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01/04/05 - News and city section

### **Billy Bragg under fire for backing pro-war MP**

By Robert Mendick, Evening Standard

Singer Billy Bragg has received hate mail from antiwar activists over his support for a Labour MP who voted for the invasion of Iraq.

The singer, who quit the Labour Party over its backing of the 1991 Gulf War, played a concert to raise funds for the re-election bid of Oona King, MP for Bethnal Green and Bow.

At the general election expected in May, her 10,057 majority is being challenged by former Labour MP George Galloway, who is standing for the anti-war Respect party. Following the gig at the Spitz club in Spitalfields, Bragg received a series of derogatory emails from opponents of the war.

He admitted people had been "disappointed in him", but said opposing Labour could split the vote and let the Tories in. "We were misled over weapons of mass destruction. But there was never a Labour government that didn't disappoint me in some way," he said.

"People are angry because they have been misled. But I don't see how handing Bethnal Green and Bow to the Tories helps the people of Basra. I signed up to fight the Tories and the BNP. That is why I am here."

The 47-year-old "Barking Bard", who had hits with *Between The Wars*, *Sexuality* and *Take Down The Union Jack*, is a friend of Ms King.

She said she was delighted to get his support, adding: "George Galloway poses a threat.

"He does not have a chance of winning but could take just enough votes from Labour to let the Tories in."

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