



# Double dip dangers

***Following the Pre-Budget Report the significance of the TUC publication 'Speaking up for Public Services' draws increasing relevance in today's climate. Public services face a squeeze on spending but it could be an overly simplistic and damaging response to the financial crisis, argues Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC leading to a 'double dip' recession.***

National debate has seamlessly changed. Only a few months ago talk was of a recession caused by a financial crash, building a greener economy less reliant on finance, and dealing with unemployment.

But somehow that changed. Now the public sector deficit is the big priority. It has been a neat ideological trick. Those that preached free markets and deregulation have not been daunted after their policies had been tested to near total melt-down of the world's financial system.

They have quickly regrouped to use the inevitable growth of the deficit in a recession as taxes fall and benefit payments rise – to argue that spending cuts must now be the top priority. The shrink-the-state brigade are now back

in the running, rather than facing the public drubbing they deserve.

But big rapid cuts make no economic sense, as the Chancellor rightly realised in the pre-budget report. The deficit is a symptom of our wider economic problem, not its cause. The deficit will close as the economy grows. Cuts will hit growth – and easily make the deficit worse.

It is crass to say that if consumers are tightening their belts, so should government. If citizens and businesses stop spending then the state must fill in the gap. And we need the public sector even more in a recession. Mass unemployment wreaks social damage. People are less healthy; families more likely to break up; and anti-social behaviour and property crime increase. It is hardly surprising that the survey for the TUC's recently published

Touchstone pamphlet by APSE shows that 92 per cent of public sector workers say that the recession has increased pressure on services.

Users, workers and managers will need to defend public services, but we should not make the mistake of pretending that they are perfect. While 81 per cent of the survey say that cuts will lead to poorer services, 41 per cent think that there is room for efficiency savings.

So what are workers and managers to do? There is nothing wrong in looking for these savings. Undoubtedly there is some waste around – much imposed from the top. Do we need quite so many consultants, so much monitoring and systems build on squeezing out trust and professionalism?

It is through talking to staff and service users that managers can identify ways of better using their resources and can understand the full damage that cuts can do.

There should be no pretence however that deep cuts can be painless. It is time for us all to speak up and say so. We need a proper debate about making public services better in an age of austerity. That will not be helped by some of the lazy anti-public sector prejudice of recent years. It is easy to see why pollsters report the paradox of growing user satisfaction at a time when people think services are deteriorating. One is their experience, the second what they read and hear.

Nor do we need the artificial division between front-line heroes and back-office bureaucrats, used to justify cuts that are claimed will make no impact. Front-line workers need back-up, yet politicians too often move from saying we need better support to free up front-line workers one week to denouncing that support as bureaucracy the next.

In a democracy the political process should make the final decisions about the size and shape of public services. But the duty on those of us who support quality services is to make sure that no-one can take a decision to cut without realising – and taking full responsibility for – the social and economic damage they will do.

Contact: [rmcllroy@tuc.org.uk](mailto:rmcllroy@tuc.org.uk)

The TUC report 'Speaking up for Public Services: The vital role of the public sector in and beyond the recession' was commissioned by the TUC from APSE. It is available to download free of charge at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/speakingupforpublicservices.pdf>



## National facilities management services seminar 2010

# Change is coming!

The soft FM sector faces many on-going challenges. The client base has fragmented with different models of schools and academies as a result of PPP and the Building Schools for the Future Programme. The sector has arguably been hardest hit by job evaluation and the local government efficiencies agenda has increased pressure on FM service providers to deliver cheaper but better quality services. Pressure on the school meals sector has been well recorded. Despite these challenges the sector continues to learn from best practice and innovation. The APSE FM services seminar 2010 provides an ideal opportunity for Heads of Services, Operational Managers and Elected Members with an interest in delivering FM services to come together with fellow FM providers in the public sector to gain knowledge on the strategic issues faced such as:-

- ♦ Identifying and delivering efficiencies
- ♦ Continuity planning for the workforce of the future
- ♦ Making the most of the organisation - testing the FM approach
- ♦ Delivering healthy communities
- ♦ Meeting the challenge of commissioning and BSF
- ♦ Developing an entrepreneurial approach to service delivery

The seminar will also look at service specific issues for catering and building cleaning services in two distinct break-out sessions

**A full programme including booking form is available from the APSE website at [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) or you can contact Mike Egerton for more details and to book a place on 0161 772 1810 or email [megerton@apse.org.uk](mailto:megerton@apse.org.uk)**

