



flash an NUJ card.

Their first gig, aptly enough, was at a Squatters Free Festival in Huntley, and they followed this through with some obligatory Roxy chaos (see the aforementioned 'Banned').

Outer London punters never got to hear of the band until January 1979 when we ran a small feature on them after getting a cassette of the '5,000' EP off Small Wonder supremo Pete Stennet (despite our jibes as dedicated and caring an individual as it's possible for a midget hippy to be). This article previewed the EP and the band's own broadsheet 'International Anthem' (a 'nihilist newspaper for the living').

'5,000' actually came out in March where it got a good slagging from myself and someone called Parsons in another paper (thus inspiring the song on 'Stations' called 'Hurry Up Garry (The Parsons Farted)'). In this piece I accused the band of being 'Hippy Punks', of perpetuating hippy ideas under the veneer of punkoid sneer.

The band, and few of the following quotes can be individually attributed, answered these criticisms in issue No. 3 of the excellent and thought-provoking young fanzine Rapid Eye Movement.

"Are we hippies? Well that depends on your view of a hippy. If you think of a hippy as a person who wants to make a

better life, then sure, that's ok. We are living in a state of anarchy. Anarchy is inside your head, just an individual way of relating to the world around you. We don't want or need any revolution to reach that point."

SO IN other words Crass are into looking after number one. They're not interested in wider social change as long as they are allowed to carve out their own little utopia...

Maybe that's a little unfair, because from their songs, their bulletins, and their stance it's obvious that they plainly do care about changing other people's points of view. Of late, for example, they've shown a particularly vivid film during their live sets which illustrates the gruesome effects of The Bomb being dropped. By confronting kids with the full horror of war they're asking them to think things through for themselves, to hopefully come to the same conclusions about society as Crass have.

And that's where the utopianism and general impracticality of their 'Dig For Victory' standpoint becomes most apparent, because it's just physically

impossible for 60 million Britons to go 'back to the land', let alone the Third World who the land isn't feeding anyway because they haven't got the money to buy adequate technology to exploit their resources to the full.

Any realistic social change for the better could only come about by physically seizing and re-directing the means of production. By using science and technology to benefit the people and not the profiteers and power interests currently destroying natural resources in the cause of greed or militarism. A rural solution is just not feasible for anyone outside of a handful of middle class drop-outs.

Can Crass really believe that their sort of ascetic, spartan existence is a viable alternative for humanity en masse? Certainly their interviews in fanzines and their own propaganda would indicate that's exactly what they do believe in — anarchy for the individual or more specifically for themselves. We'll drop out, do our own thing, leave us in peace.

By avoiding the system I would say Crass become no challenge to the system. Thatcher ain't gonna worry about even thousands of 'anarchists' doing their own thing. Thousands of striking dockers, or occupying factory workers — well, that would be a different thing altogether.

So the Crass slogans 'Anarchy, Peace and Freedom' need to be supplemented with the question for whom? Crass would appear to be simply echoing the philosophy of hippy 'statesmen' like Theodore Roszczak (I'm indebted to E. Fuller for this info by the way) who opined that acting as if 'the revolution' had happened would mean the revolution would happen. In other words sit around smoking dope all day and everything will be cool.

Trouble is businessmen and politicians can smoke dope with the best of them, and probably better quality dope in greater quantities.

THESE WIDER criticisms do not detract from Crass's concrete achievements. They treat their fans well, liaising with them to organise their gigs around the country and thus keeping prices down. Most gigs are benefits and everyone from the international Anarchist Black Cross to down-in-the-mouth fanzines have pocketed the ackers.

Similarly record costs are kept well low. '5,000' sold for two quid. 'Stations' for

three. The single 'Reality Asylum' sold for 45p and Donna Bane's 'Girl On The Run' on which they played as 'the Kebabs' (their best ever music) sold for 65p. Their current single with the Poison Girls 'Bloody Revolutions' is similarly cheapo cheapo and the Crass label is currently strong enough for them to be able to visualise releasing singles by a wide range of obscure and uncelebrated artistes.

More importantly the band plan to use money they make to open an Anarchist Centre in London as a new alternative venue/meeting point for all the young punks.

There is little doubt that the Crass really do care and they believe enough in what they're doing to have turned down some pretty substantial financial offers including a tasty 25 grand tickler from Sham's manager Tony Gordon.

Myself I can't help finding them alternatively both very grey and very comical. Their lyrics for example are mostly pure abuse strung together with little positive argument or reasoned polemics to enlighten the bitching.

The extreme example of this is the distinctly yawnsome 'Reality Asylum' which featured such tortured logic as 'Christ forgive? FORGIVE? Shit fuck I vomit on you Jesu'. This track was scheduled for '5,000' but discerning workers at the pressing plant refused to press it leaving a big blank space on the EP entitled 'The Sound Of Free Speech'.

Later out as a single, 'Reality Asylum' attracted the attention of the Director Of Public Prosecutions and may yet result in the band being charged under the Blasphemy Laws (a more irrelevant law to get busted under or useless cause to propogate I'm pushed to think of at present).

The words to 'Asylum' are pretty typical of the bulk of their lyrics which are essentially free-flowing Anglo-Saxon excursions round various predictable themes. Fair enough if your name's Mensi but a little bit suspect if you happen to have a University Degree under your sackcloth.

MAYBE I'd be less harsh on the Crass if they weren't in turn so vehemently ultra-critical of other self-styled radicals. Socialists for example are dismissed out of hand in both their literature and propoganda (mostly one suspects because of an SWP-inspired riot at

one of their Conway Hall gigs, most of the Left being so out-to-lunch they shit a brick on sighting a skinhead or hearing a working class accent).

On 'White Punks On Dope' for example they sing: 'Left-wing macho street-fighters willing to kick arse... It's just a form of fascism for the socialist elite... left-wing violence right-wing violence all seem much the same.'

What a witless liberal cop-out! Has anything, any social change or social reform been achieved without violence ever? Certainly not to my knowledge. Crass's answer is always the same however — drop out, cop out... Can you honestly not see the difference between right and left, between Tyndall and Scargill? Between the '45 Labour government and the '79 Tory government? Emperical evidence would suggest the former '45 government for all its faults achieved much much more than Crass could ever dream of achieving.

The Clash are also hugely slagged by them on the very amusing 'Guns On The Roof' pisstake 'System' which includes the words 'You can swear by who the fuck you like/ But you're still on the roof... what have they got?/ Fuck all?/ NO/ What have they got?/ A swimming pool/ Where did they get it!/ Follow the rules!'

Steve Ignorant explained to Back Issue fanzine: "I went through a stage where I was really disgusted with the Clash in the hope that they'd cringe up and never appear again. I don't think the Pistols ever promised anything. I mean they probably promised exactly what happened. There are far worse people than the Clash like the Stranglers and Gen X, people who are beyond contempt."

"On the other hand I really respect the Jam who are a fucking good band, they make exciting music, and I think the Clash are like the Jam but the Jam never made any promises. If the Clash had carried on as they were we wouldn't have had to do this."

So what guarantee was there that Crass wouldn't eventually turn out just as corrupt as the Clash? Penny Rimbauld told No Easy Answers 'zine: "It couldn't happen to us and that's not a bullshit statement. I mean it couldn't do 'cos we've got too much in our own lives. We're not relying on the band 'cos it's not the only outlet we've got. We've got lots of outlets, we've got lots of experience, lots of new ways of seeing things and it's not that important to us."

"We're not gonna start getting compromised. We've already been offered lots of things that I think most bands would have leapt at. We've been offered the big deals and supporting big people and we just won't do that, there's no fucking point. It's only money."

