

POLITICS OF BOREDOM

- The Clash In Leeds

"THIS I have got to see" murmurs a well dressed young man to his better dressed woman as a coach disgorges The Clash and their punk entourage into the foyer of the Metropole, one of Leeds' premiere hotels. But the Commissionaire doesn't blink when one of the few female punks strides past in torn black stockings and her "alluring corselette, superbly made in sensual easy-care fricel satin with gorge ous lace frills, and detachable suspenders." "Rodent, which is my fucking room, my underpants stink" says Joe Strummer, his voice hoarse from yet another night shouting at the pogo jumping punks in the Polytechnic. Rodent, recently promoted to Tour Manager, has spiky hair whose peroxide is turning orange, and his face is pretty much the same colour. "Rodent, dash upstairs and get the stickers out of my bag, there's a geezer here who wants some", demands a little bloke called Barry who turns out to be the Clash's manager. "Rodent get me a drink" says another punk, and Rodent runs off in three directions.

FRENZY

It's a far cry from the ashen, sweating faces and the debris they've left behind in the Poly. At the end of the gig, the frenzied leaping and shouting dissipates into polite queuing for spare copies of the Clash's poster, as the two hundred committed punks go home to stack their plastic shoes, coloured rimmed sun glasses, schoolboy shirts and ties, chains, safety pins and paper clips, ready for the next outing.

Meanwhile the punks settle into the red leather chairs of the Metropole and try and squeeze a pound or so out of Barry to get a drink. The Metropole has seen it all before — they didn't turn a hair at Rahsaan Roland Kirk and his band, and the punks are far better behaved. One business man even stops to let a thickset punk with a manic smile brush his hair.

YOUTH VANGUARD ?

By this time your roving reporter has got himself in on the most bizarre interview of all time. Five trendy Japanese from CBS Japan, only one of whom seems to speak much English, are talking to Joe Strummer about the IRA, religion, The Beatles and politics, laughing with reserved enthusiasm at Joe's attempts to outrage us. Joe says the British have no business in Ireland, but he destroys the hopes of those who are trying to conjure up a working class youth movement out of punk's rebelliousness:

"I don't know no Marx, no Trotsky, no nothing. I know about fascism and I don't like it, but I don't know about communism. The Socialist Workers Party, you know, they keep coming up and saying (Joe nudges a bewildered Japanese woman, imitating the mock friendliness of the comrades) 'Come and join us.' But they can fuck off, the wankers, that's just dogma, I don't want no dogma"

But your probing reporter, Arthur Sewer-Rat, has read many references to the role of the Clash as the new youth vanguard which has high regard for the culture and struggles of Black Youth. Joe, after all, has SKA and DUB neatly

stencilled on his jacket and their best number that night had been an original punk version of Junior Marvin's Reggae classic 'Police and Thieves.' Plus the magnificent backdrop to their stage act was a picture of a scene from the Notting Hill Carnival riot. Surely the song 'White Riot' is a political statement?

"No it fuckin ain't. Look, I'll tell you how it happened, right? I was at the Carnival right chuckin bricks, having a great time. A copper grabs me, but he lets me go, cos I'm white. Then, later on some black kids get hold of me. 'Hey mon, you give me a poun mon and we let you go' (Joe does a passable imitation of cockney black street talk). I give them the pound and I go home. I sit down and I think I can't fucking win, the police get me and the blacks get me, I'm pissed off right, and so I write it down 'I want a riot' of my own. That's all it is."

EXTREMITY

It could be added that not a word could be heard at the gig, and maximum pleasure was extracted by one punk who spent the whole evening leaning against the wall of speakers wincing with pain each time a number started. You can distinguish the words on the album, but it seems that only the intellectuals listen that hard. We can hope that the ideas of those punk groups who lean to the left will rub off on some fans, and we can hope that the neo-fascist punks will fade away. In the meantime, enjoy the style, energy and excitement. It IS a boring, worthless dead world for most youth, and punk is a glorious moment of extremity.

from the Sex

