

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,

With Michael Conliffe, Piano

The Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis, Sunday 9 October 2011

Greetings and Welcome. Some weeks ago, the government announced several job losses among the armed forces, from highly skilled engineers to combat troops, some of them hearing the news while still serving in Afghanistan. This could pose a bit of a problem to those of us who feel that the arms industry and war mongering are evil aspects of modern civilisation. Our cynicism isn't reduced when we hear that our Defence Minister has a friend accompanying him on foreign trips allegedly brokering arms deals in other countries without necessarily having the right credentials. The officials in those countries would probably be used to that kind of possible irregularity, but here it rightly raises eyebrows, and political opponents smell blood. If this gentleman was going round selling British expertise in education, medicine and the like, his detractors might be more easily disarmed, but peddling death and destruction? And who gave him the job anyway? Those newly unemployed could potentially be redeployed here or overseas, not in fuelling the war machine, but for example in coming up with ways of reducing our dependence on foreign oil, like insulating homes, improving the efficiency of boilers, car engines, or improving schools and hospitals. Several young people are today marching from Jarrod, in a re-enactment of the march that happened 75 years ago, when unemployment was at an all-time high. In America, people have occupied Wall Street (occupywallst.org) and cities all over the country, demanding that their government pay more attention to the needs of the people rather than the banks, the super-rich and the military-industrial complex. I believe Paul Robeson, whose story we are sharing today, would have supported all these movements. He certainly went on many a demo in his time, speaking and singing to them at great personal and professional risk. I hope he and others like him inspire us to not to be afraid to take risks where issues of fairness, peace and justice are at stake. I hope you enjoy the show.