



CLASH: the film they

JOE STRUMMER at the Blackhole Rehearsal Studio

LONDON CALLING? It hardly covers the situation. Every is-or-was punk fan in the country must be quietly slaving to see the Clash film and apprehensive that 'Rude Boy' will go the way of 'The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle' and be lost in the legal shredder.

Well, I've got news. The Clash film lives and it's OK (at least). I've seen it, I've even walked through the West End back streets holding an umbrella over it as director Jack Hazan borrowed it back from the preview theatre. The plan is that it will be released in March — if the Clash and their management don't come up with some effective interference.

They do seem very likely to continue trying, judging by the file of correspondence between various sets of solicitors which the singularly fed-up Hazan showed me. Before I review the film here's a rundown on the documentation:

An agreement was set out in October, 1978, to cover the deal between Hazan's company, Buzzy Enterprises, and the Clash with their then manager Bernard Rhodes, trading as Ripe Role Ltd and Nineden Ltd (the working title then was '1980').

A significant clause states that 'Buzzy as maker of the film will be sole owner of the copyright in the film with the full and unfettered right to make such use of the film as it may determine.'

You might think it would take an army of Petrocellis to drive the proverbial coach and eight through that one, but there is a drawback in Buzzy's position — the Clash never signed it. However, the law does recognise other less clearcut

forms of contract which still seem to leave Buzzy in the driver's seat.

Despite a denial at one point that the band knew of the existence of the 'memorandum of agreement' the Clash's representatives at other times dickered for changes in various clauses which were mostly agreed by Buzzy, except for a demand for 'script approval'.

THEN AGAIN the fact that the Clash took part in filming and recording the music over a period of months right through to delivering the tapes of 'Rude Boy' and 'Revolution Rock' as late as last November implies a certain amount of commitment and collaboration in the project. Likewise their acceptance of a total of £2,550 from Buzzy so far (the Clash's total income from the film is to be £4,000 plus ten per cent of net profit above £25,000 plus, chiefly, royalties on the music).

The correspondence proceeds at a mundane level through Caroline Coon's 'caretaker' management until their transfer to Andrew King at Blackhill, Ian Dury's manager.

Then in September '79 Compton Carr, who acted for John Lydon during the Pistols litigation, took up the cudgels for the band and wrote "We believe that our clients have recently viewed the film and have expressed serious reservations about its content and its *political overtones* (my italics). They are very concerned that the film is not published until it has been edited to their satisfaction and terms have been agreed."

From that point the barricades were manned on both sides. Hazan says that King rang him to emphasise that the Clash "didn't consider themselves to be a political band" and saw

don't want you to see



ROADIE RAY GANGE in trouble

'Rude Boy' as a 50-minute promotional film. Its present, 'final' form is a 133-minute epic even with 35 minutes cut since the Clash saw it last summer.

With artistic and business control disputed by both parties (and no doubt the party of the second part) Buzzy have taken the militant line of refusing the Clash access to the film, despite offers of a conciliation meeting. Compton Carr, in the absence so far of a court injunction to block performance, have thrown a new technical curve.

"Your clients," they wrote to the opposition solicitors, "are not in possession of synchronisation licences in respect of the use of our clients' music in the film and for this reason your clients are not entitled to perform the music publicly

or to sell or distribute the film incorporating our clients' music."

Unless any heavier guns are fired Buzzy will ignore this and go ahead. Expressing frustration and resignation that it should all end in arm's-length wrangling Hazan groaned "Every time they change management they seem to want to change direction...It's strange that a proletarian band should resort to such middle-class means...We're a small company. It's very annoying to be treated like CBS or some movie mogul."

SO WHAT'S all the fuss about? A fairly dynamic length of celluloid which shouldn't be suppressed.

Like many films which use novice actors it hovers uncomfortably between

fiction and documentary in its narrative sections and it still seems flabby in parts despite the editing marathon it took to reduce it to its present dimensions. But the simple fact is that it's a must for Clash-lovers.

Nearly all of the music is from live concerts in '78-9. The cameramen and the sound engineers have captured more of the Clash's emotional charge than anything I've heard on record — you get 'Police And Thieves', 'Career Opportunities', 'Garageland', 'London's Burning', 'White Riot', an inspiring version of 'Tommy Gun' and many others. There's also some fascinating footage of Joe and Mick in the studio singing 'unaccompanied' (the backing tracks are on headphones so we can't hear them) which makes them seem strangely vulnerable and touching.

That takes care of maybe a third of the film as unqualified rave. The story/theme aspect is less successfully executed although there's obviously a clear plan behind it.

The pattern of context sequences is fine: Thatcher at the Tory conference demanding more law and order, police and nazis at the Digbeth Town Hall general election meeting, black boys in Brixton being persecuted by police with sus, intimidation and frame-ups, the very last shots of Thatcher victorious. You get the picture, no need for sermons.

BUT RAY GANGE, the central sometime-Clash-roadie character, is hard to bear at times. It's not the plot, which he co-wrote himself that twists and turns in unpredictable ways I'll try not to spoil for you, basically avoiding the trap of making him a working-class liberal striding bright-eyed into a multiracial socialist rock'n'roll Utopia.

The trouble is that after a few scenes he seems to get a notion of what acting might be and proceeds to play up to it. So he begins as a natural gem, talking with a mate or nonchalantly advising a customer in the porno bookshop where he works, but a couple of hours later he's become a lurching parody of a young Cockney Brando/Dean. Once in a while this works as an expression of the destructive effect going on the road with the Clash has on him. Too often though it's just embarrassing.

Apart from the stunted development of his character he's also a stumbling block for the political approach of the film. Ray becomes *unnaturally* inarticulate and so fails to challenge the Clash's line enough to draw them into much substantial dialogue although Strummer manages to respond quite interestingly to criticisms on the level of "All this fuckin' left wing bollocks is a load of fuckin' bollocks init?" Perhaps it's not surprising that such debate is pretty sterile compared to the real politics of the concert's screaming paradoxes like the Clash asking for calm and singing for a white riot.

There's certainly one way in which he appears as either a prophet or a profound influence on the band. One of the last scenes has Ray telling Strummer the Clash should turn away from politics.

In the film they turn away from tax instead. In reality they seem to have accepted his opinion judging by what has been said to Buzzy in the band's name and recent quotes in other papers. Whether you belong to the SWP, the Young Conservatives or no party at all if you are a fan of theirs this must mean a lot to you because politics, from the gut rather than the manifesto, have been the roots of their rebellion.

Phil Sutcliffe