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### Billy Bragg drives in voting wedge

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 Guardian

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His political anthems are synonymous with the Labour movement but age mellows even the hardest political heart - Red Wedge founder Billy Bragg is to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election.

As the driving force behind the leftwing political pop vehicle that railed against the Thatcher regime of the 1980s, Bragg was cast by Neil Kinnock's Labour party as the key to unlock support among the nation's brooding youth.

But those fearing Bragg has gone politically "soft" need not mourn the loss of a Labour voter. Bragg is now behind a campaign of tactical voting to unseat Tory MPs.

The musician is making the Lib Dem commitment as he launches a "voting valentines" website - [www.votedorset.net](http://www.votedorset.net) - designed to pair up Lib Dem and Labour supporters in neighbouring seats who want to vote tactically to oppose Conservative candidates.

Denying that his decision betrayed his leftwing past, Mr Bragg asked: "Was Red Wedge pro-Labour, or did we just hate Tories?" He still wanted to see a second term of a Labour government, he said, adding: "Last time a lot of people voted tactically on a personal basis, and with a little bit of organisation that can increase. Until the voting system is genuinely proportional I don't think you can expect people to just waste their vote."

The Lib Dems were delighted last night, welcoming the songwriter whose best known work proclaimed "I don't want to change the world, I'm not looking for a new England", but who has been consistently outspoken on political matters. Campaign director Lord Rennard said: "We hope many other Labour voters will follow Mr Bragg's example in Lib Dem-Tory marginals."

Mr Bragg, who explains his tactical voting plans in today's New Statesman, is aiming to unseat Oliver Letwin, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury and MP for Dorset West where the singer lives with his family after moving from London several

months ago. He also hopes tactical voting could oust Conservative Ian Bruce in adjoining Dorset South, where Labour's Jim Knight came within 77 votes of snatching the seat in 1997.

Mr Letwin, regarded as one his party's key intellectuals, fended off Lib Dem challenger Robin Legg in the traditionally safe Tory seat with a majority of just 1,840.

The Bragg website, one of several being set up to match up voters around the country who want to vote tactically but are keen that a compensatory vote for their party of choice should be cast elsewhere, will pair by email Labour supporters in Dorset West and Lib Dems in Dorset South.

They will then informally agree to vote for each other's party, though there will be no means of creating a binding commitment since this would break election law.

Another site - tacticalvoter.net - is operating the same vote trading concept on a national scale.



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