

- ★ *Billy Bragg was first introduced to politics by attending the Rock Against Racism march in 1978, headlined by The Clash. From this experience he saw that music could be both entertaining and carry weighty messages. For more than 20 years, Bragg has preached to the masses with his spoken-verse singing, electric guitar, well-crafted lyrics and articulate speeches. The following interview is from the Tell Us the Truth tour, which focused on media consolidation. Though a British resident, Bragg sees U.S. media consolidation as a major issue.* **Tyson Schuetze**

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Everyone knows that the best music is music that challenges the status quo and whenever I look out from the stage and see some dude standing there wearing the Clash T-shirt, I am reminded about why I did this and how I felt when I first went to see the Clash. What they meant was a finger to everything that my society stood for at the time. By coming to see the Clash, my perspective completely changed. That's probably the most you can do as an artist—change someone's perspective.

I am sure people who listen to Steve [Earle] or Rage Against the Machine feel that same feeling. If the whole thing is going to be controlled by the kind of people who are running Clear Channel, how are we going to find the next Clash? How are we going to find the next Rage? How is the next Billy Bragg going to get that space? That's where it is really affecting me as a listener. I turn the radio on and it's full of crap. Those bands that are inspired by the Clash and by the issues they brought up are not going to get any play on those stations.

Clear Channel recently opened a European headquarters in London and began to buy billboards and venues. I asked my British agent to be very careful not to book me at any Clear Channel venues and Clear Channel bought my British agent and his whole company. This is a forest fire and you cannot fight it by standing still. It is something that has to be actively fought against. In the end, you and me, we might sit down and scientifically prove that it doesn't

make a difference, but it sure as fuck doesn't mean that we shouldn't try. Mussolini said another name for fascism is corporatism; Clear Channel and Murdoch and his SKY Empire are the only companies that are buying venues and agencies vertically. Rupert Murdoch is the president of the United States.

As an outsider I am not without hope for the way this could go and I articulate that to audiences every night. The American people still have not really made up their minds about what America is going to be like in the 21st century. But you have another opportunity in November to try and resolve this. There are many traditions in this country and George Bush represents but one of them. You are the only people who have the logistics anymore and you need to fill those aircrafts with good ideas and good people and come out in the world and make a difference. I have a lot of hope.



**BRAGG**

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