

times an hour.

"The operative words are *steal, arrest, and honest,*" explains Dennis Duerden, national sales manager of ProActive Systems, which markets the antishoplifting messages. "Basically, the system is directed at honest people who won't shoplift under normal circumstances."

Business is booming for ProActive, a Portland-based sister company of the publicly owned Oregon utility, Pacific

Power & Light. Since it began pushing Threshold Messaging a year ago, ProActive has signed up some 120 clients, most of them retail outlets and supermarket chains. Duerden claims that the messaging, which is also available in Spanish, has reduced employee theft and shoplifting by 5 to 15 percent among his clients using the system.

Duerden says Threshold Messaging is designed to reach people just below the level of

consciousness, unlike the more classically subliminal technology of an earlier epoch, which was aimed at the deep subconscious. But the principle is the same, and the ProActive system serves to confirm what many people have long believed. Since the 1957 publication of Vance Packard's blockbuster book, *The Hidden Persuaders*, subliminals have been deeply embedded in modern American mythology. The popular im-

age persists of TV spots and workplace Muzak studded with hidden messages that drive Americans to work like beavers and spend like Rockefeller.

But what substance is there behind this image? It's hard to say. Perhaps the most notorious use of subliminals took place in a Fort Lee, New Jersey, movie palace in 1957. While fans were ogling Kim Novak in *Picnic*, market researcher James Vicary repeatedly flashed the messages "Hungry? Eat popcorn!" and "Drink Coca-Cola!" on the silver screen and then observed whopping increases in sales at the refreshment counter.

Sixteen years later, a Christmas TV commercial hawking a children's game was demonstrated to have had the subliminal message "Get It!" embedded four times—leading the Federal Communications Commission to ban the use of the technique on the tube. But despite hearings down through the years, congressional legislation against the use of subliminals has never passed.

Packard, who opened the subliminal can of worms, says he isn't "particularly impressed" by Threshold Messaging because "everyone has a different threshold."

But despite his skepticism about the ProActive system, Packard warns that there's no reason why, if it works, it couldn't be used to sell merchandise as well as protect it. ProActive's Duerden insists that the messages are restricted to antitheft—or, on some job sites, worker safety—themes, and "can't manipulate people to do what they don't want to do." But who can be sure? Certainly not this reporter, whose companion in the course of researching the Threshold Messaging system dropped \$150 on merchandise she didn't really need.

—John Ross

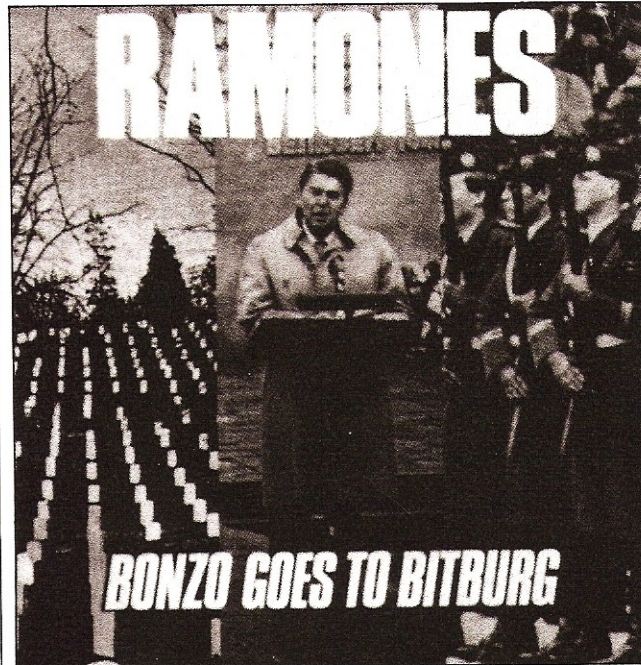
## Disc Spells Hit Time For Bonzo

Ronald Reagan is said to be fond of the Beach Boys, so it's easy to imagine him crooning "Surfer Girl" as he chops wood on his southern California ranch.

But he's probably not much of a Ramones fan, and he and Nancy probably don't pogo around the White House to the strains of "I Wanna Be Sedated." Now Reagan has one less reason to like the Ramones: the New York group's recent 12-inch import single, "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg."

The latest effort by the pioneers of punk slams the president for his May visit to the German war cemetery, and has been embraced by college radio stations, which generally stray further from the musical flock than do their commercial counterparts. Record stores specializing in imports say "Bonzo" has moved off the shelves much quicker than Ramones' records usually do.

The band's longtime U.S. label, Sire Records, hasn't released the song, in a decision products manager Suzanne Emil describes as "both financial and political." But others at Warner Bros. Records, Sire's parent company, main-



A collector's item? Original jacket for the Ramones' 12-inch single, later changed by Britain's Beggars Banquet Records.

tain that the decision may have been artistic. "It just wasn't considered a good enough record," one insider says. The song will "probably," according to Emil, show up on a greatest-hits album tentatively scheduled for a Christmas release.

But political considerations are harder to dismiss in the case of the record jacket. The original version, showing Reagan addressing the crowd at the German cemetery, was changed after the release of the record by Britain's Beg-

gars Banquet Records, with Reagan's picture covered up on the new jacket. In the spirit of classic English understatement, the British pop music newspaper *Melody Maker* blamed the jacket flap on pressure from the "Moral Majority, the Patriotic League of the Alamo, and the SS."

Songwriter Joey Ramone was more succinct in articulating the inspiration for "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg": by visiting the cemetery, Ramone says, Reagan "sort of shit on everybody."

—Larry Jaffee