

CENTRE FOR BRITISH PHOTOGRAPHY TOURING EXHIBITIONS



NOTHING TO LOSE

THE PUNK PHOTOGRAPHS OF CAROLINE COON

WWW.BRITISHPHOTOGRAPHY.ORG

Nothing to lose: The punk photographs of Caroline Coon presents newly discovered images from the photographer's archive in an exhibition exploring three parts: her vision of the punk scene, Word and Image and how the punk aesthetic represented social and political issues, and her relationship with one of the most important bands of the scene, The Clash.

Caroline writes: In the 1970s, as the optimism of Sixties 'Peace and Love' disintegrated into economic crisis, political failure and urban dilapidation, I wondered how disenchanted and alienated youth would react. Would the next generation be as angry as I was?

In 1976, I saw the Sex Pistols perform their second gig and immediately I recognised a galvanizing new expression of sub-cultural revolt. Urgently I upgraded the Kodak Instamatic I used for my painting to a Nikon F2 SLR. As the early days of the dramatic punk scene evolved -created by bands like the Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Damned and The Slits - I photographed and interviewed musicians and fans.

The national press was critical and the music press didn't want to know. The music critic of The Sunday Times pronounced punk "the latest musical garbage... Punk will fade... its apologists are ludicrous... when it dies it will not be mourned". But I knew it was necessary to record what was happening. Having witnessed how the 'hippy movement' had been condemned in the media, and its youths imprisoned by the police, I thought that by suggesting young bands group together as a movement - the punk rock movement - there would be a modicum of safety in numbers.

The photographs in this exhibition, some from negatives and others restored and printed from scratched contact sheets, are a glimpse of what has survived from this revolution moment.



ABOUT US

CAROLINE COON

Caroline Coon has a unique place in British Culture: a counter-culture activist in the 1960s, a leading protagonist in the early years of British Punk and a photographer and painter. Coon also continues to work as a feminist agitator, political activist and social campaigner: particular causes include the legalising of drugs and of sex work.

CENTRE FOR BRITISH PHOTOGRAPHY

The Centre for British Photography (registered charity number 1190955) was founded by James Hyman in 2020 and seeks to support photographers working in Britain through exhibitions, events, grants and mentoring.

The charity provides a platform for a range of voices in order to present an expansive overview of the diversity of photography, past and present.

SPACE REQUIRED

Full exhibition requires approximately 30 linear metres.

To expand or reduce this exhibition please contact us to discuss shaping it for your venue.

LIST OF WORKS

The exhibition is divided in three parts: please see appendix for each part for selected works.

PREVIOUS VENUES

Centre for British Photography, London, 17th November to 17th December 2023

CONTACT

For more details of this exhibition please consult info@britishphotography.org

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication, 'Nothing to lose. Punk 1970s' published by Cafe Royal Books. £6.70

FRAMING

All works are provided framed.

INTERPRETATION

Included with the exhibition is:

- Archival material available
- Text for introduction panel and captions
- Artist information folders

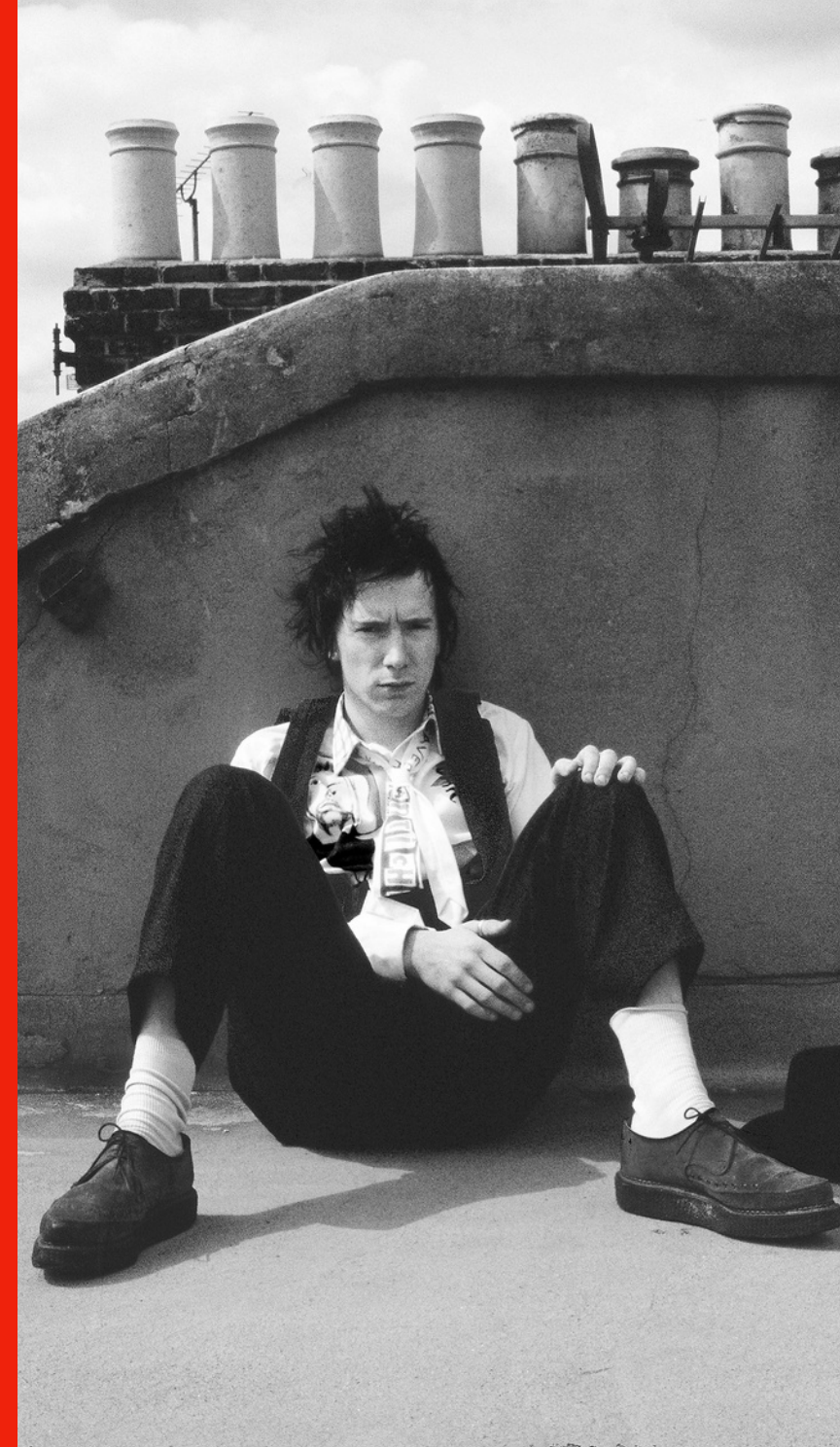
Venues to produce own vinyl lettering and labels.

HIRE FEE, TRANSPORT AND INSURANCE

£1,000 artist fee to Caroline Coon

£1,000 fee to the Centre for British Photography for curation and administration

Venues will be responsible for two way transport within mainland UK and for insurance in transit and in situ.



INSTALLATION IMAGES



THE EYE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Centre for British Photography : Nothing to Lose : The Punk Photographs of Caroline Coon



Artist Caroline Coon is working with The Centre for British Photography to produce three boxed sets of her photographs entitled *Nothing to Lose: The Punk photographs of Caroline Coon*. The three sets are *The Clash: A Relevant Rebellion*; *Punk: A Very Contemporary Significance*; and *Word and Image: Personal and Political Statements*. There will be just 10 of each set available.

[THE EYE OF PHOTOGRAPHY](#)

Punk Bands In 1970s London: Rescued And Never-Before-Seen-Photos

 by Will Noble



[THE LONDONIST](#)



NEWS

THE NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN PUNK PHOTOGRAPHY OF CAROLINE COON

[SHOWSTUDIO](#)

London 1975: the historical year the Sex Pistols began their shocking fight to be heard through the fog of stagnation and paralysing gloom that had fallen over the land. By winter 1976, they were heard loud and clear! The band, and the fans who immediately identified with them as representing the spirit of their new age, had caused a dramatic break with the past. There was horror in the music industry as older musicians and established record companies sensed they had lost control and were about to become outdated if not redundant.

The mainstream media, reacting in moral panic to the “uproar”, “rock outrage” and the use of “the filthiest language heard on British television” called for the banning of everything and anything associated with punk.

Today, looking back at the photographs I took then, reminds us that all the musicians and fans creating such disruptive, universal perturbation were barely out of their teens: Johnny Rotten was just 20. Joe Strummer was 23. The average age of The Jam was 19, The Buzzcocks – 19, Subway Sect – 18. Polly Styrene, lead singer of X-Ray Specs, was 19, Ari-Up, lead singer of The Slits, was 14.

Over the last five decades, theoreticians in the cultural studies industry, historians, music critics and journalists have written enough about punk to fill an Atlantic trench. Every minute facet of the punk era has been forensically examined, loading on to the young shoulders of those who created it every conceivable expectation. A general theme has been a morose blaming of the musicians for not living up to their youthful aspirations.

However, I celebrate the success of punk, especially for the way that space was created for women. And, of course, we still listen to the exhilarating music in all its style and diversity!

Caroline Coon

1.The Jam. Paul Weller (guitar), Rick Buckler (drums) and Bruce Foxton (bass) performing a pop-up gig on a Soho street. August 1976.

2.The Damned. Ray Burns (bass), Dave Vanium (lead singer) and Rat Scabies (drummer) on the ferry to Calais travelling to The First European Punk Rock Festival, Mont de Marsan, August 1976.

3.Don Letts. Filming at the Rock Against Racism concert, Victoria Park, 30th April 1978.

4.The Sex Pistols and their fans meet up at The Deux Margots brasserie, the day after their first gig abroad. Paris, 4 September 1976.

5.Girlschool. Enid Williams (vocals/ bass guitar), Kim McAuliffe (vocals/Guitar), Kelly Johnson (Vocals/guitar) and Denise Dufort (drummer), before the Rafters gig, Manchester, May 1978.

6.Toyah Wilcox with her band, September 1977.

7.Buzzcocks. Garth Smith (bass), John Maher (drums), Pete Shelly (vocals, guitar), Steve Diggle (guitar). Manchester September 1977.

8.Johnny Rotten on the roof of his home, taking a break from recording tracks for his post Sex Pistols band, Public Image Ltd (PIL). Warwick Road, London, September 1978.

9.The Slits. Viv Albertine (guitar), Palmolive (drummer), Tessa Pollitt (bass) and Ariup (lead singer) in the Post House Lobby, Cardiff, before going to the Top Rank gig on The Clash ‘White Riot’ tour. May 1977.

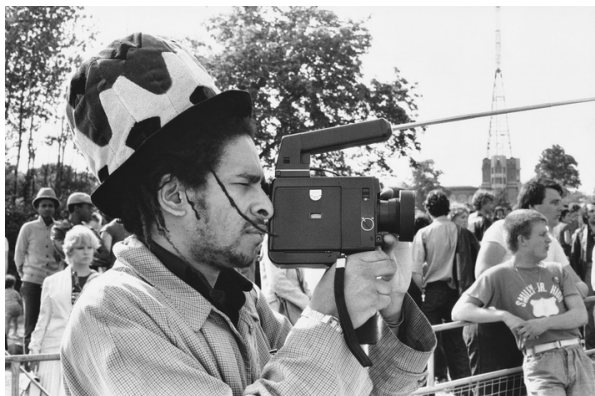
10.The Clash at Heathrow airport on the way to The Second European Punk Rock Festival, South of France. August 1977.



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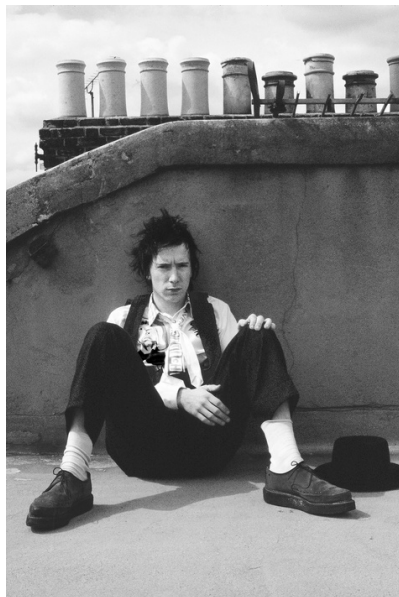
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WORD AND IMAGE

By the mid 1970s unrest was brewing throughout the United Kingdom. Chaos mounted as striking workers demanded better than "poverty pay". In 1976, black youths accustomed to racist police harassment, rose up and rioted at the Notting Hill Carnival. Unemployment was reaching a 40-year high of 1.5 million. Young people were blamed for being work-shy benefit-scrungers. With Government out of reach and as complacent as the rich, it seemed to me that teenagers were existing in an emergency of helpless anomie and alienation.

The Sex Pistols explosion on to the scene was exactly the shock that was needed. Their name alone, the bellicose antithesis of hippy "Peace and Love" - like the "Hate and War" announcement that Joe Strummer painted on his back - heralded the new era. In fact, it seemed inevitable. Repeatedly fans expressed to me sentiments as anguished and happy as "I've been waiting for something to identify with", "They're the best bands around", "They are playing the music of the people", "There's been nothing for years", "I just want to be involved!"

As significant as punk's music and protest song lyrics were in jolting teenagers out of culture's stagnating rut, so were the words painted on their clothes. Effective political demonstrations take time to organise. As an urgent, immediate reaction to daily oppression, do-it-yourself t-shirts were meaningful, fast and cheap. Words and images on t-shirts, as if written on the body like a second skin, were punk's personal and political statements. Signs and symbols turned each musician and fan into their own individual broadcasting company communicating with and to the world.

Caroline Coon

1. Ari-up, lead singer of The Slits in her Silver Jubilee Knickers, Sussex University, Brighton, June 15th 1977.

2. BLACK AND WHITE UNITE - Paul Simonon, Selwyn 'Andy' Brown (Steel Pulse), Glen Matlock (ex-Sex Pistols/The Rich Kids) Mick Jones (The Clash) and Mykaell Riley (Steel Pulse) demonstrate outside the headquarters of the neo-fascist National Front on Connaught Road, Teddington. Passing local residents look on. March 1978.

3. Siouxsie outside the 100 Club Oxford Street, preparing for the 100 Punk Rock Festival where she was to perform as Siouxsie and the Banshees for the first time. Monday September 20th, 1976.

4. Dave Vanian, lead singer of The Damned, at the bullring entrance as he waits to perform. The First European Punk Rock Festival, Mont de Marsan, August 1976.

5. The Clash in their rehearsal studio, Camden Town, London. November 5th 1976.

6. The Lou's. Pamela Popo (vocals, lead guitar), Raphaele Devins (rhythm guitar), Tollim Toto (bass) and Saskia de Jong (drums). Camden Town, London. December 1977.

7. Jimmy Pursey, Sham 69. December 1978.

8. Paul Simonon with his t-shirt: Everyone's A Prostitute. The Clash bassist performing at Le Stadium, Paris France, October 16 1978

9. Polly Styrene lead singer of the band X-Ray Spex, turban off back stage, after she had performed at the Rock Against Racism concert, Victoria Park, 30th April 1978.

10. Janie Jones outside her London home, October 1977.



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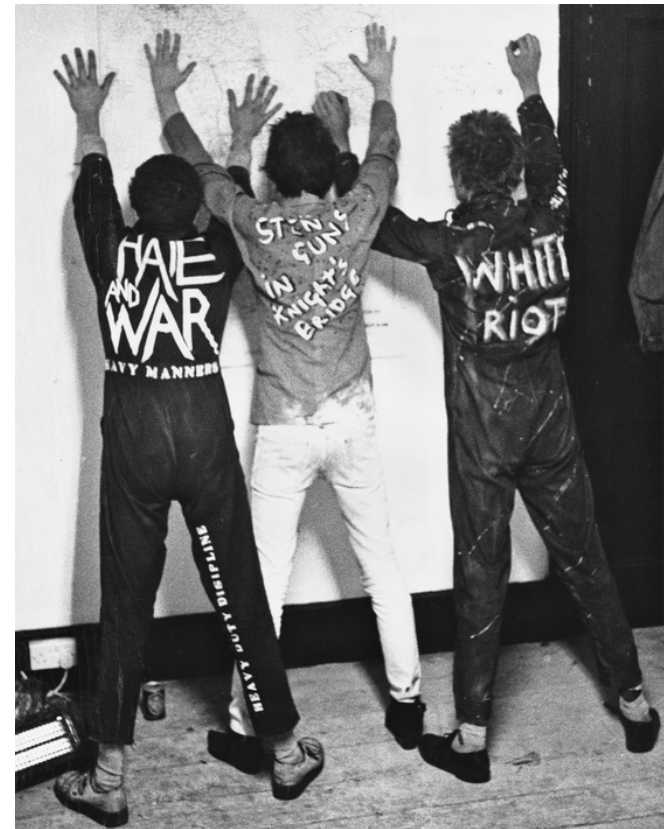
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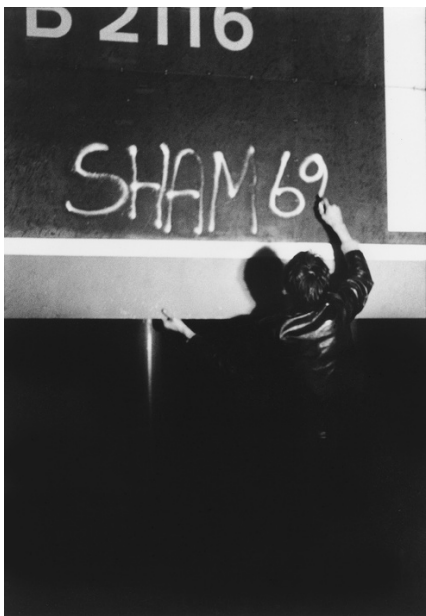
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THE CLASH

To lurch out of the past into a new era, what was needed was a catalyst. The Sex Pistols were it. As Joe Strummer put it to me:

“Yesterday I thought I was a crud. Then I saw the Sex Pistols and I became a king and I decide to move into the future.” Some days later, Strummer was walking along Golborne Road in West London, a few blocks away from where he was squatting, and he bumped into Mick Jones and Paul Simonon. They checked each other over, recognised kindred spirits and... formed The Clash.

When I first saw The Clash in rehearsal, before their first public performance, it was their exceptional musical talent and their charisma that jolted me. Before my eyes and ears was the kind of appeal that I immediately knew had a WOW! Factor.

In 1976, everything about the power and consciousness of the way that The Clash presented themselves - their words, music and style seemed to be exactly what the moment needed. From the start of what has become mythologised as The Clash story, the band acknowledged that it was their politically aware, socialist manager, Bernard Rhodes, who suggested they abjure typical pop love songs and instead write about the world around them. For Joe Strummer, writing prose and poetry as song lyrics was second nature. Rhodes' suggestion seemed to liberate him from the stasis that he had fallen into with his r'n'b band, the 101ers, good as they were. In collaboration with Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Topper Headon (who replaced drummer Terry Chimes), Strummer set about writing social realism. How perfectly these songs capture the alienation and anger that 1970s youth was feeling as they were expected to endure and pay for the economic incompetence of global financiers!

The Clash represented hope. A relief from misery. They drew in fans like iron filings to a magnet. They created music that embodied the rebellion of the time and that is just as meaningful for us today as it was then

Caroline Coon

1. Joe Strummer. 1978.

2. Mick Jones. 1978.

3. Paul Simonon, 1978.

4. Topper Headon. 1978

5. Mick Jones (guitar), Joe Strummer (lead vocals/guitar), Paul Simonon (bass), Rehearsal Rehearsals studio, Camden Town, London. November 5th 1976.

6. Joe Strummer in his Brigade Rosse t-shirt back stage at the Rock Against Racism concert, Victoria Park, 30th April 1978.

7. The Clash in the recording studio: Mickey Foote engineer and The Clash's live sound man at the mixing desk as Joe Strummer confers with Paul Simonon. CBS Studio 3, Whitfield Street, London. February 1977.

8. Joe Strummer at the head of the table before with the band's 'rider' spread. 'White Riot' tour, 1977.

9. Mick Jones, lead guitarist of The Clash, and manager Bernard Rhodes at Heathrow airport on the way to The Second Punk Rock Festival, Mont de Marsan, France, August 1977.

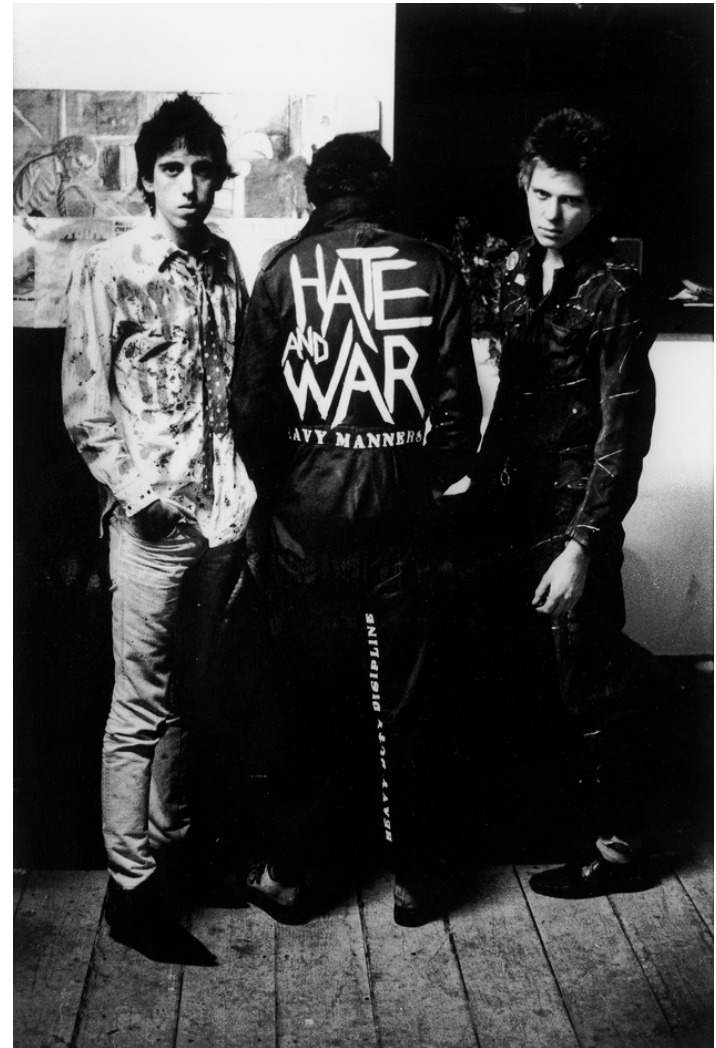
10. The Clash. Topper Headon (drums), Mick Jones (guitar), Paul Simonon (bass) and Joe Strummer (lead vocals/guitar). Belfast, 20th October 1977.



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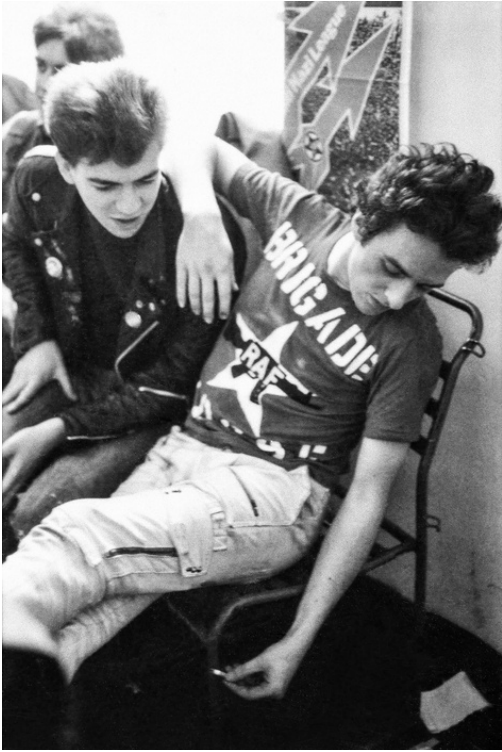
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