

BILLY BRAGG WITNESSES THE SANDINISTA'S ELECTION DEFEAT

All Chamorro's parties



NEWS EXTRA!

BILLY BRAGG. He was a docker. He was a miner. He's a loser. The last two general elections, the coal miners' strike, the '88 US presidential election, and most recently, the election in Nicaragua: which side was he on, boys?

If you fancy getting lost in an ideological cuddle with this bad luck boy from Barking, you should realise a politically correct quick shag would be a safer bet than the whole Marx and flowers routine because even though he's smart, he's cute, and he's a brilliant poet, he's a jinx. Who was in China just before the shit hit the fan in Tiananmen Square? Who flew into Los Angeles just before an earthquake sent the Richter scale soaring to an impressive 5.5? It wasn't Yazz.

And speaking of Yazz, has anyone else noticed the striking similarity of the gangly pop star and the new president elect of Nicaragua, Violeta Chamorro the leader of Uno, the National Opposition Union (a shit name for a new Clash album). Mixing pop and politics, you may ask me what the use is, but I prefer to ask Billy, who was down in Managua to watch the elections and root for Daniel Ortega - leader of the Sandinistas and president of Nicaragua since 1984.

A BIG name manager in the pop music industry recently said of Bragg: "If you have a good, right on cause, don't ask Billy to play a benefit for it because you'll lose."

"Oh, thanks very much," says Billy, who sounds even more depressed than he was after the last general election. "Who said that?" Peter Jenner, your manager; and you know what his son said? "Yeah, no more benefits, only paid gigs! More money for us," though I'm sure he was just kidding. This idea clearly gets up Billy's nose.

"I'd like to think I wasn't the only one in Nicaragua... but I had kind of a good feeling about it because Mandela was freed two weeks before and Drexell, Burnham, Lambert (the big American company that invented junk bonds) went down the tubes so that kinda cheered me up and then Tyson got beat and that kinda cheered me up even more so I thought 'Great, we'll go down and have some good fun with the FSLN (Sandinista Front). I had met up with some people from Arts From Nicaragua and The Nicaraguan Solidarity campaign and they said the best thing to do was to come and observe the elections and go home and talk about it and to tell people that it was fair."

"Fair? From these parts it looked like a circus. Very showbiz with Ortega's men handing out baseball caps, condoms and land titles and Chamorro talking about love and peace and saying stuff like 'I am a symbol'. Of what, no one knows, because her coalition is made up of 14 different parties. The opposition were calling Ortega 'The Fighting Cock' (does this make cock rock not only politically correct but downright fashionable?) and when he lost they were singing 'chicken soup'. All this makes the US Democratic party's 'Lick Bush' stickers seem like pretty



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"I can appreciate what you're saying. A lot of the places I go to are interesting at the moment; I don't think they become interesting once I get there. I think Gorbachev is responsible for a lot of the changes going on. I don't think you should hoax your readers into thinking that it's me. Actually, it's Peter Jenner... "Anyway, I get bored sitting in the sunshine when I used to go to Clacton... I never got into all that. I'm too perverse. When you do this job the way I do, with a political angle, you get asked to do more interesting things. I feel I have a responsibility to see things through. I judge other artists by the songs they write and the actions they take to go with them. I want to walk it like I talk it."

PLUS IT'S grist for the writer's mill. Not that Billy's political involvement is a means to an end, but rumours that his next album will be political have a solid basis. Gorby has upstaged Shirley, Mary, Jeanne et al. When you see so many people not getting any bread it must do your head in to still write songs about not getting any. Which is worse, Bill? Boy loses girl, or boy loses election?

"Well, I have to tell you, coming home on the plane from Managua (spot the Freudian slip readers: Billy was actually flying to LA) it felt like losing in love. All the little things you remember that were really important that you won't see anymore because that person isn't in your life anymore. FSLN was like a shining light that showed that a country doesn't have to be intimidated by its local superpower."

"It may be a good shake up for the Sandinistas because it will allow them to step away from this terrible, terrible struggle (the war) and because they'll be the opposition they'll really have to hone down and focus their ideological and humanitarian aims."

Billy Bragg, a diamond geezer. A poet. He's scheduled to play a benefit for cancer research this weekend at Le Palais. I suppress the urge to tell him that the venue has been changed to the Cock In Hand in Stoke Newington Church Street.

Michelle Kirsch

"I'll get those bastards yet." Billy vows to continue the struggle

tame stuff. At least with those, Billy got a few laughs with jokes about oral sex.

"There were strong elements of showbiz but it was more ideologically focused than the American elections but then I suppose there was only one real issue, the war overshadowing everything. It wasn't really a case of what the FSLN could do but who would best end the war, because that's what's totally destroying the economy. She (Chamorro) says the Americans like her so they'll call off their big dogs (the Contras) but it was like leading the population up against it... all vote for this party and we'll take the dogs away."

HOW ABOUT the Americans down there? When Billy tours the States and plays places like Podunk, Iowa where they think Ortega is a Puerto Rican brand of corn chip, he could get the impression that all Americans are as brain dead as P J O'Rourke - the conservative comedian who reckons Nicaragua is really, really poor because they have no chickens running round the street - apparently a staple of poverty stricken central American countries.

This actually ties in with the 'Fighting Cock' moniker, but O'Rourke did make one valid point in his essay on Nicaragua which is that there seem to be more fact finding missions than facts down there.

"All the good Americans were down there. Anyone who has any doubt about the capacity of Americans to have left wing feelings, I mean genuine feelings -

like the people you meet at the ambulance strike demos in London... he trails off, as I mentally note all the places Billy has travelled recently - Bolivia, Chile, China, Nicaragua - hot spots all in one way or another, but no place for a busker's bucket 'n' spade holiday, unless the bucket had ambulance strike stickers all over it. Billy, why don't you do normal stuff on your holidays, I mean what's next on the itinerary? Libya?



Happier pre-election days with Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy