

# ON THE TOWN

LONDON THIS WEEK has been witnessing dramatic new developments in the so-called 'punk' youth movement currently sweeping the country. From his secret headquarters, last thought to be a cupboard situated somewhere in the Clapham South area, Chairman Mal "The Mug" McContent wrought mighty changes in the system when, in a message to his party, he informed all concerned that from now on the 'punk' ethos could only be attained not, as previously was the law, by 'gobbing' on pedestrians anywhere within the Kings Road district, but by beating rock critics over the head with rusty bicycle chains and running away.

In a detailed manifesto, "The Mug" drew up the exacting rules by which all interested parties could achieve the ends of this "offensive". First he claimed 'punk' predators needed to search out these "scumbag jewboy hypocrites" (as the rock critic element was to be referred to thenceforth) in places like the Roxy, the Marquee and the Nashville.

They should then "irritate" their victims by means of quick kicks in the shin, "accidentally" pouring beer over them while passing by, etc. and, eventually, when the victim is aggravated enough to retaliate, they should bring in a mate who will "pacify" the critic by brandishing a large knife approximately two inches from the latter's face, and start swinging the chain directly against the cranium of one's victim until stitches are thought to be necessary.

The predator should simply "run away". The manifesto adds that, as a bonus, anyone causing "the critic" to "get what he deserved" could expect to join members Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious in a reconstructed Sex Pistols.

The first direct consequence of this latest dramatic occurrence, after a surprisingly lethargic immediate response to the call-to-arms, has been the counter-ploy announcement from one Nick "Judas" Kent (considered by Mal McContent's collective to be one of the most desirable craniums amongst the 'rock critic' crowd to shatter) that he was willing to be the first official sacrifice to this 'new order'.

"Well, it's cheaper than a lobotomy, innit?" quipped the ageing 'hack' from his bomb shelter/bachelor pad below a massage parlour in Kilburn. "No, but really... you've gotta dig it," he continued. "These kids are where it's at, you know. Heavy duty destruction, the breaking down of the old way. I mean, Johnny, Sid, those guys... they're so soulful, so honest."

"I'm truly touched they even mention my name at their press conferences these days. The biggest hypocrite walking the face of the earth — that's pretty heavy, right — and I'm flattered, 'cos, dig, I'm hip to the trip. It's like the same as when me and Iggy Pop used to

KENT WAS LATER seen down at the Colosseum in Harlesden, a Pakistani cinema that has suddenly allowed the New Wave to 'do their thing' at the premises on a trial basis.

Friday night saw The Slits, Subway Sect, Buzzcocks and The Clash performing to a 50/50 crowd of fanatics and mongoloid impersonators whose usual habit is to



Roxy Club.

Kent had arrived early to check out the basic geography of the place and see where the best spot would be to have his 'lobotomy' executed. Despairing somewhat at the timid lack of 'activity', he'd disappeared to the pub, thus missing all-girl 'punk' band The Slits, who had been performing their sound check when he left.

Mildly fortified, Kent returned just in time to witness The Subway Sect. Ah, this is more like it, he thought, looking down at the bunch directly in front of the stage. There was this one guy, see, who looked exquisitely like a vole sniffing glue, squirting globules of the stuff into the hair of his 'mates' when not falling around or pushing people over, or else getting his four or five cohorts to chant something along the line of "Boring old farts — sitting down" to all those comparatively disinterested souls behind them.

Monsieur Vole, Kent was duly informed, actually ran a New Wave fanzine. Heavy, he thought — and how suitable! He was quite ready to descend from the circle to let the ritual commence... until he noticed a disturbing lack of weaponry being openly brandished. What, no chains, no knives, no... steel combs, even!

His heart sank. And the band would have been just right, too. They were absolutely godawful. Drawing together what shards of logic and perception he hadn't discarded specially for the occasion, Kent realised that unless one had a hernia or something equally debilitating, it would be quite impossible to dance to The Subway Sect's music.

Such planned obsolescence, so resolute a 'blankness' of attitude... such crappy instruments... and such a determined inability to finger even the most mundane chord shapes imaginable...

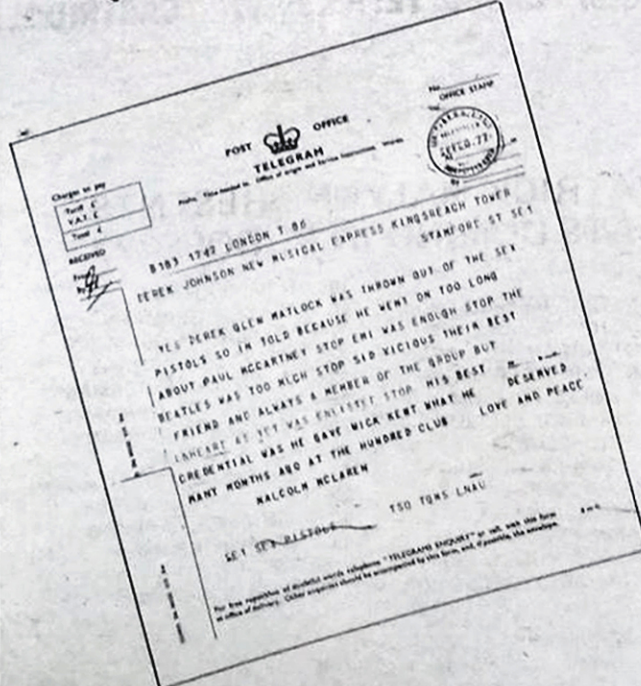
And then there were The Buzzcocks, who certain factions of the crowd knew beforehand, because they were shouting "Breakdown! Breakdown!" — which turned out to be the title of this band's only record so far. This duly was churned out as their first song and, sounding exactly like a cheap, sloppy Ramones work-out, set the precedent for every other 'toon' to come.

Trouble was, though, this lot come from "up t'North, lahk", and t'singer looks and sounds unerringly like some punk Wee Georgie Wood who's just swapped his old ukelele for an electric guitar.

## NOT NEW WAVING BUT DROWNING in a sea of safety pins, senselessness and spite?

NICK KENT comes out of hiding to offer himself as a 'punk' sacrifice to the ritualistic 'beat' of THE CLASH (pictured above), THE BUZZCOCKS, THE SUBWAY SECT and THE SLITS... and hangs around to join in the ceremony himself. Well, sort of...

# LONDON'S BURNING (OUT?)



Also, excepting the singer's puckish frame all swathed in black, the other bully boys in the group all chose to wear these quite grotesque pop-art shirts which even The Who wouldn't have worn for publicity shots circa "Anyway Anyway".

They looked and sounded dreadful, anyway, and Kent quite firmly had decided that their presence onstage to coincide with his 'scalp graft' was so simply not on. He laid low in the 'gods', waiting for The Clash to provide just the right moment.

THE CLASH EVENTUALLY came on, to be faced with immediate equipment problems: "And it's all new stuff," moaned the guitar player aggressively, in his special bright red outfit resembling 'pop star' army fatigues.

He and the other two frontmen had obviously already seen a bit of 'geldt' from their reputed six-figure deal with CBS. The old paint-flecked jumble sale duds, for example, once so defiantly modelled so that the 'kids' could easily copy the band's style and attitude, had been dumped for custom made threads: extravagant space cadet uniforms — or at least that's what they most resembled — with big lapels and all manner of seamstress embellishment.

They looked like pop stars (albeit rather subversive ones), glamorous enough to be comfortably slotted into some suitably futuristic scaffolding on the *Supersonic* set. It made Kent remember the previous afternoon, when he'd heard "White Riot", The Clash's single, at the NME office — and at first had been disappointed at its patent lack of 'menace' until he realised that the chorus had been made insidiously catchy enough to become a sort of football chant.

That it was commercial enough, in other words, to be truly subversive.

Anyway, sod the new clothes and new equipment! They looked and sounded good, and were probably eating regularly. Starvation, after all, doesn't always enhance commitment; it more often than not brings malnutrition and makes one listless and low-energy irritable.

When the band kicked into "London's Burning", Kent also recalled the first (and only previous) time he'd seen The Clash — when they were battling hard against shoddy equipment, with out-of-tune guitars

constantly threatening to destroy the intense energy level but never quite succeeding. There was a tension to their sound then which set them apart from all the other bands simply because it was really was tainted with all the desperate industrial rhythms of their native environment.

Nothing, mercifully, had been lost.

"London's Burning", as performed in Harlesden, still smouldered with equal quotients of rage and the sheer exhilarating rush of speeding down the Westway. Kent settled back to watch this band. He suddenly felt involved in this music.

Of course, the kids in the front were going apeshit now. Pushing each other over, tossing beer every-which-way... living on zombie-time, as ever.

Suddenly Joe Strummer stopped between numbers. "Stop throwing beer at me! I don't like it," he stated in a decisively no-bullshit way. Kent dug that. After all, even Iggy hadn't told the arse-wipes at Aylesbury, involved in said activity, to "quit it".

A cool guy, this Strummer. The three-pronged Clash visual was great too. Guitarist Mick Jones pushing himself physically to the limits, bassist Paul Simonon like something straight out of *Muscle Beach Party*, succeeding on bass exactly like the Richard Hell of Television days when Patti Smith wrote of the latter, "his bass playing is total trash but he has this way of approaching the instrument that is so physical it comes off sounding real sexy."

And Strummer dead centre, every, very authoritative. Strummer's stance sums up this band at its best, really: it's all to do with real 'punk' credentials — a Billy The Kid sense of tough tempered with an innate sense of humanity which involves possessing a sense of morality totally absent in the childish nihilism flaunted by Johnny Rotten and clownish co-conspirators.

That is what Eddie Cochran had, what Townshend had... not some half-baked feelings about anarchy or any of that other jive.

"To be outside the law you must be honest" isn't just some hip piece of rhetoric: it adds up perfectly and always will just as long as human beings need to take up a rebel stance.

The Clash's music is taking on other dimensions as the band moves on, too. It's no longer just a Ramones-ish adrenalin spitfire rush, there's a rock steady readjustment here and, like I said about the single, a sharp commercial bite to the numbers that, combined with the best new wave lyrics/sentiments currently in town courtesy of songs like "Janie Jones", "1977", "Protex Blue", "I'm So Bored With The USA" (the only recent I'm-so-bored rock declaration Kent could even half-way stomach), and the new "Garage Land", that makes for truly subversive rock.

As they left the stage, Kent thought The Clash took up exactly where Ian Hunter's Mott The Hoople left off, anyway — a perfect rock critic analysis, that.

He was just leaving the cinema, thoughts of self-sacrifice conspicuous by their absence, when he noticed some job approaching. "I'm Bruce Lee's son — what are you going to do about it?" he muttered.

Nothing happened, of course. It took him at least a minute to remember he'd heard the line coming from Joe Strummer's lips only half an hour earlier.



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