

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

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With Michael Conliffe, Piano

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Greetings. The trade unions are trying to decide whether to take out coordinated strike action against the government cuts later this year. What with the laws brought in during the Thatcher regime and reinforced by subsequent administrations, they have to think very careful indeed before taking on the government. One of the issues they need to consider is the public appetite for disruption and inconvenience. And that depends on whether the public agree that the trade unionists have a legitimate cause for complaint, and wish to support them. Were Paul Robeson alive today, I have no doubt that he would be standing shoulder to shoulder with the trade unionists, even though he was strictly speaking an entertainer by profession. He believed in showing solidarity with other people where their livelihoods were at stake. He was made honorary member of numerous trade unions around the world, though it must be said that there were those who refused to associate with him because he was seen as too militant. Here today, we see unions varying markedly in their preparedness to take on the government today, and the public also varying in the extent of their bravery in showing solidarity with the workers. It seems we have a thing or two to learn from our friends out on the streets in Egypt and other places where the effect of ordinary people's actions is to make their leaders quake in their boots. I hope you enjoy the show.