

GreenNet and The Systems exchange share the second floor of the Friends of the Earth building in Islington.

**W**e are not shy about saying what we are about, or who we are and the work we do." Geoff Cohen runs The Systems Exchange, which is far from your average computer supplier. First, it is housed on the second floor of environmental group Friends Of The Earth. Second, it offers low-cost computer equipment to worthy individuals and causes and, third, it has two operating arms, a low profit arm and a regular profit arm to subsidise the low profit trading.

Cohen tells the story of the computer company which is concerned with the environment and wants to change the world. "The Systems Exchange is essentially a company I set up three years ago with the prime purpose of providing resource facilities and computer facilities to groups working in areas such as environmental, peace and human rights who would not normally be able to afford these facilities. We did this by setting up some very good links with manufacturers and importers."

Since the setting up in 1986, The Systems Exchange has gone from strength to strength. It offers a complete range of IBM-compatible machines, including PCs, ATs and XT. Also included in its current price list is a good selection of lap-tops, printers, monitors, and hard discs. With a wide selection, interest in The Systems Exchange not only includes campaigning groups but also many corporate clients.

"We work for a few big companies. Many of them are in tune with our ideas or want to know more about them but also we offer a very good service to the end-user. We

offer complete training and repair facilities in-house and give high-quality support. This side of the business allows us to keep the low profit side going," Cohen says.

While winning corporate supporters because of the beliefs, The Systems Exchange has also lost with some. "There have been two companies where when we told them what we are about, it was clear it was not appropriate for us to do business with them," Cohen says.

Does Cohen single out any computer companies for damage caused to the environment? "We could not pick any one company and say it was their fault. We are not interested in making companies wrong or telling them they are bad; that does not really move things forward. We are more interested in what they want to do in the future. Everybody to whom we sell we put in touch with a company called Paperback which does re-cycled computer paper and other forms of re-cycled paper."

Re-cycling seems to be important to Cohen. "We are involved in a plastics project where it will be possible to produce computer cases from re-cycled plastics."

Training at The Systems Exchange also extends to individuals who wish to become computer literate. "They can come here and we will have a conversation with them to see what they want to do and where they want to go. After three months they can walk away knowing how to put together an XT PC, knowing about DOS - not just how to copy it but having some understanding how to work with it - and also we have a large library of software."

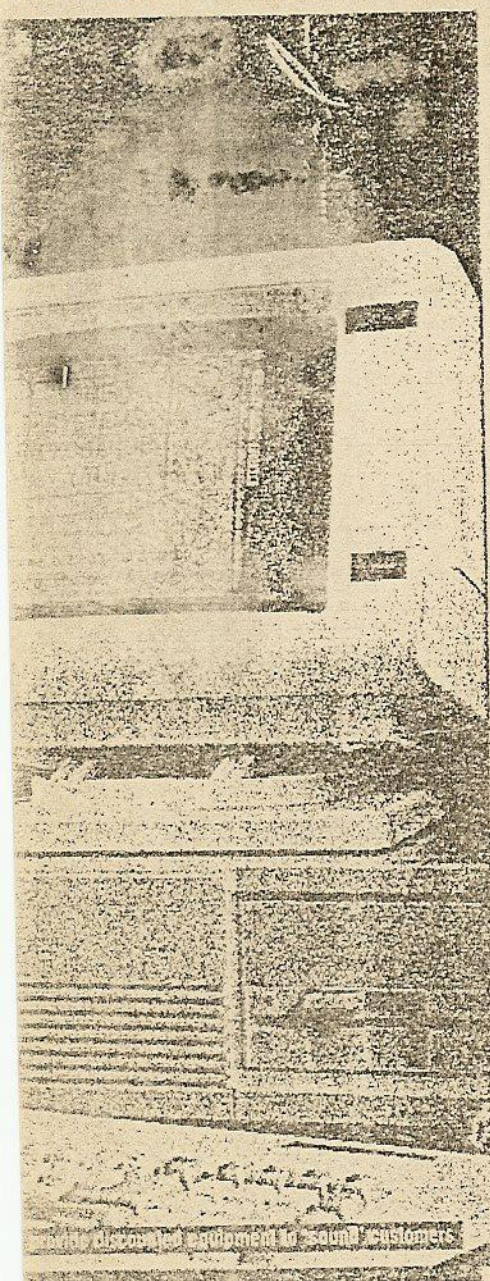
A number of machines from The Sys-



**Behind the**  
Leslie Bunder visits the  
The Systems Exchange  
suppliers and GreenNet.  
Both provide services  
tal, peace and hur

tems Exchange will be used in third world countries. "Some of our equipment goes to Africa and from time to time we get involved in tropicalisation, which is another ball game. Without tropicalisation the average life of a PC is four months. It is a process in itself, literally stripping the whole thing, cutting off all the things, soldering everything in, putting varnish





tive change, environment, peace, human rights which were once again available only to military companies and multinationals.

GreenNet received some funding from Joseph Rowntree and we also received support from a company called On Citytel which gave us on permanent loan our Plexus machine which has provided the centre of our network for a time," he says.

"Around the same time in the States a group called PeaceNet was set up and also EcoNet. Then the United Nations University of Peace in Costa Rica became involved and we were working independently of each other but each knowing of the other. Then about two years ago pop star Peter Gabriel became involved. As a result of a meeting at the University of Peace he agreed to stage a concert to raise funds to bridge the gap and put the whole thing together. This progressed and finalised in a concert in Tokyo to raise funds for this double computer network. More than 250,000 attended and it was a major success."

GreenNet covers the whole planet, he says. "Because we are world-wide, we have effectively become the only uncensored news network. We now get a number of newspapers which use the service because we get direct information from areas such as South America and South Africa."

The last year has been a good one for Cohen. "The Systems Exchange Sales are up four times, which is unheard of. GreenNet is up by 10 times. It has really gone through the roof. Our current machine is overloaded and we are going

through 386 route. We are writing our own system in microport units. What we will be having is a series of 386 machines all working on different parts of it and bus-linked. That is due to go on-line in June/July this year."

What is the future for The Systems Exchange? "Our lease in this building expires in October and we are looking at a shop-front area with a good amount of space behind us to put things together. I have been offered to have our own range of machines and badge them. It will probably be a native combination of GreenNet and The Systems Exchange."

When the machines are launched it will be the first time that a 'sound' computer has been sold. "We will be using recycled plastic for the case and also making sure from where it came and to make sure that the equipment did not damage the environment. The price for the basic machine will be around £850 and include 600K, 20MB hard disc, the standard specification and good monitor." Also included in the price will be some hands-on training, so that the user becomes familiar with the system as soon as possible.

The Systems Network is dedicated to offer value. With its plans now fully under way it will be interesting to see how it progresses and how other manufacturers react to the challenge Cohen has set. □

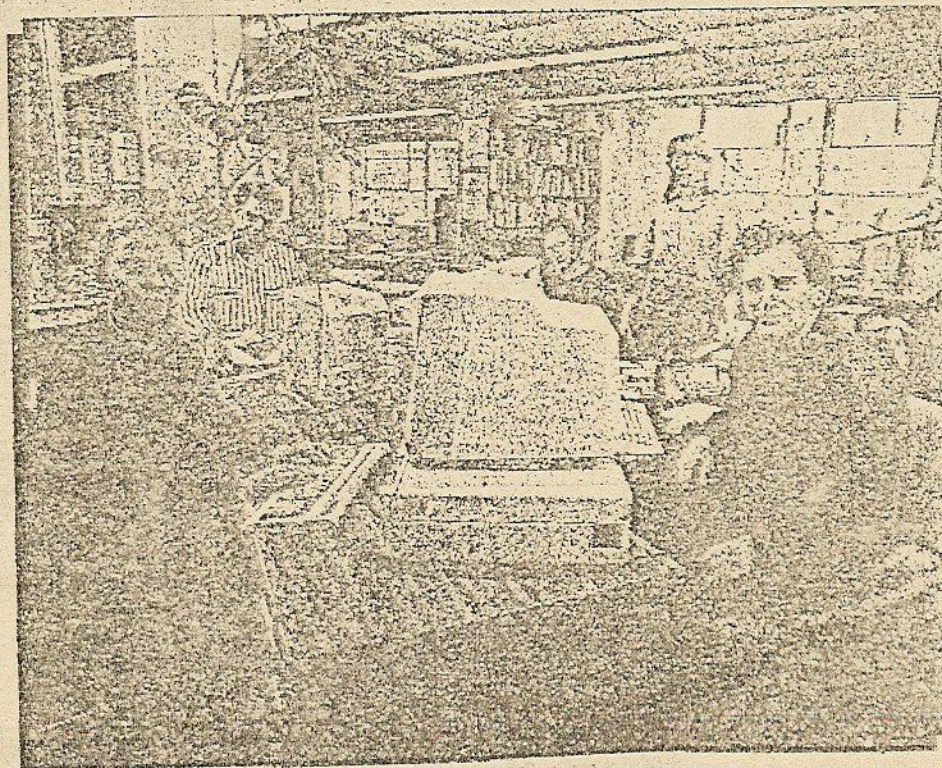
For more information, contact The Systems Exchange or GreenNet at 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ. Tel: 01-490 1512. Fax: 01-251 2613.

## green door

London headquarters of computer equipment for global computer network. Specifically for environmental organisations.

over it, sealing the whole computer as much as you can," Cohen explains.

GreenNet is a group which shares an office with The Systems Exchange, Cohen explains: "GreenNet was set up at about the same time as The Systems Exchange with a similar kind of vision. It was to provide the same kind of communication facilities to groups working towards posi-



The Systems Exchange at work.