Melody Maker

NOVEMBER 25, 1978 15p weekly USA 75 cents

STILL ONLY 15p!

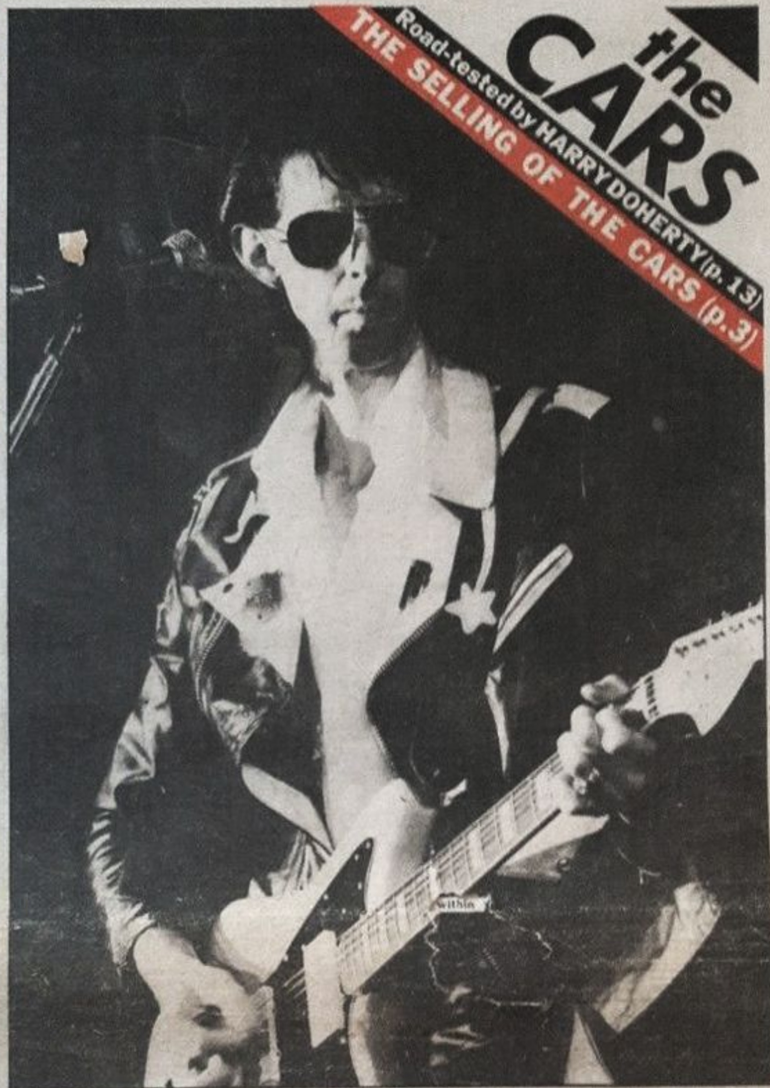
The greening of Devo

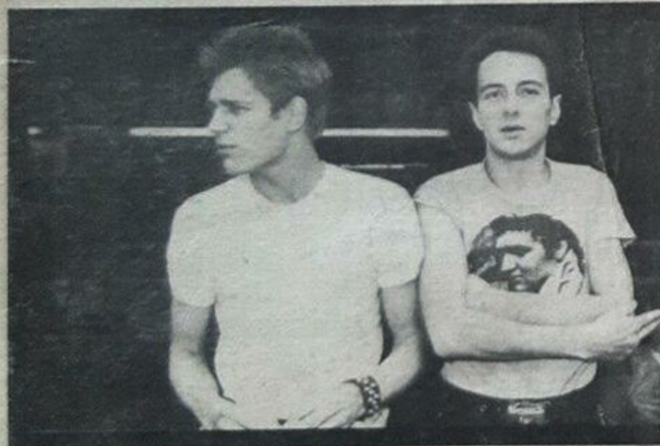
(p.36)

the CARS

Road-tested by HARRY DOHERTY (p. 13)

THE SELLING OF THE CARS (p. 3)





The Clash plead Not Guilty

"We never came to destroy"

by ALLAN JONES (p. 33)

The Venue closes – briefly

LONDON'S newest rock club, the Venue, in Victoria, is being forced to close down for a week to cure extensive problems with the PA system and make design alterations less than a month after it opened with claims of "studio quality sound."

The Venue, owned by Virgin Records, opened on November 1 with Graham Parker and the Rumour playing three nights — the last two with their own equipment. Since then, every band has used its own PA, and manager Daryl Edwards admitted that the club was opened too early.

"It was incredibly rushed — we got the licence two hours before we opened — but it was a case of either not opening and disappointing the public or starting before everything was perfect, and we chose the latter."

Apart from the PA, a second bar is being put in where people can buy their own drinks and food instead of the present waitress-service only, and a dance floor at the front of the stage is being built, reducing the capacity from 550 to 500.

Free your mind the Parliafunkadelicment way...

by VIVIEN GOLDMAN (p.39)

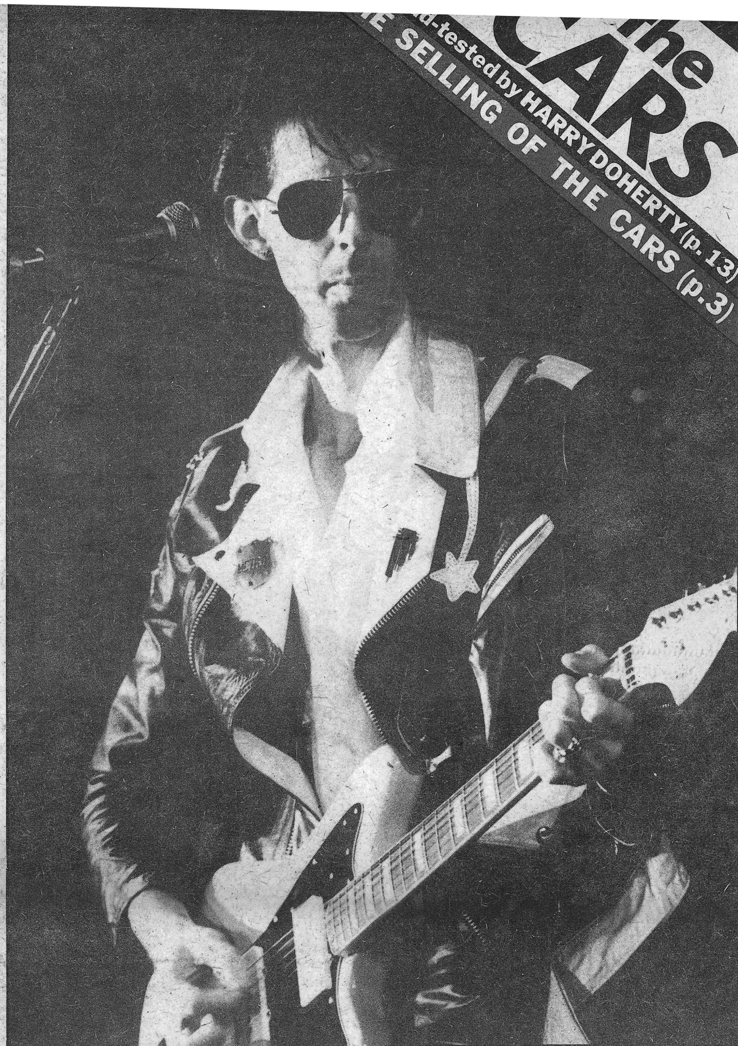
Melody Maker

NOVEMBER 25, 1978 15p weekly USA 75 cents

STILL ONLY 15p!

The greening of Devo

(p.36)



the CARS

d-tested by HARRY DOHERTY (p. 13)

E SELLING OF THE CARS (p.3)

The Clash plead Not Guilty

"We never came to destroy"

by ALLAN JONES **(p. 33)**

The Venue closes — briefly

LONDON'S newest rock club, the Venue, in Victoria, is being forced to close down for a week to cure extensive problems with the PA system and make design alterations less than a month after it opened with claims of "studio quality sound."

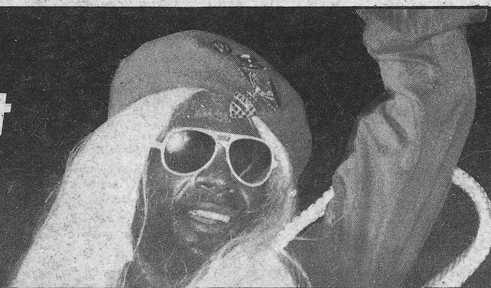
The Venue, owned by Virgin Records, opened on November 1 with Graham Parker and the Rumour playing three nights — the last two with their own equipment. Since then, every band has used its own PA, and manager Daryl Edwards admitted that the club was opened too early.

"It was incredibly rushed — we got the licence two hours before we opened — but it was a case of either not opening and disappointing the public or starting before everything was perfect, and we chose the latter."

Apart from the PA, a second bar is being put in where people can buy their own drinks and food instead of the present waitress-service only, and a dance floor at the front of the stage is being built, reducing the capacity from 550 to 500.

Free your mind the Parliafunkadelicment way...

by VIVIEN GOLDMAN **(p.39)**



"We never came to destroy..."

ALLAN JONES talks to Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon

TUESDAY morning still has the sleep in its eyes, but the Edgware Road is alive with the general chaos and frantic panic of the rush-hour blues.

It's half-nine, and Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon are to be found hiding from the brittle November sunshine in the Metropolitan Cafe, a greasy spoon just around the corner from Strummer's flat.

The pair are hunched over their breakfast plates, insolently disregarding the inquisitive eyes of Metropolitan regulars who peer with a barely concealed curiosity from behind grubby copies of the Sun and the Mirror at the two punks wolfing down omelettes and chips.

Strummer and Simonon share the look of tired refugees. Strummer is wearing a soiled Elvis teeshirt — a souvenir presumably of the Clash's recent sojourn in America — and bondage strides. Simonon, his spiky blond hair razored tight against his skull, looks like an out-of-focus mirror-image in a similarly grimy teeshirt, strides and cumbersome biker boots.

The conversation is punctuated by the howling and steaming of the espresso coffee machine and the constant clatter of crockery and cutlery, and interrupted briefly by the appearance of Caroline Coon, the rock journalist with whom Simonon lives and who, since the recent exit of their erstwhile mentor and manager Bernie Rhodes, has been managing the Clash.

She takes Strummer aside. Their conversation is hurried. Strummer looks impatient. He returns, clearly agitated and quietly furious.

He has just been told that CBS, the group's record company, have acquired a copy of a promotional film the Clash have produced. The film features them performing their new single, "Tommy Gun," and CBS, it transpires, are attempting — without the group's permission, hence Strummer's anger — to flog the clip to Top Of The Pops.

The Clash have already refused unconditionally to appear on the programme, and Strummer is determined to prevent the record company from negotiating a slot for the film on the show.

"It was one of the *shouts*, remember," he seethes later, "to refuse to have anything to do with Top Of The Pops. It's one of the things we all wanted to do away with, right? It was one of the *shouts*. No one was gonna do Top Of The Pops to sell their records. Seems we're the only ones still shouting. The others have all done it . . . maybe they've got their reasons. But it makes me sick that that programme should still be on. I want it to end. We don't do it, and CBS ain't gonna get away with putting any film of us on it behind our backs."

Simonon smiles indulgently at Strummer's passionate outburst. Strummer's temper, though, is slow to cool. His anger is understandable. The commercial manoeuvres of CBS present to him yet another irritating distraction.

"It's just *another* battle," he complains. "We just don't have the time to keep fighting them. There's more important things for us to be doing."

It's the truth: the Clash were scheduled to open a British tour the following night in Edinburgh. Tuesday afternoon found them still rehearsing in London. Their preparations for the tour have been surrounded by enough hassles already, Strummer attests. They should, he declares, be concentrating on the tour, not fighting petty battles with the record company.

"We're used to it now," Simonon alleges. "So many things have happened during the last tours that we don't take much notice now. We've always had all kinds of hassles before tours. Personal hassles within the band. Hassles with the managements. Hassles with the record company. Hassles with everybody. The last time we had that court business . . ."

"The Guns On The Roof Tour," Strummer recalls slyly.

"You just have to plough your way through it, you know," Simonon continues. "I don't find it frustrating any more. I find it's good fun, actually. It really brings the group together in a way, having to face up to it. You've got to stand up to it when people are going on at you all the time from all directions. If you give in, you ain't gonna get nowhere. You've gotta fight back. To try to win. To beat them."

"Yeah," smiles Strummer laconically.

"I find it adds a certain *desperation* to the proceedings. It's not always a bad thing to be desperate, you know what I mean?"

THE last month has, indeed, been traumatic for the Clash. The release of their long-overdue second album, "Give 'Em Enough Rope," was prefaced by their well-publicised estrangement from Bernard Rhodes, whose sacking as the band's manager succeeded months of speculation and rumour about the growing rift and increasing animosity between the two factions. The split, when it came finally, provoked the inevitable round of hostility, allegations, accusations, bitching, sneering and law suits.

Rhodes applied to the High Court to freeze the band's earnings. They replied with the claim that his financial accounting amounted to a breach of his duties as their manager. Rhodes, assuming an injured tone, explained the principal reasons for the split (as he saw them, naturally), when he spoke to the MM at the end of October.

"I have been given the elbow by the band," he complained. "I took them off the street and made them what they are, and now I'm out. It's ended with the group owing me money — it's not often that it ends up that way — and I feel they have let me down over the last year, during which time they haven't really done anything.

"I thought this was one band that wouldn't get involved in all the rock 'n' roll nonsense, but that's what they've drifted into. I know I've been painted as a horrible ogre-like figure, not letting the band have any fun, but that's not what it was about. I didn't view my job as being here to subsidise their silly indulgences like recording in big New York studios and staying in top New York hotels. That's basically what the split between us is all about."

Bernie, I might add, was not alone in his apparent disaffection.

The Clash had been widely criticised even by their most ardent admirers, impatient with the delays and constant re-scheduling that afflicted the production of the album, and for their choice, as producer, of Sandy Pearlman, a producer most noted for his involvement with the Blue Oyster Cult. The decision to employ Pearlman must, to committed Clash addicts who idolised the group as the most radical of the surviving punk bands, have smacked of commercial compromise and an attempt to secure some kind of advance into the American market place.

The idealisation of the Clash as fervent revolutionaries had already been tarnished by their association with CBS (which Mark P., you might recall, had described emotionally as the death-knell for punk and its more radical intentions), and an initial backlash — which they survived, of course — which had many of their original champions, who merely exaggerated the importance and social weight of their first album, bickering and sniping at what they interpreted as the corruption of the group's early idealism.

I should probably mention here a personal aversion to much of that frequently cheered debut. Its crude musical force was briefly exhilarating (despite the enormous shortcomings of the production), but I tired quickly of its ranting tone and the confused indignation of Strummer's violent rhetoric. And I found quite absurd the image, fostered by some of their more impressionable supporters, of the band as captains of a revolutionary underground.

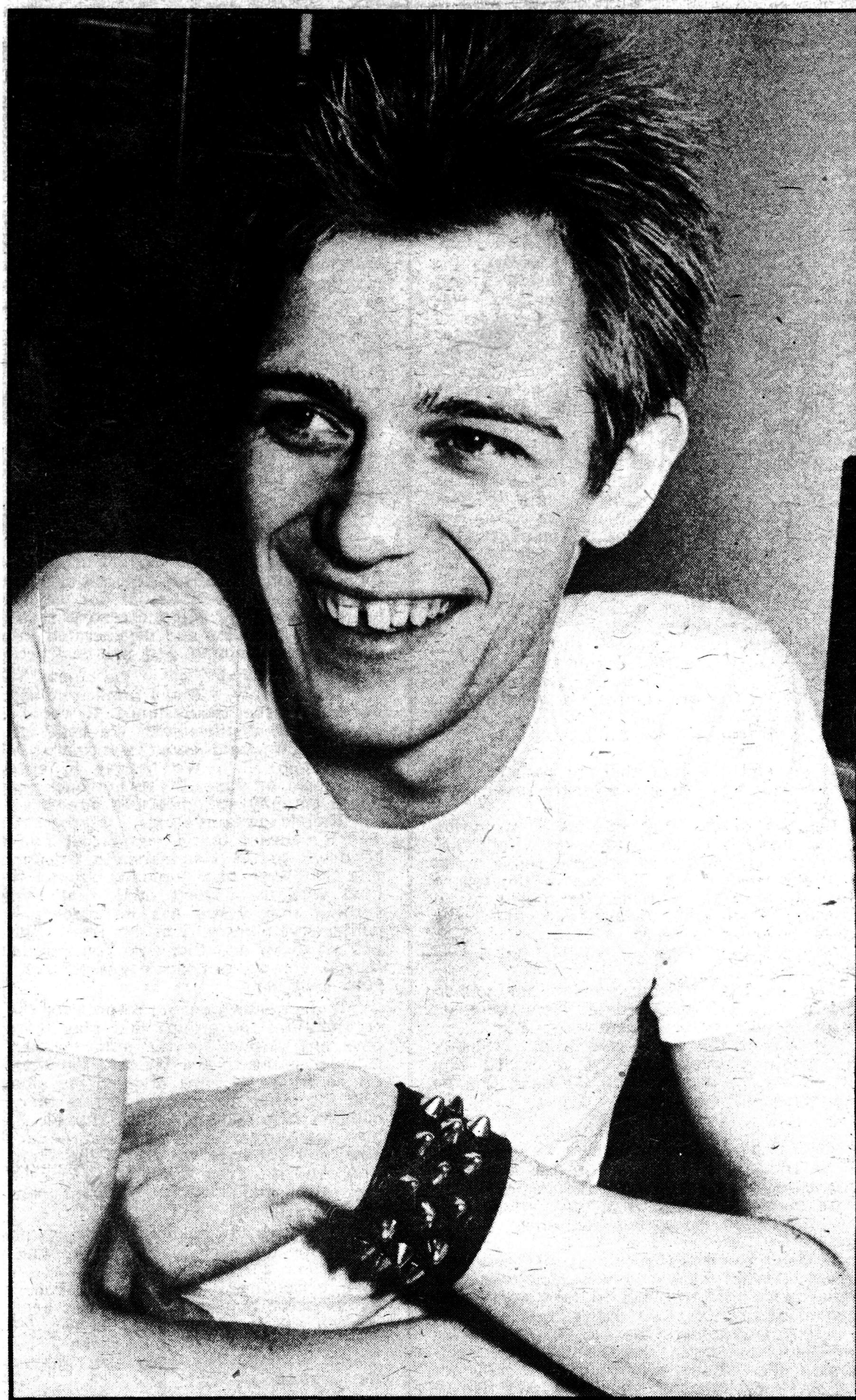
Still, I could sympathise (reluctantly, perhaps) with their recent tribulations, and the pressure under which they were supposed to be suffering with the imminent release of a new album, which — most observers agreed — would probably leave them vulnerably exposed to a more vicious critical sandbagging than anything they'd previously encountered.

AS it happened, "Give 'Em Enough Rope," escaped the expected mauling: the reviews, thus far, have been favourably enthusiastic. Only Jon Savage, in this paper, was openly critical of its disappointments and failures.

I might as well admit that I find "Give 'Em Enough Rope" generally disappointing. Pearlman's production strikes me as erratically balanced, capturing only occasionally any real musical force. The opening salvo of "Safe Euroean Home," "English Civil War" and "Tommy Gun" possesses a genuinely fierce thrust that the rest of the album fails to sustain, though "Guns On The Roof" comes close to the same kind of orchestrated frenzy.

Some of the cuts, I must say, seem quite embarrassingly shoddy to these ears. "Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad," especially, seems pathetically slight, while Mick Jones' "Stay Free," despite its obvious emotional

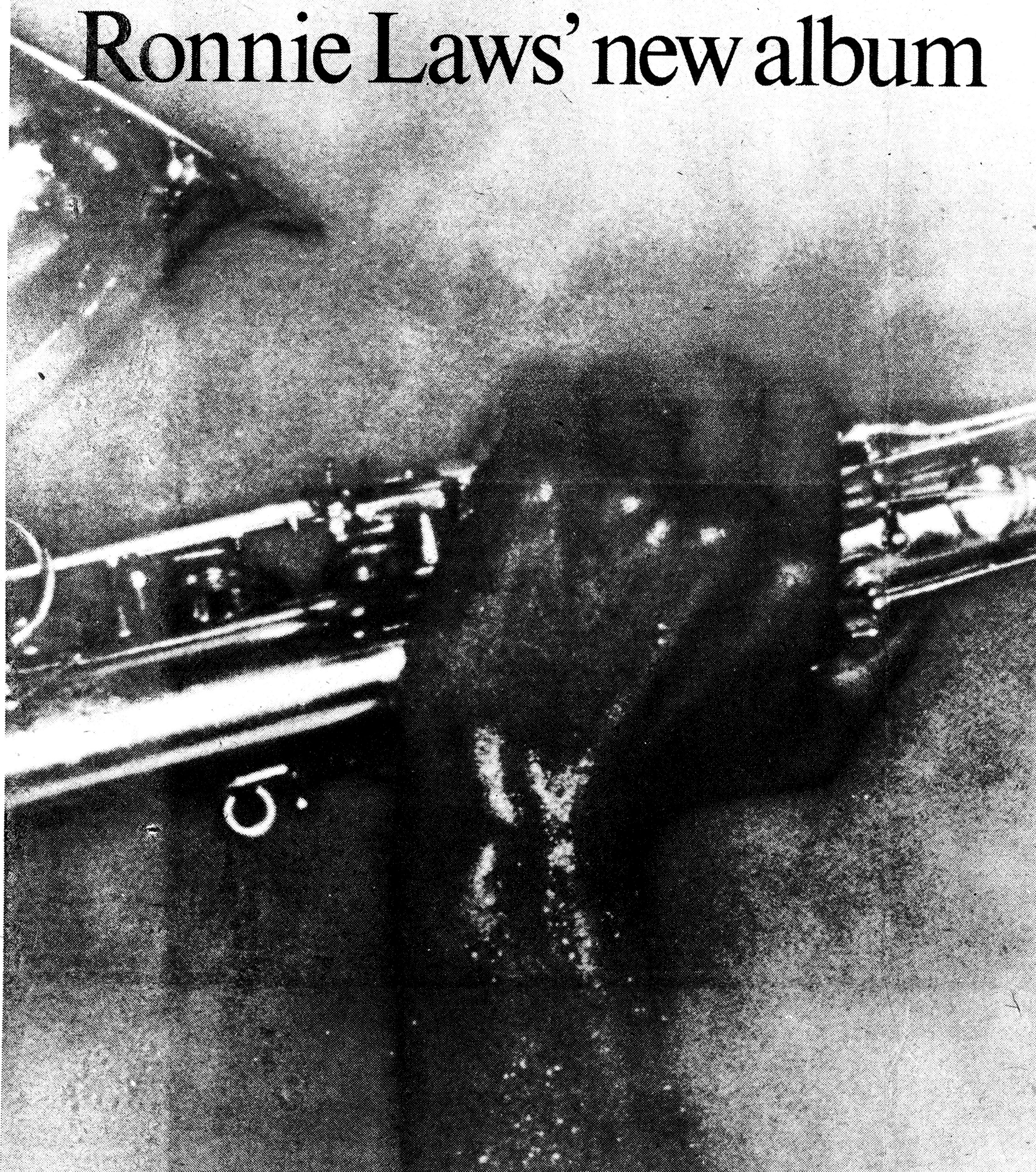
continued overleaf



Above, Simonon; top, Strummer (pix: ADRIAN BOOT)

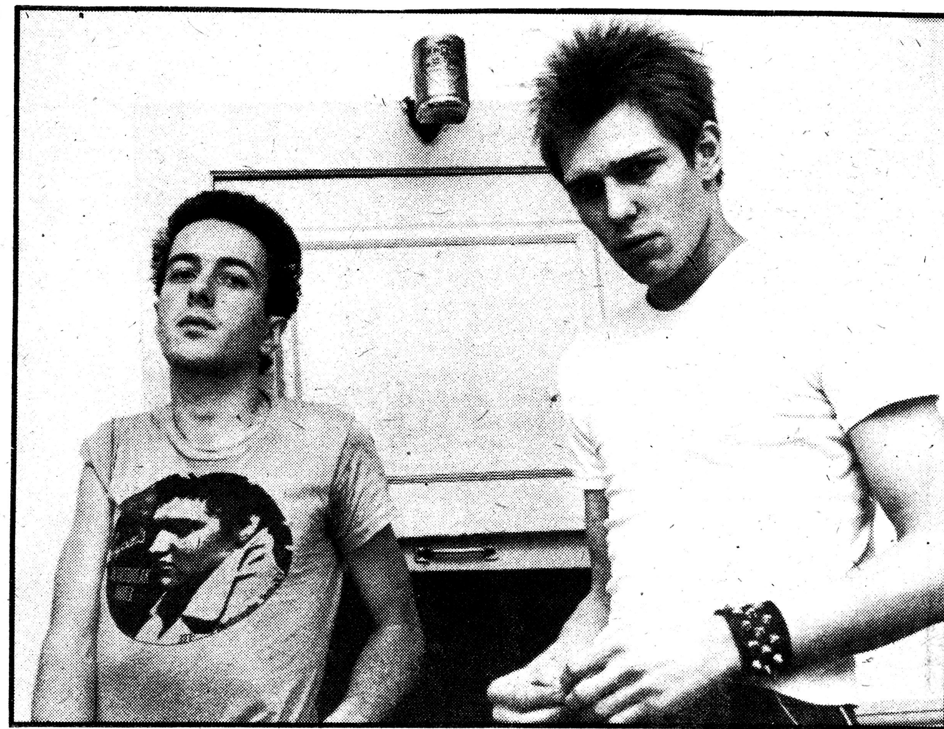
Flame.

Ronnie Laws' new album



is Red Hot

Album UAG 30204. Cassette TCK 30204



The Clash from previous page

sincerity, reminds me of one of those cloying sentimental tracts with which Ian Hunter used occasionally to clutter Mott The Hoople albums.

Strummer, however, shrugs off the criticisms of the album, and remains defiant in his defence of his band and his belief in the ultimate worth of the Clash.

"I could've stood a slagging," he says bravely. "The first time you're slagged, it really gets you *here*, you know . . ." he thumps his first over his heart in a characteristically dramatic gesture. "But after that you get sort of immune. You get a leather heart, know what I mean?"

"We probably expected *more* criticism," Simonon offers. "People do seem more critical of us than most bands. It's, like, the higher you go the more people expect of you. You come to expect criticism, and after a while you don't really take any notice of it. You just get on with what you're there to do."

STRUMMER is especially unrepentant about the decision to record the album with Pearlman, despite the flak it might have provoked and despite the contradictions it embraced: "He was the *only* contender. Who else is there? Try and name one. We wanted to find somebody who could put us on record, you know. And he was the *only* one. And so we had to do it *his* way. The record took so long to do 'cos I got hepatitis and we did that tour in the summer . . . and, anyway, that's the way *he* does it. He takes the long way around. He gets there in the end. It just takes him a long time. But we accepted that. I mean, *we* asked him to do the record. So we worked in *his* style, out of respect for him."

It had been rumoured that CBS, exasperated with the band's prevarication, gave them an ultimatum and presented them with a short-list of eight producers and instructed them to choose one or be damned.

"Well," says Strummer, "I've read about this list. But I've never seen it myself. I'm told it exists. Perhaps it does. Nobody's ever shown it to me. The only producer I met was Sandy. And he amazed me. I'd never heard of him before. I'd never bought a Blue Oyster Cult album, never read the small print on the back. I didn't know *who* he was. But he really knew quite a lot about us. And he was the first producer I thought we could really work with. We'd tried people in the past, but the ones we tried were all past their peak."

Strummer denies Bernard Rhodes' allegations that the reason for his split with the Clash centred upon their recording in New York with Pearlman (who, it was rumoured, was eager to take over their management). Their differences with Rhodes pre-dated their association with Pearlman, he suggests. He is, however, initially reluctant to pursue the conversation about their present wrangles with their former manager.

"The thing is," he says, "we can't say too much . . . . If we slag Bernie off, they can do us, you know . . . But the reason, really, that we had to part company is that Bernie, although he's like some kinda genius — a great *ideas* man — he can't, you know, do *sums*.

"That and the fact that he hadn't really been friends with the group for the last couple of years."

Simonon agrees that Rhodes' contribution to the nascent Clash image was vitally important: "He made us actually *think* about what we were doing. To observe the record business from the outside. He taught us to keep our distance. To always keep outside the music business."

"He put it all together, really," Strummer says succinctly.

Simonon suggests that Rhodes' antagonism toward the Clash can be dated from the time, virtually, when they signed with CBS.

"It wasn't the same after that. Probably the whole business side of it pulled him away from the contact with the band that he had before."

I MENTION that Rhodes had claimed that he thought that the band were becoming increasingly indifferent to the original impulse of his definition of a punk group, and the ideals that had earlier fired their inspiration.

"I don't think that's true at all," Simonon argues. "What happened was that when we signed with CBS we had to take on certain responsibilities that we didn't have before."

"Like, we thought we had to play better and sound better on stage," Strummer interrupts. "We felt that when we did a show we had to be really good, you know. We had to be at our best. So first we wanted decent amps. So we'd sound good.

"We'd had enough of crappy amps and shitty equipment. At first we were using terrible equipment and we sounded awful. So we just wanted decent stuff, you know . . . but Bernie thought that us getting decent amps was contradicting the original aims of being a punk band.

"Bernie thought punk rock meant low overheads. We didn't think it meant any such thing. When we went out in front of an audience we wanted to sound as good as possible. We didn't want to sound terrible. We wanted decent amps to back us up and he just thought it was us being pop stars.

"But we were in a situation, you know, of suddenly having to go out to play in front of, like, 2,000 people at the Glasgow Apollo, say, and we owe it to those people to sound good, to be *heard*, at least. They've paid to *see* us, right? They wanna be able to *hear* us, too. That was the situation. *We* had to deal with it. *He* didn't have to deal with it. *He* wasn't on f——— stage."

You mean he didn't share your sympathy for the demands of your audience?

"I just think he felt that it sounded all right as it was," Strummer replies. "But Bernie always *hated* music anyway."

Was there one final thing that forced you to ditch him?

Simonon: "There were a lot of minor but crucial things that happened."

Strummer: "When we found out what state our business was in, we realised we'd have to do something pretty quick. Otherwise we weren't gonna survive much longer . . ."

"Like I said," says Simonon, "he didn't have time to come down and see the group, which he'd been able to do before. When we signed with CBS suddenly there was a whole lot of new things to do and they took up all his time. He was as much a victim of the music business as anyone."

"I think it took him a bit by surprise, the way we took off and what he then had to handle," Strummer reflects. "The amount of work built up really quickly over a few months and I think it caught *him* by surprise as well as us. He didn't want us to become what we'd started out against. All credit to him. But his method of preventing this was to come and attack us, to come in with *scorn*."

And did you, I ask Strummer, think you were becoming what you originally campaigned against?

"I think that *every day*," he replies gravely.

TAKING their split with Rhodes in a more general context, it's suggested that it might be seen as symptomatic of the manner in which the punk movement has suffered for its original idealism. The initial momentum of punk, and its potential for change, has been battered by the mercenary realities of the music business and degenerated into bad-tempered squabbling and self-destruction.

"Punk has ended up in the courts," Strummer says sternly. "And I think it's disgusting. But I don't feel disillusioned. It would be too easy to feel disillusioned. We believed in all the stuff we said about wanting to change the system . . . We believe in everything we've said or done. We're not backing down. We're actually still directing our own future.

"There's certain things I regret about the way it's turned out. I regret that I've got to go down to the Hammersmith Odeon to see acts that were once bumping around the 100 Club with us. I don't think *that's* progress. I think that venue has no respect for the punters, you know. You get there, right, and you sit down and that's *it*. You can't get up. If you get up someone's got their hand on your shoulder.

"If the venue's got no respect for the punter, therefore the groups that play there can't have any respect for the punter either. I remember going to see Humble Pie there once . . . a friend of mine dragged me along . . . And the other night I was sitting there and I couldn't help thinking about Humble Pie, and how many years ago that was. And this is now, and yet here we are in the same situation. And it's even worse . . . Who did I see the other night? Some so-called new wave group . . ."

He refuses to acknowledge any nostalgic regret for the early days of the punk movement, and accepts as inevitable the friction that occasionally surfaces between various bands (something of which he has been guilty himself — you might recall the letter he wrote to Mailbag attacking Brian James, Tom Robinson "and four-eyed Van Morrison impersonators").

continued p.57

THE CLASH from p.34

"As soon as it all becomes a big deal, or becomes something to be lost rather than won, it all changes. That's what happened to punk. People start stabbing each other in the back. But I don't bother to think back. It's a waste of time."

He admits, though, to a personal disappointment with some people with whom he had enjoyed some degree of friendship or respect, who later turned against the Clash.

Mark P, for instance, who penned the immortal line, as I mentioned earlier, "Punk died the day the Clash signed to CBS."

"The dirty fucking rat," Strummer swears when Perry is mentioned.

"The strange thing is," says Simonon, "that HE becomes a director of a record company."

"He was just blaming us for his own cop-outs," Strummer bristles. "Any time that I've copped out I've never blamed anyone but myself. When I heard that he'd said that, I was so annoyed, you know. It was like him saying, 'It's all their fault. They let us down.' Why should he hang on to us? Where's his own two feet?"

MORE recently the Clash have been bitterly attacked in The Boy Looked At Johnny, the Tony Parsons/Julie Burchill book; it's an attack that especially offends Strummer, because of his former friendship with Parsons (who I clearly recall openly *fawning* over Strummer at the Mont de Marsan punk festival last year when he trailed the Clash singer over most of the weekend like a ga-ga shadow).

"Somebody gave me it to read the other night at a gig. What disappointed me most was that it was boring to read. And also the fact that they'd invented so many lies. They needn't have. They could've put that kind of cynical slant on the *facts*. But they've thrown in, like, five or six outright lies. They're just things that I know just as well as Tony knows that are just a load of lies."

"That kind of thing happens all the time," Simonon says conclusively. "Friends turn against you quicker than anyone. Like at school, it's always your best mates that turn against you. You don't think anything of it. You just have to turn the other way and get on with what you're doing."

IT'S not impossible to surmise from the new album (notably from the evidence of, say, "Cheapskates," Strummer's vindictively sardonic attack on critics of the Clash), and, especially, "Last Gang In Town" and "All The Young Punks (New Boots And Contracts)" that the Clash see themselves as increasingly isolated from their contemporaries. The last of the punk bands still true to the old punk standards.

Someone once mentioned to me that if the Pistols were the martyrs of punk — "grinning on their way to the scaffold" — then the Clash were the social conscience of punk. I thought it a fanciful comparison at the time. But then I hadn't heard "All The Young Punks."

"I think we ARE the last well-known punk group still true to the original aims of punk," Strummer says, without any undue arrogance. He denies, though, that "Last Gang In Town" is any kind of idealisation of the Clash. "I was just taking the piss out of mob violence."

But I seemed to recall Mick Jones describing the Clash in almost the same terms last summer when he was interviewed by Chris Brazier.

"Maybe," says Strummer. "But that was just after the Pistols had thrown the towel in, and that's how we felt at the time. When the original Pistols split we had to look at ourselves in a new light. We'd been chasing them for so long, you know. We wanted to catch them and beat them. And it did them a lot of good. If you've got somebody chasing you all the time, there's no relaxing."

"We were suddenly left out there on our own," Simonon interjects, "and it made us feel a bit lonely somehow. The Pistols had suddenly gone. They weren't there anymore. There was nothing to chase."

"We'd never have beaten them anyway," Strummer says.

"Probably not. We'd almost get there and they'd do something else and they'd be even further ahead. And then we'd catch up again and they'd do something else. It was like that right from the Anarchy tour."

So you saw the Pistols as the only real competition?

"We thought they were one of the best groups. In fact we thought they were *the* best."

And there's no one else you regard so highly?

"Only people like Bo Diddley," Strummer smirks. "I mean, we like Sham, but we never had the same kind of respect for them that we had for the Pistols. And when they came out with 'Let's Go Down The Pub' or whatever it's called, they really dropped quite a few places on the Clash top ten. We thought 'The Kids Are United' was a *really* great record . . ."

"But the new one," says Simonon, "it's like, this is the way to keep the working man in his place. As if going down the pub is the only thing for them to do."

"ALL The Young Punks" — which Strummer describes as a direct comment on Mott The Hoople's "All The Young Dudes" — might in this context be regarded as a direct antithesis to the Sham song; a stirring call-to-arms, if you like. This is Strummer's version of the song, at least.

"We really wanted it to sound like a hymn, you know. The essence of that song is that it's for the young people who listen to it. It tells them they've got to start with nothing. 'Cos that's how it *does* start — with nothing. It isn't a requiem for punk, or anything like that. It's about *us*. And the future.

"There's been a long history of political songs . . . but they were always *folk* songs — we brought that kind of political thing into, like, electric flash music. And when you do that you are opening yourselves to attacks. It's much safer to say, 'Well — it's just entertainment, boys . . . It's not really meant to threaten you or make you think' . . . But the thing is we are trying to threaten you and make you think."

This diatribe, of course, opens up the whole area of the Clash's apparent radicalism. OK, Joe — how radical do you think the Clash really are?

"We're really radical . . . yeah. We don't do *anything* we don't want to do. We've got a really high standard that we want to maintain, right? And we don't do anything that might cross that standard . . . Awright — you've got to sell records to survive. This is one thing we've found out. We've got to sell records to survive, 'cos a group is such a huge machine. It requires a lot of money to run on. The input of money to keep it going must be from records 'cos you never make money from touring. So we realise that we've got to sell records. But we're not prepared to do just anything to sell them. We're only prepared to do what fits in with our idea of what it should be like. We're not prepared to go on Top Of The Pops. 'Cos we don't feel that it's like a real show . . ."

Refusing to appear on TOTP could hardly be classified as the most radical of acts, though.

"You're talking about radical acts . . . right: you mean like *bombing*. That's a radical act, isn't it? To actually blow something up is an extreme act. There's nothing more extreme you could do to this caff than blow the place up and leave a big hole in the Edgware Road. Maybe you could take your clothes off and dance around on the tables. That would be pretty good. That would turn a few heads. But to blow it up would be pretty extreme. *But we never came to destroy. We never did.*"

AND here resides the crux of another classic anti-Clash argument, which both Jon Savage and Nick Kent, in their respective reviews of "Give 'Em Enough Rope," levelled against the band, and Strummer specifically.

Both reviewers questioned Strummer's apparent infatuation with a kind of gratuitous revolutionary violence (of a kind perpetrated by the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Brigades), and his occasionally unfortunate tendency to react somewhat hysterically to the potential supremacy of reactionary forces (as on "English Civil War," which predicts the immediate ascendancy of the National Front).

Strummer, of course, believes that he's been misunderstood.

We never came to destroy — right?

"We have been misunderstood," he says plaintively. "When we wrote 'White Riot' and all that about sten-guns in Knightsbridge, and knives in West II, we imagined what was gonna hit on *us*. I imagined having a knife pointed at *me*, right? I imagined sten-guns in Knightsbridge *pointed at me*. But people took it to mean that WE had them and we were pointing them at other people. That was a song written about the future. I thought the future was gonna do us in. I really imagined it."

"THE thing is," Simonon says, "when you're a kid, right, you go around smashing things up. And most of the time people smash up their own areas. Like kids go around their blocks of flats and piss all over the walls. And I remember when I was a kid, me and me mates went around Knightsbridge smashing things up. And that's what more kids should do, instead of doing it to their own areas."

Well, that's one point of view. But I still think that there's an element of sensationalist overkill on something like "English Civil War"; and a danger, even, of being seen almost to relish the potential of that violence . . .

"I don't think it *is* hysterical," Strummer argues with a passionate conviction. "The song says: 'It was still at the stage of club and fists . . .' And THAT IS the stage it's at now. If you go on a march, on an anti-National Front march, or whatever . . . if the police don't get in the middle and the two sides get together, you'll see people with bits of wood hitting each other over the head and punching each other. It's not being wildly cut of hand to imagine it getting more violent in the future."

But you're still wide open to the charge that you're using such emotive subjects to create no more than a dramatic impact, and that your apparent militancy is no more than a fashionable stance. Especially when the songs tend toward the ambiguous and make so few conclusive statements about the predicament you're attempting to illustrate.

"This could be true. But I think if you listen to the song, I injected it with as much emotion as I could. I actually *felt* that situation. The fear is *real*. You know, like, when you read all those books about the Second World War, and the armies marching, in and there were people hiding in cupboards and hiding radios under the stairs — you realise how people have to live under another regime . . . And I imagined it was, like, happening to me and my girlfriend. I was trying to imagine how it would affect me."

YES: but don't you think you do tend to glamourise to some extent the violence of the Baader-Meinhof gang or the Red Brigades . . . isn't there a danger of creating a kind of romantic respectability for that violence?

"Yeah. But the only reason I ever brought them up was 'cos I couldn't believe what they were doing. They were just *human*, right? And they've taken up guns. They've gone out robbing banks, kidnapping people and shooting people and murdering them and blowing up places . . . They've gone to that extreme. And I *couldn't* go to that extreme . . . so I had to compare them to me, right?

"Right now there's loads of people out in their country mansions getting ready to go out grouse shooting. And at the same time there's millions of old-age pensioners who have to wrap themselves in bits of cardboard to keep warm 'cos they've got no heating, and they have to last three days on a piece of rotting bread 'cos they've got no food . . . And I don't think it's fair. And those people in West Germany and Italy, they decided that the only way they can fight it is to go out there and start shooting people they consider to be arsholes . . ."

I still find your attitude toward them ambiguous.

"I AM ambiguous. 'Cos at once I'm impressed with what they're doing, and at the same time I'm totally frightened by what they're doing . . . It's not an easy subject."

Presumably there's little chance of you and the Clash cooling it at all on the righteous anger front?

"No."

Not even for America?

"Listen," says Strummer, "everywhere I went over there people were, like, grabbing me by the lapels and saying, 'Come and play here'. I'd go to clubs and there'd be punters who'd had, like, a few too many, and they'd get excited and grab me by the collar, demanding that we come and play in America — and *they* didn't want us to tone it down. And I think that if we toned it down we'd f—— it up completely in America. Some of them are worried that by the time we get over there we'll only be a pale imitation of what we were like when we started."

So that answers *that* one.

THE interview is just about over and the plates have been cleared away.

I mention that I found it ironic, after all the promises from groups like their own to remain independent of the music business and its various satellites, that the interview should have been arranged through the offices of Tony Brainsby, a publicist whose other clients include (in no particular order) Thin Lizzy, Queen and Paul McCartney.

"Yeah . . . well," Strummer smiles uncomfortably. "The thing is, right, there ain't nobody who can be with us now that we can accept into our circle. It's too late. And we haven't brought any publicity man along with us. So we have to go outside the circle, to someone like Tony, right?

"But it don' matter . . . as long as the songs are still true. It all depends on the music, on the songs. The songs that you're writing tell you if it's still worth it. If they're no good, you've got to face up to the fact that you've gone as far as you can with this thing . . . Songs have got to be truthful. And they're meant to tell the truth to everyone. And it's important that they tell the truth to us as well as everyone else. That's important. You can't fool yourself."

"We never came to destroy..."

ALLAN JONES talks to Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon

TUESDAY morning still has the sleep in its eyes, but the Edgware Road is alive with the general chaos and frantic panic of the rush-hour blues.

It's half-nine, and Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon are to be found hiding from the brittle November sunshine in the Metropolitan Cafe, a greasy spoon just around the corner from Strummer's flat.

The pair are hunched over their breakfast plates, insolently disregarding the inquisitive eyes of Metropolitan regulars who peer with a barely concealed curiosity from behind grubby copies of the Sun and the Mirror at the two punks wolfing down omelettes and chips.

Strummer and Simonon share the look of tired refugees. Strummer is wearing a soiled Elvis teeshirt — a souvenir presumably of the Clash's recent sojourn in America — and bondage strides. Simonon, his spiky blond hair razored tight against his skull, looks like an out-of-focus mirror-image in a similarly grimy teeshirt, strides and cumbersome biker boots.

The conversation is punctuated by the howling and steaming of the espresso coffee machine and the constant clatter of crockery and cutlery, and interrupted briefly by the appearance of Caroline Coon, the rock journalist with whom Simonon lives and who, since the recent exit of their erstwhile mentor and manager Bernie Rhodes, has been managing the Clash.

She takes Strummer aside. Their conversation is hurried. Strummer looks impatient. He returns, clearly agitated and quietly furious.

He has just been told that CBS, the group's record company, have acquired a copy of a promotional film the Clash have produced. The film features them performing their new single, "Tommy Gun," and CBS, it transpires, are attempting — without the group's permission, hence Strummer's anger — to flog the clip to Top Of The Pops.

The Clash have already refused unconditionally to appear on the programme, and Strummer is determined to prevent the record company from negotiating a slot for the film on the show.

"It was one of the *shouts*, remember," he seethes later, "to refuse to have anything to do with Top Of The Pops. It's one of the things we all wanted to do away with, right? It was one of the *shouts*. No one was gonna do Top Of The Pops to sell their records. Seems we're the only ones still shouting. The others have all done it . . . maybe they've got their reasons. But it makes me sick that that programme should still be on. I want it to end. We don't do it, and CBS ain't gonna get away with putting any film of us on it behind our backs."

Simonon smiles indulgently at Strummer's passionate outburst. Strummer's temper, though, is slow to cool. His anger is understandable. The commercial manoeuvres of CBS present to him yet another irritating distraction.

"It's just *another* battle," he complains. "We just don't have the time to keep fighting them. There's more important things for us to be doing."

It's the truth: the Clash were scheduled to open a British tour the following night in Edinburgh. Tuesday afternoon found them still rehearsing in London. Their preparations for the tour have been surrounded by enough hassles already, Strummer attests. They should, he declares, be concentrating on the tour, not fighting petty battles with the record company.

"We're used to it now," Simonon alleges. "So many things have happened during the last tours that we don't take much notice now. We've always had all kinds of hassles before tours. Personal hassles within the band. Hassles with the managements. Hassles with the record company. Hassles with everybody. The last time we had that court business . . ."

"The Guns On The Roof Tour," Strummer recalls slyly.

"You just have to plough your way through it, you know," Simonon continues. "I don't find it frustrating any more. I find it's good fun, actually. It really brings the group together in a way, having to face up to it. You've got to stand up to it when people are going on at you all the time from all directions. If you give in, you ain't gonna get nowhere. You've gotta fight back. To try to win. To beat them."

"Yeah," smiles Strummer laconically. "I find it adds a certain *desperation* to the proceedings. It's not always a bad thing to be desperate, you know what I mean?"

THE last month has, indeed, been traumatic for the Clash. The release of their long-overdue second album, "Give 'Em Enough Rope," was prefaced by their well-publicised estrangement from Bernard Rhodes, whose sacking as the band's manager succeeded months of speculation and rumour about the growing rift and increasing animosity between the two factions. The split, when it came finally, provoked the inevitable round of hostility, allegations, accusations, bitching, sneering and law suits.

Rhodes applied to the High Court to freeze the band's earnings. They replied with the claim that his financial accounting amounted to a breach of his duties as their manager. Rhodes, assuming an injured tone, explained the principal reasons for the split (as he saw them, naturally), when he spoke to the MM at the end of October.

"I have been given the elbow by the band," he complained. "I took them off the street and made them what they are, and now I'm out. It's ended with the group owing me money — it's not often that it ends up that way — and I feel they have let me down over the last year, during which time they haven't really done anything.

"I thought this was one band that wouldn't get involved in all the rock 'n' roll nonsense, but that's what they've drifted into. I know I've been painted as a horrible ogre-like figure, not letting the band have any fun, but that's not what it was about. I didn't view my job as being here to subsidise their silly indulgences like recording in big New York studios and staying in top New York hotels. That's basically what the split between us is all about."

Bernie, I might add, was not alone in his apparent disaffection.

The Clash had been widely criticised even by their most ardent admirers, impatient with the delays and constant re-scheduling that afflicted the production of the album, and for their choice, as producer, of Sandy Pearlman, a producer most noted for his involvement with the Blue Oyster Cult. The decision to employ Pearlman must, to committed Clash addicts who idolised the group as the most radical of the surviving punk bands, have smacked of commercial compromise and an attempt to secure some kind of advance into the American market place.

The idealisation of the Clash as fervent revolutionaries had already been tarnished by their association with CBS (which Mark P., you might recall, had described emotionally as the death-knell for punk and its more radical intentions), and an initial backlash — which they survived, of course — which had many of their original champions, who merely exaggerated the importance and social weight of their first album, bickering and sniping at what they interpreted as the corruption of the group's early idealism.

I should probably mention here a personal aversion to much of that frequently cheered debut. Its crude musical force was briefly exhilarating (despite the enormous shortcomings of the production), but I tired quickly of its ranting tone and the confused indignation of Strummer's violent rhetoric. And I found quite absurd the image, fostered by some of their more impressionable supporters, of the band as captains of a revolutionary underground.

Still, I could sympathise (reluctantly, perhaps) with their recent tribulations, and the pressure under which they were supposed to be suffering with the imminent release of a new album, which — most observers agreed — would probably leave them vulnerably exposed to a more vicious critical sandbagging than anything they'd previously encountered.

AS it happened, "Give 'Em Enough Rope," escaped the expected mauling: the reviews, thus far, have been favourably enthusiastic. Only Jon Savage, in this paper, was openly critical of its disappointments and failures.

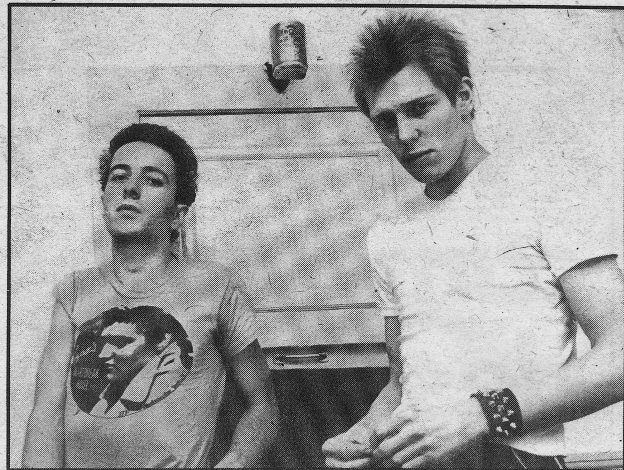
I might as well admit that I find "Give 'Em Enough Rope" generally disappointing. Pearlman's production strikes me as erratically balanced, capturing only occasionally any real musical force. The opening salvo of "Safe Eurpean Home," "English Civil War" and "Tommy Gun" possesses a genuinely fierce thrust that the rest of the album fails to sustain, though "Guns On The Roof" comes close to the same kind of orchestrated frenzy.

Some of the cuts, I must say, seem quite embarrassingly shoddy to these ears. "Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad," especially, seems pathetically slight, while Mick Jones' "Stay Free," despite its obvious emotional

continued overleaf

Above, Simonon; top, Strummer (pix: ADRIAN BOOT)

e.
album
Flame
ot
0204



The Clash from previous page

sincerity, reminds me of one of those cloying sentimental tracts with which Ian Hunter used occasionally to clutter Mott The Hoople albums.

Strummer, however, shrugs off the criticisms of the album, and remains defiant in his defence of his band and his belief in the ultimate worth of the Clash.

"I could've stood a slagging," he says bravely. "The first time you're slagged, it really gets you *here*, you know . . ." he thumps his first over his heart in a characteristically dramatic gesture. "But after that you get sort of immune. You get a leather heart, know what I mean?"

"We probably expected *more* criticism," Simonon offers. "People do seem more critical of us than most bands. It's, like, the higher you go the more people expect of you. You come to expect criticism, and after a while you don't really take any notice of it. You just get on with what you're there to do."

STRUMMER is especially unrepentant about the decision to record the album with Pearlman, despite the flak it might have provoked and despite the contradictions it embraced: "He was the *only* contender. Who else is there? Try and name one. We wanted to find somebody who could put us on record, you know. And he was the *only* one. And so we had to do it *his* way. The record took so long to do 'cos I got hepatitis and we did that tour in the summer . . . and, anyway, that's the way *he* does it, He takes the long way around. He gets there in the end. It just takes him a long time. But we accepted that. I mean, *we* asked him to do the record. So we worked in *his* style, out of respect for him."

It had been rumoured that CBS, exasperated with the band's prevarication, gave them an ultimatum and presented them with a short-list of eight producers and instructed them to choose one or be damned.

"Well," says Strummer, "I've read about this list. But I've never seen it myself. I'm told it exists. Perhaps it does. Nobody's ever shown it to me. The only producer I met was Sandy. And he amazed me. I'd never heard of him before. I'd never bought a Blue Oyster Cult album, never read the small print on the back. I didn't know *who* he was. But he really knew quite a lot about us. And he was the first producer I thought we could really work with. We'd tried people in the past, but the ones we tried were all past their peak."

Strummer denies Bernard Rhodes' allegations that the reason for his split with the Clash centred upon their recording in New York with Pearlman (who, it was rumoured, was eager to take over their management). Their differences with Rhodes pre-dated their association with Pearlman, he suggests. He is, however, initially reluctant to pursue the conversation about their present wrangles with their former manager.

"The thing is," he says, "we can't say too much . . . . If we slag Bernie off, they can do us, you know . . . But the reason, really, that we had to part company is that Bernie, although he's like some kinda genius — a great *ideas* man — he can't, you know, do *sums*.

"That and the fact that he hadn't really been friends with the group for the last couple of years."

Simonon agrees that Rhodes' contribution to the nascent Clash image was vitally important: "He made us actually *think* about what we were doing. To observe the record business from the outside. He taught us to keep our distance. To always keep outside the music business."

"He put it all together, really," Strummer says succinctly.

Simonon suggests that Rhodes' antagonism toward the Clash can be dated from the time, virtually, when they signed with CBS.

"It wasn't the same after that. Probably the whole business side of it pulled him away from the contact with the band that he had before."

I MENTION that Rhodes had claimed that he thought that the band were becoming increasingly indifferent to the original impulse of his definition of a punk group, and the ideals that had earlier fired their inspiration.

"I don't think that's true at all," Simonon argues. "What happened was that when we signed with CBS we had to take on certain responsibilities that we didn't have before."

"Like, we thought we had to play better and sound better on stage," Strummer interrupts. "We felt that when we did a show we had to be really good, you know. We had to be at our best. So first we wanted decent amps. So we'd sound good.

"We'd had enough of crappy amps and shitty equipment. At first we were using terrible equipment and we sounded awful. So we just wanted decent stuff, you know . . . but Bernie thought that us getting decent amps was contradicting the original aims of being a punk band.

"Bernie thought punk rock meant low overheads. We didn't think it meant any such thing. When we went out in front of an audience we wanted to sound as good as possible. We didn't want to sound terrible. We wanted decent amps to back us up and he just thought it was us being pop stars.

"But we were in a situation, you know, of suddenly having to go out to play in front of, like, 2,000 people at the Glasgow Apollo, say, and we owe it to those people to sound good, to be *heard*, at least. They've paid to *see* us, right? They wanna be able to *hear* us, too. That was the situation. *We* had to deal with it. *He* didn't have to deal with it. *He* wasn't on f——— stage."

You mean he didn't share your sympathy for the demands of your audience?

"I just think he felt that it sounded all right as it was," Strummer replies. "But Bernie always *hated* music anyway."

Was there one final thing that forced you to ditch him?

Simonon: "There were a lot of minor but crucial things that happened."

Strummer: "When we found out what state our business was in, we realised we'd have to do something pretty quick. Otherwise we weren't gonna survive much longer . . ."

"Like I said," says Simonon, "he didn't have time to come down and see the group, which he'd been able to do before. When we signed with CBS suddenly there was a whole lot of new things to do and they took up all his time. He was as much a victim of the music business as anyone."

"I think it took him a bit by surprise, the way we took off and what he then had to handle," Strummer reflects. "The amount of work built up really quickly over a few months and I think it caught *him* by surprise as well as us. He didn't want us to become what we'd started out against. All credit to him. But his method of preventing this was to come and attack us, to come in with *scorn*."

And did you, I ask Strummer, think you were becoming what you originally campaigned against?

"I think that *every day*," he replies gravely.

TAKING their split with Rhodes in a more general context, it's suggested that it might be seen as symptomatic of the manner in which the punk movement has suffered for its original idealism. The initial momentum of punk, and its potential for change, has been battered by the mercenary realities of the music business and degenerated into bad-tempered squabbling and self-destruction.

"Punk has ended up in the courts," Strummer says sternly. "And I think it's disgusting. But I don't feel disillusioned. It would be too easy to feel disillusioned. We believed in all the stuff we said about wanting to change the system . . . We believe in everything we've said or done. We're not backing down. We're actually still directing our own future.

"There's certain things I regret about the way it's turned out. I regret that I've got to go down to the Hammersmith Odeon to see acts that were once bumping around the 100 Club with us. I don't think *that's* progress. I think that venue has no respect for the punters, you know. You get there, right, and you sit down and that's *it*. You can't get up. If you get up someone's got their hand on your shoulder.

"If the venue's got no respect for the punter, therefore the groups that play there can't have any respect for the punter either. I remember going to see Humble Pie there once . . . a friend of mine dragged me along . . . And the other night I was sitting there and I couldn't help thinking about Humble Pie, and how many years ago that was. And this is now, and yet here we are in the same situation. And it's even worse . . . Who did I see the other night? Some so-called new wave group . . ."

He refuses to acknowledge any nostalgic regret for the early days of the punk movement, and accepts as inevitable the friction that occasionally surfaces between various bands (something of which he has been guilty himself — you might recall the letter he wrote to Mailbag attacking Brian James, Tom Robinson "and four-eyed Van Morrison impersonators").

continued p.57

THE CLASH from p.34

"As soon as it all becomes a big deal, or becomes something to be lost rather than won, it all changes. That's what happened to punk. People start stabbing each other in the back. But I don't bother to think back. It's a waste of time."

He admits, though, to a personal disappointment with some people with whom he had enjoyed some degree of friendship or respect, who later turned against the Clash.

Mark P, for instance, who penned the immortal line, as I mentioned earlier, "Punk died the day the Clash signed to CBS."

"The dirty fucking rat," Strummer swears when Perry is mentioned.

"The strange thing is," says Simonon, "that HE becomes a director of a record company."

"He was just blaming us for his own cop-outs," Strummer bristles. "Any time that I've copped out I've never blamed anyone but myself. When I heard that he'd said that, I was so annoyed, you know. It was like him saying, 'It's all their fault. They let us down.' Why should he hang on to us? Where's his own two feet?"

MORE recently the Clash have been bitterly attacked in The Boy Looked At Johnny, the Tony Parsons/Julie Burchill book; it's an attack that especially offends Strummer, because of his former friendship with Parsons (who I clearly recall openly *fawning* over Strummer at the Mont de Marsan punk festival last year when he trailed the Clash singer over most of the weekend like a ga-ga shadow).

"Somebody gave me it to read the other night at a gig. What disappointed me most was that it was boring to read. And also the fact that they'd invented so many lies. They needn't have. They could've put that kind of cynical slant on the *facts*. But they've thrown in, like, five or six outright lies. They're just things that I know just as well as Tony knows that are just a load of lies."

"That kind of thing happens all the time," Simonon says conclusively. "Friends turn against you quicker than anyone. Like at school, it's always your best mates that turn against you. You don't think anything of it. You just have to turn the other way and get on with what you're doing."

IT'S not impossible to surmise from the new album (notably from the evidence of, say, "Cheapskates," Strummer's vindictively sardonic attack on critics of the Clash), and, especially, "Last Gang In Town" and "All The Young Punks (New Boots And Contracts)" that the Clash see themselves as increasingly isolated from their contemporaries. The last of the punk bands still true to the old punk standards.

Someone once mentioned to me that if the Pistols were the martyrs of punk — "grinning on their way to the scaffold" — then the Clash were the social conscience of punk. I thought it a fanciful comparison at the time. But then I hadn't heard "All The Young Punks."

"I think we ARE the last well-known punk group still true to the original aims of punk," Strummer says, without any undue arrogance. He denies, though, that "Last Gang In Town" is any kind of idealisation of the Clash. "I was just taking the piss out of mob violence."

But I seemed to recall Mick Jones describing the Clash in almost the same terms last summer when he was interviewed by Chris Brazier.

"Maybe," says Strummer. "But that was just after the Pistols had thrown the towel in, and that's how we felt at the time. When the original Pistols split we had to look at ourselves in a new light. We'd been chasing them for so long, you know. We wanted to catch them and beat them. And it did them a lot of good. If you've got somebody chasing you all the time, there's no relaxing."

"We were suddenly left out there on our own," Simonon interjects, "and it made us feel a bit lonely somehow. The Pistols had suddenly gone. They weren't there anymore. There was nothing to chase."

"We'd never have beaten them anyway," Strummer says.

"Probably not. We'd almost get there and they'd do something else and they'd be even further ahead. And then we'd catch up again and they'd do something else. It was like that right from the Anarchy tour."

So you saw the Pistols as the only real competition?

"We thought they were one of the best groups. In fact we thought they were *the* best."

And there's no one else you regard so highly?

"Only people like Bo Diddley," Strummer smirks. "I mean, we like Sham, but we never had the same kind of respect for them that we had for the Pistols. And when they came out with 'Let's Go Down The Pub' or whatever it's called, they really dropped quite a few places on the Clash top ten. We thought 'The Kids Are United' was a *really* great record . . ."

"But the new one," says Simonon, "it's like, this is the way to keep the working man in his place. As if going down the pub is the only thing for them to do."

"ALL The Young Punks" — which Strummer describes as a direct comment on Mott The Hoople's "All The Young Dudes" — might in this context be regarded as a direct antithesis to the Sham song; a stirring call-to-arms, if you like. This is Strummer's version of the song, at least.

"We really wanted it to sound like a hymn, you know. The essence of that song is that it's for the young people who listen to it. It tells them they've got to start with nothing. 'Cos that's how it *does* start — with nothing. It isn't a requiem for punk, or anything like that. It's about *us*. And the future.

"There's been a long history of political songs . . . but they were always *folk* songs — we brought that kind of political thing into, like, electric flash music. And when you do that you are opening yourselves to attacks. It's much safer to say, 'Well — it's just entertainment, boys . . . It's not really meant to threaten you or make you think' . . . But the thing is we are trying to threaten you and make you think."

This diatribe, of course, opens up the whole area of the Clash's apparent radicalism. OK, Joe — how radical do you think the Clash really are?

"We're really radical . . . yeah. We don't do *anything* we don't want to do. We've got a really high standard that we want to maintain, right? And we don't do anything that might cross that standard . . . Awright — you've got to sell records to survive. This is one thing we've found out. We've got to sell records to survive, 'cos a group is such a huge machine. It requires a lot of money to run on. The input of money to keep it going must be from records 'cos you never make money from touring. So we realise that we've got to sell records. But we're not prepared to do just anything to sell them. We're only prepared to do what fits in with our idea of what it should be like. We're not prepared to go on Top Of The Pops. 'Cos we don't feel that it's like a real show . . ."

Refusing to appear on TOTP could hardly be classified as the most radical of acts, though.

"You're talking about radical acts . . . right: you mean like *bombing*. That's a radical act, isn't it? To actually blow something up is an extreme act. There's nothing more extreme you could do to this caff than blow the place up and leave a big hole in the Edgware Road. Maybe you could take your clothes off and dance around on the tables. That would be pretty good. That would turn a few heads. But to blow it up would be pretty extreme. *But we never came to destroy. We never did.*"

AND here resides the crux of another classic anti-Clash argument, which both Jon Savage and Nick Kent, in their respective reviews of "Give 'Em Enough Rope," levelled against the band, and Strummer specifically.

Both reviewers questioned Strummer's apparent infatuation with a kind of gratuitous revolutionary violence (of a kind perpetrated by the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Brigades), and his occasionally unfortunate tendency to react somewhat hysterically to the potential supremacy of reactionary forces (as on "English Civil War," which predicts the immediate ascendancy of the National Front).

Strummer, of course, believes that he's been misunderstood.

We never came to destroy — right?

"We have been misunderstood," he says plaintively. "When we wrote 'White Riot' and all that about sten-guns in Knightsbridge, and knives in West 11, we imagined what was gonna hit on *us*. I imagined having a knife pointed at *me*, right? I imagined sten-guns in Knightsbridge *pointed at me*. But people took it to mean that WE had them and we were pointing them at other people. That was a song written about the future. I thought the future was gonna do us in. I really imagined it."

"THE thing is," Simonon says, "when you're a kid, right, you go around smashing things up. And most of the time people smash up their own areas. Like kids go around their blocks of flats and piss all over the walls. And I remember when I was a kid, me and me mates went around Knightsbridge smashing things up. And that's what more kids should do, instead of doing it to their own areas."

Well, that's one point of view. But I still think that there's an element of sensationalist overkill on something like "English Civil War"; and a danger, even, of being seen almost to relish the potential of that violence . . .

"I don't think it *is* hysterical," Strummer argues with a passionate conviction. "The song says: 'It was still at the stage of club and fists . . .' And THAT IS the stage it's at now. If you go on a march, on an anti-National Front march, or whatever . . . if the police don't get in the middle and the two sides get together, you'll see people with bits of wood hitting each other over the head and punching each other. It's not being wildly cut of hand to imagine it getting more violent in the future."

But you're still wide open to the charge that you're using such emotive subjects to create no more than a dramatic impact, and that your apparent militancy is no more than a fashionable stance. Especially when the songs tend toward the ambiguous and make so few conclusive statements about the predicament you're attempting to illustrate.

"This could be true. But I think if you listen to the song, I injected it with as much emotion as I could. I actually *felt* that situation. The fear is *real*. You know, like, when you read all those books about the Second World War, and the armies marching, in and there were people hiding in cupboards and hiding radios under the stairs — you realise how people have to live under another regime . . . And I imagined it was, like, happening to me and my girlfriend. I was trying to imagine how it would affect me."

YES: but don't you think you do tend to glamourise to some extent the violence of the Baader-Meinhof gang or the Red Brigades . . . isn't there a danger of creating a kind of romantic respectability for that violence?

"Yeah. But the only reason I ever brought them up was 'cos I couldn't believe what they were doing. They were just *human*, right? And they've taken up guns. They've gone out robbing banks, kidnapping people and shooting people and murdering them and blowing up places . . . They've gone to that extreme. And I *couldn't* go to that extreme . . . so I had to compare them to me, right?

"Right now there's loads of people out in their country mansions getting ready to go out grouse shooting. And at the same time there's millions of old-age pensioners who have to wrap themselves in bits of cardboard to keep warm 'cos they've got no heating, and they have to last three days on a piece of rotting bread 'cos they've got no food . . . And I don't think it's fair. And those people in West Germany and Italy, they decided that the only way they can fight it is to go out there and start shooting people they consider to be arsholes . . ."

I still find your attitude toward them ambiguous.

"I AM ambiguous. 'Cos at once I'm impressed with what they're doing, and at the same time I'm totally frightened by what they're doing . . . It's not an easy subject."

Presumably there's little chance of you and the Clash cooling it at all on the righteous anger front?

"No."

Not even for America?

"Listen," says Strummer, "everywhere I went over there people were, like, grabbing me by the lapels and saying, 'Come and play here'. I'd go to clubs and there'd be punters who'd had, like, a few too many, and they'd get excited and grab me by the collar, demanding that we come and play in America — and *they* didn't want us to tone it down. And I think that if we toned it down we'd f—— it up completely in America. Some of them are worried that by the time we get over there we'll only be a pale imitation of what we were like when we started."

So that answers *that* one.

THE interview is just about over and the plates have been cleared away.

I mention that I found it ironic, after all the promises from groups like their own to remain independent of the music business and its various satellites, that the interview should have been arranged through the offices of Tony Brainsby, a publicist whose other clients include (in no particular order) Thin Lizzy, Queen and Paul McCartney.

"Yeah . . . well," Strummer smiles uncomfortably. "The thing is, right, there ain't nobody who can be with us now that we can accept into our circle. It's too late. And we haven't brought any publicity man along with us. So we have to go outside the circle, to someone like Tony, right?

"But it don' matter . . . as long as the songs are still true. It all depends on the music, on the songs. The songs that you're writing tell you if it's still worth it. If they're no good, you've got to face up to the fact that you've gone as far as you can with this thing . . . Songs have got to be truthful. And they're meant to tell the truth to everyone. And it's important that they tell the truth to us as well as everyone else. That's important. You can't fool yourself."