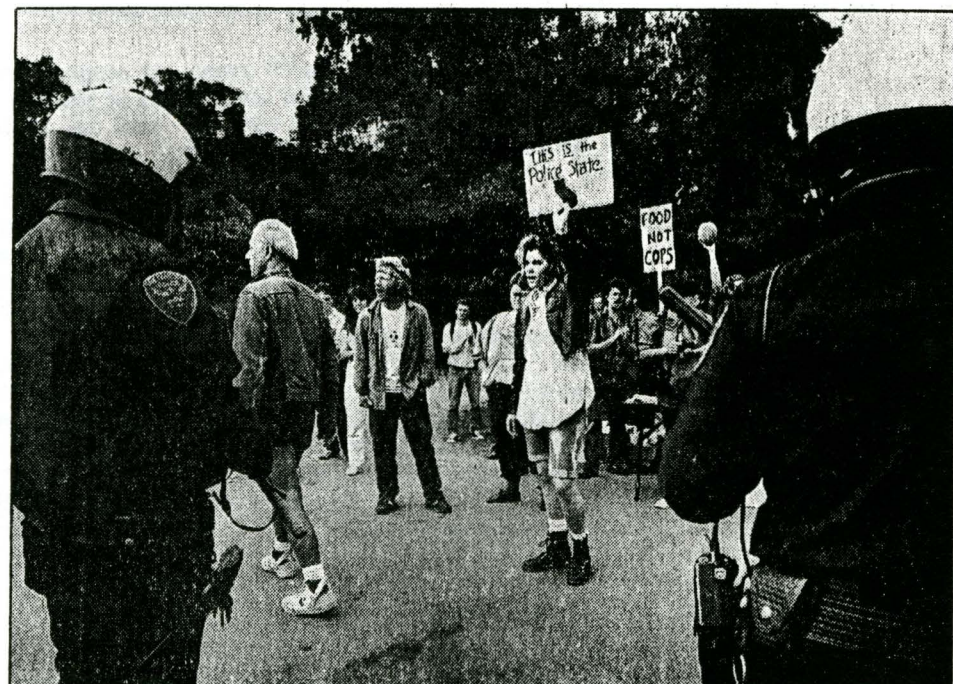
The Cole Valley group complains that the Haight-Ashbury coalition's history book goes back only 20 years — to a time when the Haight was best known for its hippies. Before that, the Haight was a quiet neighborhood of single-family homes and safe park playgrounds for the children.

"The name Cole Valley signals that there is a different group who would like to call this neighborhood home," said spokeswoman Therese Gaus, who incidentally lives on the same block of Ashbury as the original home of the Grateful Dead, the rock band with an extensive cult-like following. "There's a large group of new people in the neighborhood who are not willing to put up with what some of the older residents put up with."

Gaus, an attorney, lives with her husband, William, also an attorney, and their four children in a house protected by wrought-iron steel gates. It is just around the corner from the scratched up, seldom-locked door of Jim Rhoads, a representative of the Haight-Ashbury group.

### 'Right-Wing Element'

"There is a right-wing element



BY MICHAEL MALONEY/THE CHRONICLE

Police officers stood ready to make arrests Monday in Golden Gate Park at Haight and Stanyan streets as Food Not Bombs supporters chanted and distributed free meals

in this neighborhood whose mindset is that everybody who is homeless is a criminal," said Rhoads, a 15-year resident and accounting consultant. "It's outrageous that the neighborhood is persecuting an utterly poor class of people."

Caught in the middle of this philosophical war are the neighborhood's longtime bus residents who at this point do not care much for the Deadheads, either.

Helios Creed does not consider himself homeless and does not follow the Grateful Dead around the country. He simply chooses to live in his 1961 school bus on the Panhandle as he has for the past two years.

"I resent the image that all of the people who live in the buses are Deadheads," said Creed, 34, who dresses in various shades and textures of black. "I'm a homeowner. My bus is as nice as an apartment. I don't think you would find many Deadheads living like this."

Creed and his mobile home neighbors are in flux now because of Mayor Art Agnos' decision last month to remove vehicle residents from the Panhandle. Most have moved their buses to friend's driveways, beneath bridges or down to the Mission District. After day-break, they return to Oak or Fell streets, park and drift a few blocks up and into the Haight-Ashbury under-culture.

Like the Haight-Ashbury and Cole Valley groups, the bus residents have organized themselves. They even have a name — Vehicular Residents Association — and a monthly newsletter. They are circulating a petition at Haight and Clayton streets to allow their return and are also suing to have declared unconstitutional Section 97 of the police code, which bans sleeping or eating in vehicles between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

"The vehicle residents just want to be left alone — they aren't doing it to make a statement," said their attorney, Sarge Holtzman, who operates from a disheveled storefront on Haight Street. His other client, Food Not Bombs, operates largely on a grant from the Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Coalition and is definitely trying to make a statement, he says. "They have a high moral purpose and are willing to get arrested for it."

Two weeks ago, the group defied a police order and set up a food giveaway at the Haight Street entrance to Golden Gate Park. Nine people were arrested for breaking various health codes. Score that 1 for the Cole Valley people and 0 for the Haight-Ashbury group.

Last week, Food Not Bombs was allowed to distribute food to the needy. That tied the score. Monday's 29 arrests were a solid victory for the Cole Valley supporters, giving them the best-of-three series.

### 'Incredibly Distressing'

"To come in on some political basis and prevent these people from getting their one meal is incredibly distressing," Holtzman said. "If the Cole Valley people win, then it's a harbinger that we will no longer help the less fortunate. If that sentiment prevails, then we will all end up isolated from each other."

Carole Isaacs, a supporter of the Cole Valley group, counters that Food Not Bombs is actually financed by the Haight-Ashbury coalition as a front to create a confrontation.

"That's why they want it at Haight and Stanyan," she said. "It's one of the main entrances to the children's playground. It's turf. Why don't they send them down to Ocean Beach. If there's free food out there, I'm sure people will show up."

But Holtzman said the hungry

probably will not go away, even if Food Not Bombs pulls up stakes.

"Their contention is that Food Not Bombs brings a bad element to the community," he said. "The people are already here. That's a fact of the neighborhood. What's going on out here is a class struggle, directed against people from a different social caste."

Representatives of the Haight-Ashbury group describe the Cole Valley people as a bunch of real estate speculators interested more in property values than maintaining the Haight as a refuge for the less fortunate. There is an overtone that Cole Valley supporters resemble people who move close to the airport and complain about the noise.

"We have Haight-Ashbury residents who don't want to be Haight-Ashbury residents," said Joel Ventresca, president of the Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Coalition. "They want to create a new neighborhood not congruent with the past."

### Aging Hippies?

Cole Valley representatives describe their opponents as a group of aging hippies trying to hang onto a dream that was long ago overrun by junkies, winos, beggars and thieves.

Sheila Bowen, who has lived in the neighborhood since 1953, said: "There were always a lot more takers out here than givers, which ruined the whole thing. People come with their backpacks and say, 'Hey, man, where's the happening?' It's over. It's gone."

Geographically, Cole Valley is up the hill and to the west of the Haight-Ashbury intersection, but the group was founded to encompass the "greater Haight-Ashbury community," according to its letterhead. The Cole Valley Improvement Association's first organized victory



was to persuade Mayor Agnos to rescind his January decision to allow vehicle-living along the Panhandle.

"A bus parked down there is like a neon sign that says, 'You don't have to obey the laws in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood,'" Cole Valley supporter Isaacs said.

Getting the buses kicked off the Panhandle attracted new members to the group, such as Bowen, who lives across the street and has spent years fighting "the lost tribes of Israel," as she calls the bus resi-

dents. "When (the Cole Valley association) pulled that deal off, I joined," she said. "I figured somebody was finally willing to do something about it."

Meanwhile, Sarge Holtzman sits in his office, tie askew and feet propped on a stack of papers and Styrofoam coffee cups.

"There are global consequences to the Cole Valley attitude," he said in a grave tone. "It's a question of how we will ultimately define our culture. If we lose in the Haight, I'm not sure where we could anticipate winning."