

The achievement has passed with little fanfare, but 1995 marks the 10 year anniversary of the birth of New Zealand's pioneer hip-hop group, Upper Hutt Posse. Virtually from day one, UHP have found themselves in the firing line. Too frequently they have been the target of uninformed media attacks, while faceless detractors have regularly labelled them 'racists'. Throughout the last decade, blessed with a maverick spirit, the Posse's chief rapper and songwriter Dean Hapeta (aka D-Word) has ridden the endless wave of controversies to keep the flame burning.

"I've known it wasn't going to be easy right from the start. I guess I am the one who's been holding Upper Hutt Posse up, but it wouldn't be Upper Hutt Posse without the others. I don't want to go solo

said the band had prevented two white students from entering a lunchtime performance at Selwyn College in Kohimarama. A defamation suit was lodged against the *Star* by D-Word, and in May 1994, INL, the owners of the publication, settled out of court for an undisclosed sum, after admitting the article was based on "erroneous information that was subsequently found to be untrue".

At the time of the settlement, D-Word told *RipItUp*: "The whole situation labelled the band as anti-white. Because we're pro-Maori, most people take that to be anti-white, but that is not the case."

The 'anti-white' accusation is usually the basis for all bad publicity or rumours surrounding UHP, and at times D-Word feels it's pointless to try and change the opinions of the ignorant.

"It happens if I just mention the words 'white people'. There's a line in 'As The Blind See', it

everybody, and when I talk about the devil, I'm talking about the bad side. White people have spread their lies and deceit throughout the world, especially on indigenous people and people of colour.

"It's funny, people today are saying: 'We hate the French... government.' That's like me saying: 'I hate the Pakeha... government.' Maybe people can understand what I'm talking about now — it's not that I hate every single white person, but the government they have basically created."

Even when away from the band, D-Word has become entangled in situations socially that further remove the focus from the music of Upper Hutt Posse. While he's far from innocent on some occasions ("I might have a few beers and get out on the loose and say this and that, but fuck, who

with Southside Records and signed to newly formed indie label Tangata. The single 'Ragga Girl' followed, and was the last Posse song to feature core members DJ DLT and vocalists Teremoana Rapley and Acid Dread. With only D-Word and his brother Wiya remaining, the Posse remained largely inactive for the next 12 months, except for a side project by the duo called E Tu, who released the single 'Whakakotahi', to celebrate the United Nations Year for Indigenous Peoples.

Midway through 1994, a new-look 'live' Upper Hutt Posse took to the stage at the 95bFM Private Function, and kicked out the proverbial jams, signalling the turnaround long-time Posse fans had been hoping for. It was a tremendous surprise.

"Yeah, I just felt like a change really. I'd got a bit tired of programming drum machines and sequencers, and wanted to get another band



NO WORRIES IN THE POSSE

as I've always wanted to stick with the band. I like the concept of being a part of Upper Hutt Posse."

UHP began as a four-piece reggae outfit in Wellington in 1985. They attracted attention almost immediately, as their approach was different to that of other reggae groups around at the time (Aotearoa, Herbs, Sticks and Shanty), in that they worked hip-hop and rap elements into smooth reggae grooves.

New Zealand's first rap single, the politically charged 'E Tu', was released by UHP on the Jayrem label in 1988, but the style and lyrical content proved too much for a nation of music fans who'd missed the first wave of US rappers — Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force — and were not yet conversant with the likes of Public Enemy and Ice T. Upper Hutt Posse were accused of being 'not Maori enough' by those hoping for a more irie flavour to their music.

A shift to Auckland the following year saw them move camps to fledgling label Southside, followed by the December release of the excellent long-player, *Against The Flow*. Several singles followed, before a series of incidents throughout 1990 pushed them to the centre of a media circus. The degree to which UHP were placed under the microscope could not have been orchestrated by even the most cunning of PR officers.

It began with a report in the *The Truth* that accused the Posse of telling Samoans to "go home", during their performance at the 1990 DMC DJ Championship at Auckland's Gluepot, and was followed by an article in the *Auckland Star* that

says: 'One law for all, don't mean it should be the white man's.' If someone's sitting at the back at a show, not really listening, just talking to their friends, if they hear the words 'white man', they'll look up and go: 'What the fuck's he saying about the white man?' They look up and see a bunch of Maoris, then they'll go: 'He's running down white people,' and that person will tell all their friends. It's just bullshit."

The situation worsened after several members of the band visited the United States in October 1990 as guests of the Nation of Islam.

"When we got back, it really got outta hand. There was a lot of rumours about me. People were saying that I hated the white man, and they would come up to me and ask: 'Are you a member of the Nation Of Islam?' I'm not down with their ideologies and I'll never be a member, but the bottom line for me is, I'm a supporter of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. I'm right behind them in the way they choose to deal with their situation, but that's not to say that I'll bring their philosophies over here and use them for my ends."

The Nation of Islam's most controversial statement is that 'all white people are devils', and D-Word's association with the group provided further ammunition for the band's many critics. But his response is similar to that of LA rapper Ice Cube: that all snakes are poisonous, but some are less poisonous than others.

"I've said throughout the years that the white man is the devil. The way I feel about it is, the white man does more of the devil's work in this country and in the world. There's good and bad in

doesn't?"), he's disappointed when non-events are blown sky high, due to his reputation, and he has to waste more time defending his position. An episode during a promo tour to Auckland by Michael Franti, of US group Spearhead, was a perfect example.

"What happened at Squid with Michael Franti was this. He said 'Aotearoa' in a bit of a fucked up way, so my girlfriend shouted out, 'Aotearoa!' That's how you say it'. He thanked her for that, but then someone shouted: 'Fuck off D-Word!' So, there was a bit of shouting over the crowd, but afterwards people were getting around saying I was hassling Michael Franti. Later on he thanked my girlfriend and said: 'I'm glad you told me. I wouldn't want to be walking around here saying the wrong thing.' But people went around spreading false rumours about me giving Michael Franti shit."

After the furore of the previous year had died down, D-Word returned to America in 1991, and spent four months exploring the options for the US release of *Against The Flow*. Upon his return, he found the original Posse line-up was starting to come unstuck.

"While I was spending time in the States, I was trying to hold the band together at the same time, it was really difficult and people were straying off to do different things. So, when I returned, there was a bit of indecision about Upper Hutt Posse as a band. It wasn't a real tight unit."

The only recorded output from UHP during 91 was a remix of an album track, 'Stormy Weather', and by the new year, the band had split amicably

together to get the live funk thing happening."

The new band entered Auckland's Revolver Studios in October, and left a month later, having made a wickedly funky hip-hop album.

Movement In Demand hits in all the right places, whether it be the slamming tracks 'Whakakotahi', 'Fuck the Status Quo' and 'Wise Up', the controlled cruisers like 'As The Blind See' and 'Can't Get Away', a sharp new version of the Posse classic 'Clockin' The Time', or when Wiya takes the lead on the raggafied 'Beware A De Wiya'.

Upon its release, D-Word hopes the music and messages contained on *Movement in Demand* will erase all preconceptions people hold about Upper Hutt Posse.

"So many people have an attitude about Upper Hutt Posse, especially in Auckland. But it's time right now to listen to what the album is saying, what it's talking about. If anybody has a problem or anything to say against me, I say: 'Go through my songs and you'll truly find out what I'm saying. I just want the album to speak for itself."

To literally illustrate his point, D-Word has assembled a portrait of legendary Maori leaders on the album cover. He's placed warriors Rewi Maniapoto and Te Rauparaha alongside the pacifist Te Whiti.

"There's a different mix of leaders, but they all stood for and fought for, Maori culture, Maori land rights, and Maori language. The idea behind the cover is to say that their struggle is still going on today, it's not forgotten. A lot of people these days talk about 'mana', but if you look at everybody on the cover, that's what mana is. Look at those people and look at their lives — that's what it's all about."

JOHN RUSSELL