

# RECORD MIRROR

**Clash backlash**

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REPORT**



# TALKING CLASH

THE CLASH — a band with honesty and commitment, playing for the people, or just another bunch of hollow, would-be superstars? RM set out to find the truth — from the mouths of the group themselves.

Unfortunately, the group's vociferous manager, Bernie Rhodes, also turned up for the summit conference. But between his increasingly silly interruptions, the group's spokesmen, Mick Jones and Joe Strummer, came up with some interesting answers . . .

RM: Joe, I want to ask you about your Rosso Brigado T-shirt. Why did you wear it to the Anti-Nazi League Carnival?

Joe: I wore it because I didn't think they were getting the press coverage they deserved. Personally I think what they're doing is good because although it's vicious and they're murdering people — you know, they go around killing businessmen and the people they see as screwing Italy up — well, I think what they're doing is good because it's a brutal system anyway, and people get murdered by the system every day and no one complains about that. But when some fat businessman is shot down in the street, everyone is horrified, right.

After they shot Italy's answer to Winston Churchill, Aldo Moro, every day after that they shot down a new businessman. And it ended up on the back page of the Evening Standard, like who won the greyhounds and who got shot in Italy today. So I wanted to have my photo taken in it, and put it in the papers. Which of course it wasn't.

RM: Why do you think no one mentioned it?

Joe: I don't think anyone could see it!

RM: I didn't notice it until someone from Rock Against Racism told me about it.

Mick: They were saying: 'How dare you play the Anti-Nazi League gig in a stormtrooper's outfit!' I was wearing a BBC commissioner's hat which we nicked when we did the TV show, black shirt and black trousers. And all of a sudden I'm in a stormtrooper's outfit. And they're saying to me: 'You're disgusting.'

(Pause as Joe and Nicky kick each other under the table.)

Joe: We're not finished, you know. You wait till you hear this record. You'll jump on the table.

RM: Yeah, we have been waiting for the album. When's it coming out?

Joe: It's coming out in early September. The second week in September.

Mick: Or something. It's coming out soon.

RM: Is it finished, then?

Joe: We've finished most of it. I've got two more to sing, he's got one more to sing. And there's a few guitars to do.

RM: Back to the T-shirt thing — you once said you don't want to be like politicians, but surely doing something like that is being political?

Joe: Oh yeah, it's being political, but I mean, the bad side of politicians is that they're all crooked and corrupt. They're all going about scratching each other's backs. It's just that we've got a tendency to write songs about the rest of the world, you know what I mean? If I write a song, I don't write about the lovely girl I saw, I write about other things. He (Mick) does a bit more than I do.

Mick: Yeah I do.

RM: Did you read what Jimmy Pursey had to say about you a few weeks ago?

Mick: I read what you said about us.

RM: Yes, I tended to agree with him.

Joe: I think Jimmy's a bit of a rip-off because what he does is, he has an argument with himself, a fake

one. He says: 'Well, I was talking to a member of the Clash the other day, and I said this, and he said this' and he's just making it up. We never had that argument with him. He does it all the time. I mean, he's probably doing it sincerely but . . .

Mick: I think they're a good group and they'll do really well. I think you probably set him up for some of that anyway, because you said (puts on a posh voice): 'I am really very much in agreement with him.'

RM: What I was saying was this. Jimmy said he felt you were letting the kids down by not playing live gigs recently, and I agreed.

Mick: We've played to the kids more than he has.

Joe: Sometimes you gotta play, sometimes you gotta sit down and work out what to play. There's no use going out and playing rubbish.

Mick: We haven't had a lay-off since Christmas, 1976.

Joe: We want to release an album that's 10 times better than the first one, and then one that's 10 times better than that. Like the Jam and the Stranglers, they were rushed into theirs.

Bernie: You mentioned something

Joe: Oh no, you shut up, you go on for 20 minutes.

(The tape is switched off till Bernie shuts up.)

Joe: We came out with this thing, we was helping groups. Normally in this business, people pay — if you want to support Black Sabbath, you've got to pay x thousand quid. We took groups on tour, and we were paying them, we were subsidising everything, just like the Pistols have done for us on the Anarchy tour, although we had to pay them back later.

Bernie: The Buzzcocks and all those bands, we paid everything for.

Joe: Jimmy comes on like this,

and Tom, and sitting behind Tom is Pink Floyd's management, and behind Jimmy is Mungo Jerry's management. And sitting behind us we've got (points to Bernie) him! You know what I mean? It's supposed to be right on and different and new, but if you look behind, it's just the same c— passing on the same money.

RM: But you've got CBS behind you. What's the difference?

Joe: We nearly had to cancel our tour because they wouldn't lend us the money to pay for the PA. That happened yesterday. Me and him was round there, and he was going: 'We'll have to cancel the tour then' and they said: 'Alright, alright, we'll give you the two grand.'

RM: Why aren't they behind you then?

Bernie: Because Bob Dylan's in town.

Mick: Oy, hold it, that's enough of that. Show some respect.

Joe: What, about Bob Dylan? Oh yeah, he's the only one of the group going to see Dylan. Next question.

RM: Let's pretend Bernie isn't present. How are relations with Bernie? We've been hearing rumours.

Joe: Sometimes it's stormy, you know. The rumours are a load of bollocks. There's all kinds of bastards trying to take us over, because they see they can make a few bucks out of us. They started these rumours they're trying to drive a wedge between us and Bernie.

Mick: We love Bernie really.

Joe: Yeah — even if he is short. We argue a lot, you know, because we're called the Clash and we have them. People say they ain't gonna last long like that, but we've been doing it for nearly a couple of years.

RM: What do you argue about?

Joe: Everything. We argue about

dates, tours, songs, shoes, socks, shirts, television programmes, telephone bills, everything.

RM: Ah, talking of TV programmes, this is another thing Jimmy was talking about.

Joe: What — 'Top Of The Pops'? Yeah, this is the real argument, right.

Mick: The real answer is that they only f— asked us once, and the f— record went down the next week! Anyway, we wouldn't be on that f— programme, it's a load of f— shit.

Joe: What's the point? You're just perpetrating it. I can see the point of going on 'Revolver', even though that thing with Mickie Most in your paper was really sickening. I can see the point of going on 'Revolver', because it's trying to start something new and it's a real gig, you know, it seems like the people are actually listening to the bands. But being on 'Top Of The Pops' and miming away is just perpetrating it, I would rather shoot our ammo into something new or not shoot it at all.

RM: But his argument was that he could change things better from the inside.

Joe: That's a load of bollocks. Top Of The Pops will still be there when Sham are down the drain.

Mick: that's what we thought when we signed to CBS. No, that's what the excuse given was. Oh, we can do much more work from the inside, when the point was, we also wanted to make records.

Joe: You can't go with a group unless you've got the dough to make a record and go on a tour, and the amount of dough for that, that comes to 50 grand. That's what we had, and that's where it went.

RM: So what's your financial position?

Joe: Terrible.

Mick: Fair to middling.

Joe: Me and him (Mick) are better off than him and him (Nicky and Paul), because we work harder.

Mick: We're not really very well off. What do you mean, our personal situation?

RM: No, as a group.

Joe: Well, I'll tell you what our finances are, our finances are that we had to borrow two and a half grand to go on this tour next week. If we hadn't managed to borrow that, we wouldn't have managed to go on the tour.

Mick: Yeah, we're doing all right.

RM: What about America? Presumably you'd have to borrow money to get to the States?

Joe: Sure we would. We had the chance of doing three dates in America in the middle of this month, but we had to knock it on the head because CBS just weren't interested in supporting us.

RM: Why not?

Joe: Because they want us to go over later and do it properly. Which is what we're going to do.

RM: So they were acting in your best interests?

Joe: I don't know, I don't think they know if they're coming or going. Every decision they've made seems to be the wrong one, ever since we've been working with them. They don't have anybody in the company who could make a decent decision.

RM: Do you regret signing with them?

Joe: Nah, all companies are the same. They're as bad as each other. We've never been with another company, so I haven't got anything to compare it to. It's just, like they released rubbish, they picked the worst track off the album to release as a single. With us, they don't know who we are, or what we're about or how to deal with us, they still don't know. All companies are as bad — they're all after money. If you move records they're prepared to smile at you.

RM: So haven't you sold enough records to earn a smile?

Mick: No, not actually.

Joe: No, not compared with Bob Dylan.

Mick: They bought David Essex a motorbike last year, and we got a set of building bricks. He was charging five quid a ticket for that posh pantomime he did, that's why he got a motorbike. I think they actually like to let people believe they're still happening till their money runs out. David Essex is probably going round in his limo, still under the impression that he's like the most happening thing in the universe. And they let him believe it, you know, because it keeps him quiet, because the more of that kind of stuff you've got, the more the chances are that won't be thinking that you're going to be uncomfortable for a long time in the future.

RM: But David Essex will always be comfortable.

Mick: No, no, I mean like it's your soul, I mean you'll always think, well blimey, if only I'd seen the error of my ways before . . . On the other hand, if they give me a motorbike, I won't refuse it. But I will flog it.

RM: Another quote I saw somewhere was: 'We'll never get a



THE CLASH

TERRY LOTT

## Clash talk

Top 10 hit because they won't let us.'

**Joe:** What I meant by that was the radio playlists. Unless it's played on the radio you might as well forget it. And I can't see anybody ever playing Clash records on the radio.

**RM:** Why?

**Bernie:** Because the music press hasn't backed us up, no one else has backed us up, we're just five people working very hard. And you can't have five people working against maybe twenty thousand.

**RM:** Don't you think that's a bit paranoid?

**Joe:** Better to be paranoid than pathetic.

**Mick:** The last time we phoned up Doreen Davies to say why aren't we on the playlist, she said: 'Well, it isn't exactly the sort of music you can work to.' And as an afterthought she added: 'Well, you lot don't work anyway, do they?' Well, why is that? Is our record too fast?

**Bernie:** It's not paranoid, it's realistic. The press at the moment are paranoid people, we ain't, we're dealing with it, right, we're getting on with it.

**RM:** Why do you think it is they still dislike you? Is it just a hangover from the punk thing, or are you still doing something to get at them?

**Bernie:** Of course we are. It's the naughty boy syndrome. If you're a good boy you get rewarded, if you're a naughty boy you get smacked. Art reflects society, and if Radio One reflects society, then you've got what you deserve.

**RM:** Yes, but every group around hates Radio One, so what makes you any different?

**Bernie:** We're not trying to be better than any groups, we're just trying to do a job that other groups maybe find it hard to do.

**RM:** What?

**Bernie:** Like — get on with it.

**Joe:** Like make real records. Records that deal with real things. We're trying to be the best group in the world. A punk rock group. A group that don't shrink out when it comes to it. Like telling the truth as

we see it, and not being paid off. They offer you a bite of the big apple.

**Mick:** They've offered us every apple.

**Joe:** The say: 'If you change the words on this single, boys, you could have a hit.'

**Mick:** They say you could have the biggest hit in the universe if only you took the words piss and shit out of there.

**RM:** Right, I know everyone's asked you this, but can you explain just why the album has taken so long to record?

**Joe:** Because records cost so much that we want to make damn sure that every groove on that record has something brilliant in it. If it takes us a year to do that, then let it.

**Mick:** As we said before, we ain't gonna be pushed into bringing out dross.

**Joe:** It's so easy. That's another way the record company works for you, right — it pushes you into a situation where you maybe don't want to go. You've got to be strong to say: 'No, this isn't good enough.'

**Mick:** We did a John Peel session, right, and we worked all day and night on it, and in the end we had to stop it because it wasn't going right. And they said to us: 'There's only one group in a thousand that can't actually do it', and 'If you don't put it out, you may not get on it again' and we said: 'You should be supporting groups who won't put out rubbish, rather than saying that sort of thing, so you can take your 1930s microphones and stick 'em up your BBC arse!' I mean, the guy was OK about it, he put it down to drug-taking, but what we were complaining about was that.

**Joe:** It sounded terrible.

**Bernie:** How many copies of Record Mirror do you sell?

**Joe:** Oh my God. Bernie, go out and get some sandwiches.

(This leads into a long, rambling tangent from Bernie).

**RM:** Bernie, why do you always insist on interrupting? Why can't



JOE STRUMMER

TERRY LOTT

you let the group talk for themselves?

**Joe:** Because he loves talking. He can't resist it. He'd rather be here, butting in than sitting at home watching telly.

**Bernie:** Well, they're talking, aren't they?

**Joe:** Not when you're butting in.

**Bernie:** Sorry, you didn't send me the rules.

**RM:** Anyway, what do CBS think about the delays with the album?

**Mick:** They think we're the laziest bastards in the world. We used to be a group. What a f---cheek! Why am I even defending this rubbish? I tell you what, I'd like to see any of those people who do attack us, staying up as long as we f--- have to, day after day. Cos we love it, right. I'd like to see all those who say we're lazy do half as much. Even when you're not involved with the actual mechanics of making something, you head's full of it. A whirlpool of nonsense.

**RM:** Have CBS done anything to speed you up?

**Joe:** No, nothing, they're just getting worried, I think. They think we're going to have a big argument with them. They seem like misers.

**CBS:**

**RM:** How do you plan on attacking the American market?

**Joe:** We're going to get long wigs and satin loon pants, and we're learning Ted Nugent riffs. We're going to get a laser show.

**Mick:** We're going to go heavy metal and put make-up on.

**RM:** I can't really see the Americans understanding you.

**Joe:** They're a bit slow you know, but they'll get there.

**Mick:** There's one or two quite bright ones.

**RM:** One thing I wanted to ask you about was your song, 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home.'

**Joe:** 'again, Hurrah, Hurrah' (the English Civil War). It's an old American Civil War song. One day it just popped into my head for no reason, and I just started rhyming it.

**RM:** What do you mean by the English Civil War?

**Joe:** What I was trying to say is that the war's just around the corner — the English Civil War — so Johnny hasn't got far to march. That's why he's coming by bus or underground.

**RM:** Which English Civil War?

**Joe:** Well, for example the one that happened the other week down at Tower Hamlets. All those people attacking them other people. Plenty of people think that sort of thing is a good idea. I was reading about that tennis player.

**RM:** Oh, Buster Mottram.

**Joe:** yeah. He was sitting there in a club full of people going: 'Right, you tell 'em, good for you mate'. And there's the Monday Club. There are plenty of people who agree with rampaging down the street doing people in just 'cos they've got a different colour. Plenty of people. And like in 10 years' time, the country's going to be divided between those who think it's a good idea and those who think it's a bad idea. So it's a folk song, that's all.

**RM:** What do you think about the people who say the power of the Front has been exaggerated?

**Mick:** In 1928, right, Adolf Hitler got 2.8 per cent of the votes. By 1930, right, there was no one voting for anyone else. That was only a matter of 10 years.

**Joe:** By 1933 he was Chancellor.

**Mick:** The National Front thing might have been slightly over-emphasised, but the whole thing is a much bigger ball game than just the Front. It's more than that.

**Joe:** The song also takes the piss out of the people who say: 'Oh yeah, it's gonna happen'. Cos it goes: 'Aha, haha, I told you so, hurrah trala', says everyone that we know. And then it goes on to make the point, but who did anything about it?

We played a gig in Birmingham a week after the Anti-Nazi League rally, right, and it was on the front page of the Sun, right, some white guys in Wolverhampton opened a car window and fired a shotgun at a bunch of West Indians.

**Mick:** It happened the night we were playing there. We went out the next morning and read about it in the paper.

**Joe:** If people go firing shotguns at you, the first thing you're gonna do is

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get your own shotgun. I mean, that's how it escalates. Think what the atmosphere must be like down Tower Hamlets - what are the Bengalis piling up to protect themselves with? It ain't gonna be bits of stick.

**RM:** So you think it's still escalating?

**Joe:** Sure it is. Sure it is.

**Mick:** I was talking to some guys who were actually down there, and they were saying it was just a personal problem, but now the media's got hold of it, they were very well aware that the papers are gonna be down there and they can get their pictures in the Sun. The same thing happened down the Kings Road in the summer. It could be just that we're changing the area from Kings Road to Brick Lane. I don't think they care about politics, they just see it as toughies and weak people, right, and they don't see it in terms of any political thing. Whereas in Italy, they make their political allegiance at about 16.

**RM:** What's your reaction to kids doing that?

**Joe:** What, bashing Pakis? I f--- tell 'em to lay off.

**Mick:** I tell 'em to lay off. I said to them, you're just doing it for the papers.

**Joe:** They should go down the House of Commons and bash up the people in there.

**Bernie:** Or Radio One.

**RM:** Do you think you've changed any of their attitudes?

**Joe:** Well, it depends on whether they want to pick up on the words in our songs. But if they don't want to, they don't want to. You can't force them to listen. You can only do so much, you can only sing and play.

**Bernie:** You can take a horse to water.

**RM:** Have you got any evidence that they've put your words into actions?

**Bernie:** Your circulation has zoomed up since people got into that kind of comment instead of just singing about my girlfriend.



MICK JONES

TERRY LOTT

**RM:** But you've still got kids beating up Pakistanis.

**Bernie:** There's a lot of Pakis who deserve it.

**Mick:** I don't think anybody deserves that.

**Bernie:** But people are getting bashed up everywhere. Cromwell started bashing people up. We're not talking about mushrooms.

**RM:** What ARE you going on about, Bernie?

**Bernie:** Rats in a hole. You take a drive round Ealing, there's so much space - you drive round the city, and everything's so concentrated.

**Mick:** You should move all the skinheads out to suburbia.

**Bernie:** Give them all a nice house, a lovely council house.

**Mick:** You're going to do this, I suppose.

**RM:** So who's going to put up the money?

**Bernie:** I can't afford to put a PA together.

**Mick:** They give them nice houses out in Stevenage, new towns like that, and they become instant ghettos.

**RM:** Anyway, after what you've said about the political

situation, will you continue to support Rock Against Racism?

**Mick:** We were going before they were!

**Joe:** We are we. F--- Rock Against Racism.

**Mick:** We've never needed to affiliate ourselves with little organisations. When they came out with RAR everyone was going yeah.

**Joe:** Not at all! Not at all. They've got the Socialist Workers' Party pushing them. We've been doing it our own way, we don't need an organisation to back us up.

**RM:** We just do it when the way we live, you know what I mean. We started playing reggae when everyone was saying white men can't play reggae, just like they used to say white men can't play the blues. On our tours we took lots of heavy dub stuff the kids had never heard.

**Mick:** In Scotland they'd never heard it. They were pretty amazed. In a lot of those places, they don't even know there is a problem. In Scotland they say: 'Oh we don't have the National Front up here. What's that then?'

**Joe:** Let us ask you something.

Let's ask you why you think we're finished, that you're so costly in agreement with Jimmy.

**RM:** I didn't. I said - oh hang on, let's see the quote.

**Mick:** What about what you said about 'White Rio'?

**Joe:** I think you were a bit hasty in saying we were finished just because of one naff gig. Every group does naff gigs.

**Mick:** I thought it was all right.

**Joe:** I thought it was naff.

**RM:** What?

**Joe:** The Anti-Nazi League gig.

**RM:** Right. I was disappointed with that gig. I didn't say you were finished. I just said I was disappointed with that gig.

**Mick:** You'd better blame the Rock Against Racism sound system, because we were f--- great.

**Joe:** They turned it up for Tom Robinson. Anyway, if you want to know about all these groups and Rock Against Racism, the truth is that we had the plugs pulled on us. We've got it on film.

**RM:** Look. I don't care what sort of inter-group politics was going on backstage. I watched you from out front, and from there, the Clash didn't sound too good.

**Bernie:** Yeah, but you're a cynical jaded journalist.

**RM:** I'm not a cynical jaded journalist, any more than you're a cynical jaded manager.

**Joe:** Or we're a cynical jaded group.

**Joe:** You are, because you get all your records free, and you get to meet all the stars.

**RM:** So that's one of the perks of the job, like one of the perks of your job is getting to travel round the world.

**Joe:** Yeah, but if you had to part with your own money, it would be a different thing.

**RM:** I agree, but what can you do about it? It's just as bad for you to prejudice us as it is for us to prejudice you.

**Bernie:** So why don't you say what you mean?

**RM:** What? We do.

**Bernie:** Do you know what you mean?

**RM:** I don't know what you mean.

**Mick:** If you hate the group, say so.

**RM:** I don't hate the group. I was disappointed in one gig, and since it was the only gig you'd done in six months, it was all I had to judge you by.

**Bernie:** We trusted people, because they said they were from Rock Against Racism.

**Mick:** And I don't think you should disclaim that, because it would make an admirable cause into a shambles. It was a very important thing from where we stood, but it was still an admirable try. And on the next tour, we'll put it right, without another group pulling the plugs on us.

**Joe:** I think the reporting on the whole affair was really shallow because

**Mick:** No one mentioned that other groups hired lots more bodyguards than us. I think it's important considering we couldn't get a glass of water backstage, but the others could.

**RM:** Yes, but again that's backstage politics. You can't have it both ways - on one hand you're saying the event was more important, and on the other you're saying I should have gone into all that sort of squabbling.

**Mick:** We weren't particularly squabbling, we were eating shit. What I'm saying is you should understand all the facts, right, but it doesn't bother me that we looked bad, or anything, because the event transcended all that stuff.

**RM:** Agreed.

**Joe:** This is costing me £50 an hour. I have to go to the studio.

**Joe:** leaves. The interview then disintegrated into a general confusion, with Bernie taking over answering the questions, making unfounded accusations, and generally making a complete pral of himself.



Listed tracks include:  
 The Eve Of The War  
 Horsell Common And The Heat Ray  
 The Artillery Man And The Fighting Machine  
 Forever Autumn  
 Thunder Child  
 The Red Weed And Parson Nathaniel  
 The Split Of Man  
 Brave New World  
 Dead London  
 Epilogue.

Composed, Orchestrated, Conducted and Produced by Jeff Wayne.