

Billy Bragg supports idea of a New Zealand constitution

7:38PM Thursday January 17, 2008

By [Edward Gay](#)

Billy Bragg, the political dissident armed with a guitar, says New Zealand needs a constitution but he is staying out of the republic debate sparked by Mike Moore's opinion piece in Tuesday's Herald.

The English musician, known for his political lyrics, is in New Zealand for tomorrow's Big Day Out.

"You need a written constitution, particularly in the time of the so-called war on terror when governments are constantly chipping away at our individual liberty in the name of security," he said.

"It's a historical anomaly that Great Britain and New Zealand don't have written constitutions. It could be changed without abolishing the monarchy."

Bragg said deciding whether or not a New Zealander should be the head of state was a separate issue.

"That's a thing for another day. Before you play Manchester United in the cup final, you've got to defeat Aston Villa on a Wednesday night on a muddy pitch ... that's what the constitution is.

"And if you chose to go on forward and be a republic, that's your business. That's the cup final but the two are not linked," he said.

Bragg said a constitution could be written by a citizen jury travelling New Zealand.

He acknowledged it could take some years to formulate said it could not be written by politicians.

Bragg said although individual rights are protected by legislation, they would be further enshrined in a constitution, which would be harder for any one political party to change.

"The point of a constitution is having a set of rules by which you can hold the executive to account.

"They are rules by which we agree to be governed. So you don't want the politicians having the ability to change the rules. It's like playing football against a team who can change the rules anytime they like. You don't really want that."

Bragg said forming a constitution would be a natural progression for a country that has taken on MMP



Billy Bragg. Photo / Supplied

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and dropped the Privy Council.

He said while the Treaty of Waitangi is of huge importance to New Zealand, it is not a constitution, but a founding document.

There was no reason a constitution could not exist alongside the treaty, he said.

"You need a written constitution to enshrine biculturalism. You need to make a new settlement based on where you are, rather than where you are from," he said.

"You're two communities that have come from elsewhere, you both have two powerful histories but ultimately belonging is about place, not race."

This story was found at:

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