

Chris Brazier reports on a heavy night in Glasgow — and its aftermath

OF STRUMMER was crying. As he struggled to autograph a fan's tie, the tears were streaming down his face and on the ceiling-room floor. While he tried to control himself after he'd been overwrought by an unfounded accusation of one of the kids who came backstage to shake the Clash had done nothing to combat the sickening brutality of the bouncers at Glasgow's Apollo.

It was the last rock night at the Apollo, with only a few Eurovisionists remaining to follow before the city's most famous rock band. But down the aisle, the aura of impending violence was thick.

I thought at first it was the turning of the old-class strains at center with an... er... the stimpunk in which Glasgow acts obviously at home.

When the Clash followed highly-promising Coventry of the Specials and crowd-sourcer Sciclar on stage, I thought I was being invited into a seething mass of young thugs.

The Apollo bouncers remained by lying in the aisles, ready to quell any dubious excuse that the fans were suffering.

When the hell is this kind of treatment of rock fans who were human beings last week? I looked at them, sitting in the aisles.

The Establishment was howled when tales of punk being attacked by me in a mainly psychopathic glint of the camera. I had first-hand experience to know how vicious the strong reaction was when I told the band did their best to get in order the bouncers in and to plead with them to get out.

franchise. Strummer, though the temerarious host, was carrying on to the ground in disgust, he was grabbed in a fancy embrace, and when Paul Simonson went to help him he was arrested too. Mick Jones and Nicky Headon highballed it into the night.

In the sleepless hours that followed, an anguished Mick Simonsen was convinced that Paul and Joe were going to be roughed up, and tried to get a doctor to them, but when they emerged from the cells into the court the following morning they were unscathed.

The last time I'd been in court was for a similar occasion at the beginning of support for Sil Vicious after he'd been arrested for allegedly crashing a glass at the 100 Club festival nearly two years ago.

But the morning court in Glasgow was in a league of its own, with a judge who was having a fit of rage, a prosecutor as frantically Dickerson as the judge, and a witness between the low-life winos and petty thieves who stumbled into court.

Strummer and Simonsen followed a parade of offenders that included a weakly little guy who was crippled in one side, whose repeated apologies were pathetically object and who premeditated to be in court the week before last week, said the judge, and a horny little fellow who said he was single and who asked who'd put up his hair for him said "my wife."

I leaned forward to watch, intrigued, and the peremptory dismissal rang out across the room. "A lot up in court" — even speakers are treated as if they're schoolchildren in the presence of their headmaster.

When Strummer emerged, the contrast with the previous defendant was obvious. Not least: in the slight sneering curl of his lip that announced that no matter how angry he was going to be, he would not let this matter. He headed gallily to making a break of the peace.

The police account was that the officers had been taken aback by the smashed bottle had been a "mistake in the name file." "Do you understand the charge against you?" "Yeah, yeah." "Just say proper words to the court, you understand this group?" "The Clash." "How appropriate." "25 years in the same file." "Do you understand the charge against you?" "Frank and disorderly, and going to the aid of the police." "As an officer only in Scotland — that which he should be." "Yeah, yeah what?" "Yes sir." "Clit and 40."

They succeeded — the Aberdeen gig was hit-and-miss, but the Clash turned it into an evening as positive and exhilarating as the previous night's had been negative and depressing. I don't think I've seen them play better, with their three-pronged visual attack as impressive as ever. Joe's classic wasted outlaw and Simonsen's Underworld session of Adonis revealing the exposed nerve-end of Strummer's raw folkism.

The new set is superbly constructed, merging what sound like fine new songs from the second album (which, when it's finally released, will be called "Ranfa-Ranfa") with both sides of the newer singles, including the magnificent "White Man in the Hammerhead Pain", so as to show that they've moved on since the first album while still attempting to play entirely new material, and saving the old synths for a six-week blitz finale.

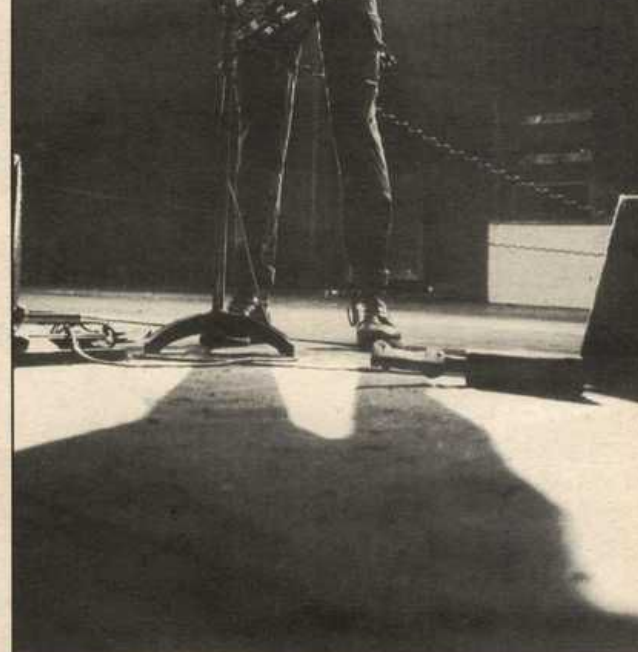
The new titles are "John Doe", "Tommy Gun", "Cheapster", "Drug Slabbin' Time", "Slay Pres" (the recorded version of which is sung by Mick and is complete with acoustic guitar, and about which Joe was excited), though the best of the new material is "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again" (Harris Horowitz), "The English Civil War" (which might be just because of the familiarity of the old American folk-song on which it's based).

They apparently began the tour playing another song room for about 15 minutes. "Young Punks" had dropped because it wasn't received too warmly. There were those in the audience who claim it is the best of the new material.

As much a part of any Clash gig as the performance for them is the time afterwards talking to and signing autographs for fans, they're the cynical that probably sounds like a peak gimmick, but it does give them an opportunity to show their concern for their followers. After the show, the fans are often allowed to sleep in the group's hotel rooms, for instance, and that doesn't just apply to the more strident protesters. The press on them from about the moment to the next day is fierce because of just such incidents as these in Glasgow. "I'm not a fan, but their concert — you're not updated enough for it."

All of that meant, however, that I didn't get to interview either Mick or Joe. I was, however, in the morning, by which time, having been sleepless for a night, they weren't in the best condition for a talk.

But what they said was still enough to convince me that the Clash were still sincerely, my faith in their music was unshaken. It has, after all, been a long time since they were over the last few months. I've had, after all, been a fan since they were in the band first. As well as for the band itself. Their last album and the White Hot Tour, we've been hoodwinked by a bewil-



JOE STRUMMER: 'I thought we'd done really well keeping the violence down'

dering amount of circumstantial evidence pointing to the Clash's absorption into the rainbow; eyes of 'we're just a rock 'n' roll band' and details of their previously ill-motivated political motivation; inside remarks by other musicians about their being so a star-trip and about Joe Strummer living with the upper-class Communist brethren; and inside remarks from journalists about the reason for the Clash's fall: their own fanbase.

How could I have not been shaken by all those implications? A clear-up conversation with Joe and Paul/Paul's Dog producer Sandy Shyman, as producer of their second album being that they wanted to water the Clash down for the American market.

"You've been pretty paranoid about the Establishment having your number? I don't think it's an unfounded paranoia. It's a constant harassment — you have to think 'well maybe they're out to get us'."

"Apart from all the minor hassles there always seems to be one incident a month. Maybe we invite the public, but it's not so much paranoia as trying to stay aware — we're very conscious of the responsibility that's been thrust upon us."

"We need an, for any market, and we don't want a crown of thorns, but we'll just have to live with what happens — I'm sure they will have other people also."

"That this is just manning I'd much rather talk about the positive things. Yesterday was the parable day — yesterday our parable was proved to be true. I'm sure they're aware of the Clash though, I'm not sure what kind of list we're on."

responsibility you mentioned? "Well, the first thing is that most of our poor gigs that haven't sold up seem to have cleaned up their act, and because they've done that they seem to be successful."

"I see that success as a very short-term thing. We refuse to 'clean up our act' and we feel that, as a responsibility not only in ourselves but for all the people who are by our side."

"This stuff about fans staying in our hotel rooms and coming backstage is very concert, and this happens again and again. "We're not allowed to play without bouncers there and we'll get with them 'hugging' us and the audience we have to make them that the fans aren't out kill up."

"I put that line of feedback down to a media, self-phobia in relation to it. To see the politics that we're on the political side of the bar as divorced from the rock 'n' roll thing, the good as divorced from the bad is not an option for us."

"People are treated differently in this country. We've got to play many more places that many 'lower-middle class' to us who feel that it shouldn't be treated like that."

"You told me once that you weren't not to play many more places that many 'lower-middle class' to us who feel that it shouldn't be treated like that. "No, I don't think you had one opinion of what we were about. It differed from our own. "But I don't mind the

JOE STRUMMER was crying. As he struggled to autograph a fan's tie, the tears were streaming down his face and on the dressing-room floor, while he tried to control himself after he'd been overwrought by the unfounded accusation of one of the kids who came backstage that the Clash had done nothing to combat the sickening brutality of the bouncers at Glasgow's Apollo.

It was the last rock night at the Apollo, with only a show by Eurovisioners Christian to follow before the city's most famous venue shut down, and I sensed the violence in the air, the aura of impending disaster.

I thought at first it was just the turning of the middle-class stomach at contact with an earthy atmosphere in which the Glasgow kids obviously felt at home.

But when the Clash followed highly-promising Coventry band the Specials and crowd-devoured Suicide on stage, the whole lower floor erupted into a seething mass of dancing enthusiasm.

The Apollo bouncers responded by laying into the front rows at will, with only the dubious excuse that the seats were suffering.

When the hell is this kind of treatment of rock fans (who were human beings last time I looked at them) going to cease?

The Establishment was horrified when tales of punk violence at gigs filtered through and were exaggerated, yet they consistently employ muscle-bound people "to keep order" who need only the slightest excuse before making use of their power.

I was attacked by one in Manchester once with a genuinely psychopathic glint in his eye, but you don't need first-hand experience to know how vicious the strong arm of venue law can be.

The band did their best to stop it, cutting songs short both to order the bouncers to stop and to plead with them passionately, and Strummer even jumped down off the stage at one point to intervene.

So it was that when the first kid backstage accused Joe of callous neglect, he completely lost his cool.

And that was neither the first nor the last confrontation that evening. Before the gig the band had flared up against manager Bernie Rhodes, with whom there seems to be a certain lack of communication at the moment, and a long row was conducted behind closed doors.

And then, as the band left the building, another fan made the same accusation that they hadn't done enough to stop the carnage.

Strummer lost his temper again and some jostling started, at which point plain-clothes policemen appeared out of nowhere wielding

truncheons.

Strummer threw the lemonade bottle he was carrying on to the ground in disgust, he was grabbed in a fuzzy embrace, and when Paul Simonon went to help him he was arrested too. Mick Jones and Nicky Headon hightailed it into the night.

In the sleepless hours that followed, an anguished Mick Jones was convinced that Paul and Joe were going to be roughed up, and tried to get a doctor to them, but when they emerged from the cells into the court the following morning they were unscathed.

THE last time I'd been in court was for a similar occasion, in a mute expression of support for Sid Vicious after he'd been arrested for allegedly throwing a glass at the 100 Club festival nearly two years ago.

But the morning court in Glasgow was in a league of its own, the whole experience having a frighteningly Dickensian flavour in its confrontation between the low-life winos and petty thieves who shambled into court.

Strummer and Simonon followed a parade of offenders that included a weasly little guy who was crippled on one side, whose repeated apologies were pathetically abject and who pretended to be deaf ("your hearing was perfect last week," said the judge), and a beefy bloke who said he was single and when asked who'd put up bail for him said "my wife."

I leaned forward to watch, intrigued, and the peremptory command rang out across the room "Sit up in court" — even spectators are treated as if they're schoolchildren in the presence of their headmaster.

When Strummer emerged, the contrast with the preceding parade was obvious, not least in the slight sneering curl of his lip that announced that no abject apology was going to be forthcoming from this quarter. He pleaded guilty to causing a breach of the peace.

The police account was that the officers had been passing the theatre, and implied that the smashed bottle had been a threat to them.

"Do you understand the charge against you?" "Yeah." "Yeah what?" "Yes sir." "Just use proper words will you? What is the name of this group?" "The Clash!" "How appropriate. £25."

Simonon's appearance was in the same vein. "Do you understand the charges against you?" (drunk and disorderly, and going to the aid of a prisoner — an offence only in Scotland — to which he pleaded guilty). "Yeah." "Yeah what?" "Yes sir." "£10 and £40."

IN THE circumstances, the "comprehensive" interview I had envisaged ranging over the whole of the Clash's career, was impossible, as was any kind of serious talk that day — the group needed the journey up to Aberdeen and the time after it to recover and work themselves into the right frame of mind for another performance.

They succeeded — the Aberdeen gig was hitch-and-violence-free, and the Clash turned it into an evening as positive and exhilarating as the previous night's had been negative and depressing.

I don't think I've seen them play better, with the three-pronged visual attack as impressive as ever, Jones' classic wasted outlaw and Simonon's Underworld version of Adonis' revolting the exposed nerve-end of Strummer's raw fulcrum

The new set is superbly constructed, merging what sound like fine new songs from the second album (which, when it's finally released, will be called "Rent-A-Riot") with both sides of the newer singles, including the magnificent "Complete Control" and "White Man In The Hammersmith Palais", so as to show that they've moved on since the first album while not alienating by playing entirely new material, and saving the old anthems for a six-song blitz finale.

The new titles are "Safe European Home," "Tommy Gun", "Cheapskates", "Drug Stabbin' Time", "Stay Free" (the recorded version of which is sung by Mick and is complete with acoustic guitar, and about which Joe was ecstatic), though the best of them sounded to be "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again Hurrah Hurrah! (The English Civil War)", which might be just because of the familiarity of the old American folk-song on which it's based.

They apparently began the tour playing another song from the album, "All The Young Punks", but dropped it because it wasn't received too well, though there were those in the entourage who claim it is the best of the new material.

As much a part of any Clash gig as the performance for them is the time afterwards talking to and signing autographs for fans backstage.

To the cynical that probably sounds like a punk gimmick, but it would be obvious to any observer that their concern for their followers is genuine — stranded fans are often allowed to sleep in the group's hotel rooms, for instance, and that doesn't just apply to the more attractive punkettes.

There's pressure on them from above at the moment to reduce their contact with fans because of just such incidents as those in Glasgow, but they should hold out — their concern is entirely worthwhile and they're not applauded enough for it.

ALL of that meant, however, that I didn't get to interview either Mick or Joe until about three o'clock in the morning, by which time, having been sleepless the night before, they weren't in the best condition for talking.

But what they said was still enough to convince me of their impressive and passionate sincerity, my faith in which had been wavering over the last few months.

It has, after all, been a trying time for Clash supporters, as well as for the band itself.

Since the first album and the White Riot Tour, we've been bombarded by a bewil-

dering amount of circumstantial evidence pointing to the Clash's absorption into the system: gigs at the Rainbow; cries of "we're just a rock 'n' roll band" and denials of their previously all-important political motivation; snide remarks by other musicians about them being on a star-trip and about Joe Strummer living with the upper-class Conran brothers; snide remarks from journalists about the reason for the recruitment of Blue Oyster Cult/Pavlov's Dog producer Sandy Pearlman as producer of their second album being that they wanted to water their music down for the American market.

How could faith not be shaken by all those implications? A clear-up conversation was obviously needed, for explanations and a restatement of actual ideals. I spoke to Mick Jones first, and was immediately impressed, despite his weariness, by both his intelligence and his sincerity.

You seem pretty paranoid about the Establishment having your number? "I don't think it's an unfounded paranoia. It's a constant harassment — you have to think 'well maybe they're out to get us'."

"Apart from all the minor hassles there always seems to be one incident a month. Maybe we invite the trouble, but it's not so much paranoia as trying to stay aware — we're very conscious of the responsibility that's been thrust upon us."

"We never ask for any medals, and we don't want a crown of thorns, but we'll just have to see what happens — I'm sure they leave other people alone."

How do you "invite" trouble? "I think that any stance which is against the actual norm they recognise early. They've now learned how to contain violence within confined situations, allowing it in football grounds and certain areas of towns."

"They're having to learn because I feel and I hope that more and more people are not putting up with their s— condition within the Establishment."

"But this is just moaning — I'd much rather talk about the positive things. Yesterday was the paranoia day — yesterday our paranoia was proved to be true. I'm sure they're aware of the Clash, though I'm not sure what kind of list we're on."

What exactly is this re-

sponsibility you mentioned? "Well, the first thing is that most of our peer group that haven't split up seem to have cleaned up their act, and because they've done that they seem to be successful."

"I see that success as a very short-term thing. We refuse to 'clean up our act' and we feel that as a responsibility not only to ourselves but to all the people who are by our side."

"This stuff about fans staying in our hotel rooms and coming backstage is very important — the responsibility is to the fans, not only to keep in touch but also to show that we do care, and I believe that this group cares more than any other in the country."

"I don't know any other group that in its soul cares as much as the Clash. Our idea was not to live out their fantasies for them but to show them that they could live out their own fantasies. This is obviously very idealistic..."

But it's the ideals I'm interested in, because it's such a long time since you insisted on them in public. When the ideals don't come through people are bound to lose faith because they don't know where you are.

"I put that loss of faith down to a media schizophrenia in relation to us. They see the politics (that word!), the political side of the band as divorced from the rock 'n' roll thing, the goofing about, whereas it's all one for us."

"Though as well as the quiet self-analytical periods you have the times when you can't see any reason for what you're doing."

"Last night there seemed no reason — I felt that if one person got bashed there was no point in doing the concert, and this happens again and again."

"We're not allowed to play without bouncers there so it ends up with them 'harassing' us and the audience — we have to make them see that the fans aren't out to kill us."

"People are treated like s— in this country. We try our best not to play too many seated places or too many bouncer-riden places 'cos we feel that they shouldn't be treated like s—."

You told me once that I misrepresented your aims and ideals. "No, I just thought you had one opinion of what we were about and it differed from our own."

"But I don't mind that"

I mean, I don't want to explain songs, I really like the idea of people, if they can't hear the lyrics, making up their own. It's like I've turned fans on to good books — they've come up and said 'they say I'm dumb, I don't know — what can I do?' and I've given them the title of a book that helped me once

and I'm sure we always had this idea that if we thought in the right way everyone who emerged with us would too.

"But now I just find myself with that same original heart of creative people, who are still working on the same basis. It didn't work the way it should have done — you can always praise the latest trend, but as I learn more and practise more I find I see through them.

"I mean, I get on with them as people 'cos I can talk to almost anybody and people tend to come to me.

"One thing I find with the kids who come to me," he says, going off at a tangent, "is that they need to be reassured of their existence, and one way to do that is to let them know that I know they exist.

"I suppose I'm a bit of an existentialist really, thinking that everyone's most important moment is when they come into contact with me, and vice versa for them — you know that thing about 'this table is not real unless I touch it.'"

So an existentialist with leanings to the Left? "Yeah, with pretensions to the favourable. I'm not stoned, you know. I am not stoned.

"Violence now is totally sickening me. It's senseless, a total waste of energy that could be used properly. We could definitely take Them, but there's no unification.

"I blame many people for the dissipation, but I think they're suffering anyway by being pushed into second albums 10 minutes after the first one's pressed, with inferior material — it's a downhill process for them.

"We may never get a hit single which we would love because it would show we could do it as well as all the people who cleaned up their act.

"I thought it might happen this time but 'White Man' has gone down, which is so sad 'cos it would have made a great summer hit."

YOU were quoted last week in the London Evening News as saying something like "it's great that our fans smash up seats because it means they come away changed people."

"Smashing seats won't change people, exciting though it is when we all allow ourselves to go over the edge in the right direction — we don't go over the edge like Lenin; and we don't go over the edge like kamikaze pilots, we become

exhilarated.

But why insist on any kind of destruction? "Well, obviously I'm concerned that someone might get hurt if they fall over on a smashed-up seat and get impaled — something awful might happen and that's a worry, but we do have to play seated venues even though we try our hardest not to — better that than not play at all."

But you didn't need to play the Rainbow, did you? "We needed to play it the first time, in May last year, because we were still being laughed at, still a joke to the musical establishment and they needed to be shown that we could sell out their dopey halls.

"The next time was one of our mistakes — we had nowhere else to play but we shouldn't have done it. In the end we were spending more time saving people from the bouncers than we were actually playing.

"We all know that was a mistake and I've spent the last six months apologising to people in London for it." Which about wound things up with Mick Jones, who said if there's a General Election in the autumn he'll "vote Labour and hope for the best" — what else is there to do?

JOE Strummer, meanwhile, was anxious to give his version of the incident the night before. "What was sending me round the bend was that I thought we'd done really well keeping the violence down — when we came offstage I thought we'd, at least had a good go at stopping it.

"So when these kids said straight after that we'd been playing up there while the kids got hurt, I went spare.

"As we came out this girl was saying 'ah, here come the big Clash, here he comes with his big speech,' really hostile like, and I really wanted to tell them we'd done all we could.

"Because you have to accept that all rock 'n' roll is played in enemy territory."

Are you still just as much the enemies of the Establishment as you were? "Yeah, sure — I find myself going even further in that direction as things become clearer to me.

"I find myself getting harder and harder. I've come to see what the Beatles' and the Stones' generation

"Later on they write to me and say it helped — they didn't understand all of it but they took in what they could. Which is kind of how people respond to the Clash."

Something you said a couple of years ago was re-quoted in the Sunday Times the other week, about punk's ideal being to channel destructive urges in creative directions. Do you still hold that ideal?

"Yeah, well, one ideal that's important to me is that people don't fight at our concerts. I don't mind if they wreck the halls but I wish they could do that without being beaten up for it. It's the halls' fault — they should take the seats out.

"As for the creative channelling, to a certain extent people have to do that for themselves, because we haven't got the power to just give people knowledge. I mean, I spend all my time accumulating knowledge.

"I think that's important and I think I'll be able to communicate knowledge some day, but at the moment we're still learning, we're still making mistakes.

"We're still fighting, though, the spirit is still there. We never claimed to have answers but we were aware perhaps of problems that other people weren't, or we articulated what other people thought they couldn't say.

"I sometimes wish that I was political, and I suppose I try to be at times, but I have leanings to the Left and I have a great concern for the human race, and immediately you accept that, you accept that you really care, that's where the responsibility starts.

"We care more than ever now because we've seen all the other groups stop very quickly. I wish them luck, and I hope they have a good time, but a lot of them have shown themselves to be prize bulls—.

"You see, in the early days there was an original hard core of creative people that were aware of the gap and decided to fill it with a pool of people—artists, musicians, managers.

"And we always thought it'd continue in that vein

achieved and I reckon we can move it on one more step.

"What I believe in ultimately is the absence of all government and all restrictions because I believe if people were given the proper mental equipment they could grow up to be complete without any murder or crime.

"As it is, people just get f—— up from the day they're born and they just can't get out of it.

"You've got to believe that every human has it in them to be a great living being, and anyone who goes around clubbing people round the head does it because they've been f—— up since they was born.

"People have got to change their way of thinking, and that change is sweeping the world right now — you have to chuck all the b—— out of the window."

In "White Man In The Hammersmith Palais" you see that change as coming about through reggae, don't you?

"No, what I meant in that song was this. Back in the Sixties the black crowd was into soul stuff, Wilson, Pickett and that, get down and dance with the pussy, but reggae chucked that out and brought in a much wider subject-matter — you can find a reggae song on any subject.

"And that's what the crowd wanted in the Hammersmith Palais that night — they were the next generation and they didn't want soul revues, but that was just what they were getting from these 'heroes' who were going down the drain in front of my eyes. Shall I rattle off the words?"

Great stuff. You said the other week that you wore a Red Brigades shirt because you liked what they were doing. Could you explain?

"The bad thing is that they go around murdering bodyguards and innocent people, but you've got to hand it to them for laying their lives on the line for the rest of the human race. They're doing it for everybody, trying to smash the system that has broken everybody."

But their aims are different from yours, they're hard-line Marxists.

"Yeah, I must admit I know very little about Marxism or Trotskyism or Leninism; all I know is that people are being broken apart at the moment and it can't go on. Those people they're hitting are the ones who are profiting from the system, rolling in the fat of everybody's sweat.

"What really gets me is that the Red Brigades are almost ghosts — from the moment they use their guns

they're doomed, they're either killed or put away. Andreas Baader and that lot were shot in their cells in Germany, with just a few guns left around to pretend it was suicide.

"You're not gonna tell me that girl who survived tried to stab herself with a table knife? You're not gonna tell me those guns were smuggled into a prison built specially to hold them? It's a pity — we've got a song called 'RAF 1810' which is all about that but it didn't make it on to the record."

You really think such extreme measures are justified, that the system has to be hit right now? "Sure, my head's reeling with just the last two years, the whole mess is getting faster and faster. I've got to hand it to the Red Brigades — I'm only singing about it but they're actually doing something; they must care more than me."

That's pretty extreme stuff

from a man who was denying the Clash were a political band a while ago.

"Yeah, well politics to us just meant all those c—— at Westminster mucking about and scratching each other's arseholes — we thought if we were called a political band, people would think we were like them.

"We've been through a bad time in the last six months — a lot of slag-offs, self-doubt and lack of confidence, and I feel we're just coming out of the tunnel now. Now I feel twice as strong as I did before — I know what we're doing.

"In the rush I lost the sense of what makes us different from Led Zeppelin, you know? I only rediscovered that when I was ill — I don't know what would have happened otherwise."

The Clash — revitalised and surging back into the light, their uncompromising political vitality regained, THE Punk Rock Group.