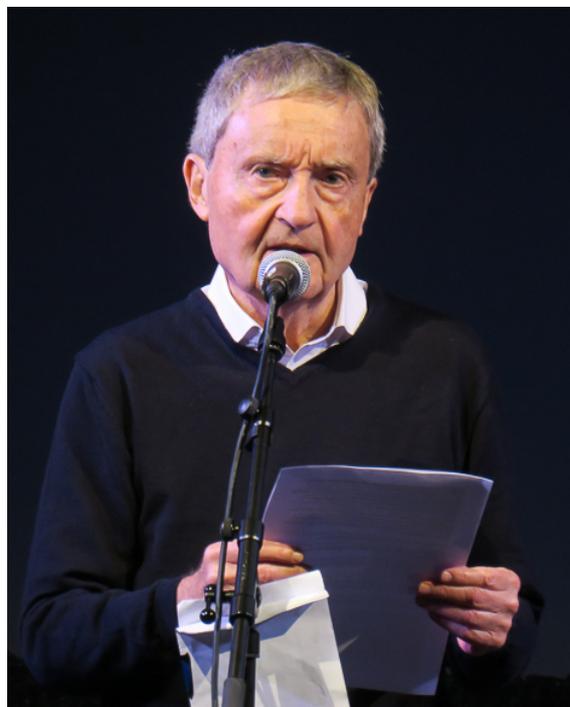


## Tony Garnett Speech • Liberating Arts 2017

I've been a trade unionist all my working life. I have always believed that in unity is strength.

But for me economism, the trade unionism of "not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day", is not enough.

I've always been on the side of revolution, by which I mean a qualitative shift in the power relations of society, so that workers control capital. Historically, the Union movement, and especially the TUC, have been conservative institutions, deeply embedded in ruling class thinking.



This is reflected in the reasons behind this conference. It should not be necessary. We should be celebrating the energetic cross fertilisation between the creative community and the Trade Unions. We are not. There is a disconnect between the Arts and working class institutions. Why? To paraphrase Bill Clinton, it's the ideology, stupid. Ideas are all powerful, they dictate how we think, what we think and what we do.

And the prevailing ideology, the deepest assumptions about society, has always been the property of the ruling class. It is their secret weapon. It owns our history, it imprisons us inside its beliefs. This ideology enters peoples' souls, occupies their deepest feelings and fears. But creative artists have escaped the shackles of this conformity. They are free to provide politics with the freedom to imagine other possibilities.

That is why our ruling class use the market to censor those artists who oppose capitalism. It's censorship posing as freedom. No one is censoring you, but we don't think there's a market for it. Our rulers, as you know, are sophisticated. In effect, artists are allowed to titillate the bourgeoisie with their dangerous ideas, but not talk to a mass audience.

Take the BBC. Its primary duty is to provide a platform for a national conversation. But it has banned class-based dramas where working people are presented from their point of view, in all their dignity. And after the bankers used Thatcher's freedom to almost bankrupt the world, the BBC analysed the crisis by interviewing bankers and free market economists - hardly a word solicited from a socialist academic or TUC expert. And, of course, the BBC experts were all converts to Free Market Capitalism. It was the ideology of the hour. As one of its believers might have said of it, there was no alternative.

But ideologies can be changed. I witnessed the change at the end of the Seventies, when not only Socialist ideas but even the Keynesian version of capitalism, was swept into the trash. The BBC, a prisoner of its paymaster at No 10, has alert antennae, so shifts its ideological stance with the political weather.

In the Sixties and Seventies I put together films for the BBC in which dockers took over the Liverpool docks and declared a Soviet; films which analysed the General Strike of 1926 from a socialist perspective; a film excoriating welfare cuts, showing their tragic consequences.

We found and worked with working people who had never thought they would ever be creative - like a fourteen year old lad languishing in a Secondary Modern in Barnsley, Dai Bradley. He carried the film *Kes*, truthfully and movingly, never having acted before. The great theatre producer, Joan Littlewood, used to say to me, "Everyone is a genius", by which she meant that creative work of the imagination can be elicited from anyone. This was a different BBC, with a different ideology.

Now we are at the beginnings of another paradigm shift in political consciousness - you can feel it in the air. But it is merely a brief window of opportunity. We must grasp it. They will soon move to abort it. Now is the moment for the Trade Unions to rise above their economism and embrace the creative community. The rewards will be transformative.

First, the enhancement of their members' humanity. Think of the Pitmen Painters, the Welsh Choirs, the Colliery Bands. Man does not live by bread alone. If Unions are thinking about the consequences of the digital revolution and robotisation how can they ignore this question? By engaging with the arts their members' minds would be opened to their own talents. It is a consequence of commodification to believe that there is a cohort of "artists" who do all the imaginative work, and the rest of us are just consumers.

Second, the creation of propaganda. We need to fight those establishment beliefs holding back progressive ideas. Lets pit Ideology against ideology. Use of the power of the internet to directly connect with, inform and entertain working

people. Create the Saatchi and Saatchi of the socialist left. Remember. Just one slogan, Bread, Land and Peace once galvanised a class, and a revolution.

Third, the envisioning of a democratic socialist future, one of flesh and blood, in all its complexity, argued out through our imaginations A future we can feel, a future we can aspire to and work for. If you can't imagine it, you won't achieve it. Our creative community can imagine it.

Socialism without the free artist becomes Stalinism. Socialism embracing the free artist is a future when men and women become truly human.

Tony Garnett.  
Liberating Arts. 5<sup>th</sup> November 2017

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## Biography

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Tony Garnett was born in Birmingham and read psychology at University College, London where he spent most of his time acting in the Drama Society and on TV. Describing himself as a Jack-of-all-trades, helping to make dramatic fiction for the screen, Tony has had a prestigious and varied career as an actor, script editor, screenwriter, director and producer.

Tony began his television career in his twenties as an actor, appearing in [The Boys](#) and a wide selection of TV dramas including [Z Cars](#). From 1964 to 1969 he worked on [The Wednesday Play](#) and produced many films for television including [Cathy Come Home](#). He continued his collaboration with Ken Loach with [The big Flame](#), [After a Lifetime](#), [Family Life](#), [Days of Hope](#) and [The Price of Coal](#). He also produced and co-wrote [Kes](#), from Barry Hines' book *A Kestrel for a Knave*.

In addition he introduced Mike Leigh with [Hard Labour](#), GF Newman with [Law and Order](#) and Roland Joffe's first film, [The Spongers](#).

He produced, wrote and directed [Prostitute](#) in 1979 and [Handgun](#) in 1981. Working in Hollywood in the Eighties he produced work as varied as [Earth Girls are Easy](#), the Sesame Street film [Follow That Bird](#) and [Fat Man and Little Boy \(AKA The Shadowmakers\)](#), starring Paul Newman and directed by Roland Joffe.

In 1990 he returned to the UK, bringing to the screen many single films and drama series, including [Ballykissangel](#), [Between the Lines](#) and [This Life](#).

He has also had a prestigious academic career and did five years as Professor of Media Arts at Royal Holloway College, University of London, with honorary doctorates from Reading and Birmingham universities.

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