Creating cultural democracy

1. There is a growing body of evidence (eg in *Culture Is Bad for You*, by O'Brien, Brooks and Taylor) that shows that there are deep, structural inequalities in the cultural landscape, defined broadly to include all the arts and sport, the media, eating and drinking, clothing etc. These adversely affect workers' access and enjoyment of culture; the employment and careers of workers in the cultural and creative industries; and the way working people are represented in cultural products. We know that

   - A great deal of publicly funded cultural provision is made and consumed by a relatively thin slice of well-off parts of British society, and tourists
   - There are significant barriers to working-class people, women, and people from BAME communities who wish to make and maintain a career in the cultural and creative industries
   - Local grassroots cultural production of many kinds – music bands, sports activities, festivals, youth activities etc. – have experienced severe cutbacks in the last few years

   - There have been massive cuts to arts funding, facilities, education, and training particularly affecting state schools and young, working-class people, which make many cultural experiences inaccessible and exclusive

   - Working people, particularly those on low incomes, are increasingly priced out of enjoyment of sports, leisure activities and other cultural experiences

   - The representation of working people in the broadcast and print media and in literature, films, exhibitions and the heritage industry etc. is generally inadequate, inaccurate and unfair
   - Hierarchical and exclusive definitions of culture by funders, gatekeepers and others reflect and reproduce class divisions and sharpen gender and racial inequalities.

2. In addition, recent research (eg by the Centre for Cultural Value) about the effects of the Covid pandemic on the cultural sector shows that these inequalities have grown and are likely to grow further.

3. We therefore need to develop and promote cultural democracy – a new approach to culture which applies the basic principles of social ownership and control over cultural experiences so that
    - current provision is *protected* and *rebalanced*
    - the planning, direction, content and control of cultural experiences are *democratised* and *shared* more widely, so that working people are *empowered* to decide, plan and engage with local cultural production of all kinds
    - a refreshed cultural landscape is *created* which reflects values of everyday creativity, equality, justice, and inclusiveness.
4. Many areas of the country are facing problems of low-paid, precarious employment, child poverty an increase in inequality and a decrease in wages and benefits. The cultural sector cannot itself solve all of our social and economic problems, but neither does it have to reflect or entrench inequality, injustice and be responsible for the denial, misrepresentation and devaluing of working people's lives.
5. The power of cultural production of all kinds to bring enjoyment and enlightenment, to imagine alternatives and bring people together in common experiences, makes it a uniquely effective force to tackle social divisions and inequalities stemming from class, gender and ethnic background.
6. So what can be done by political and trade union activists? Here are some proposals:
    - Develop detailed policies and raise awareness around cultural issues in the labour movement
    - Encourage and lead local campaigns through Trades Councils and other activist networks to tackle inequalities in cultural production, consumption and representation and to develop and encourage everyday creativity and grassroots cultural production
    - Encourage and support creative responses which promote cultural democracy through projects involving music, literature, film, visual arts, sport, the media etc.

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