

Not a single job has to be lost

Mark Serwotka

The General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union addressed the Trade Union Congress in Manchester on 13 September 2010. His union's analysis of the situation in Britain, entitled 'There is an alternative', follows.

We have already heard that the attacks that we are about to face will be the biggest that any of us will ever have experienced. Not only attacks on welfare, attacks on pensions, attacks on jobs, attacks on pay, a mass of privatisation, in fact if these cuts go unchallenged we will see whole parts of the communities where our members live devastated and laid to waste. Let's be clear, these attacks will not just affect public sector workers, they will also affect public service users and members in the private sector. For every 600,000 jobs lost in the public sector there will be up to 700,000 jobs lost in the private sector.

So let's not fall for the nonsense – the divide here is not public versus private, the divide is the haves against the have nots. We are speaking up for the have nots. Let us not take lectures from millionaires who have spent their lives in a bubble of privilege about lifestyle choices of welfare scroungers. The real scroungers are the rich who avoid paying their taxes in this country – to the extent of £120bn. These are the scroungers who should be held to account. Benefit fraud is reckoned to be £1bn. Tax avoidance and evasion is £120bn. That is why we have to be bold in our arguments.

We should not accept that a single job has to be lost, not a single penny should be cut in public spending, because there is an alternative; and if we don't advocate the alternative we will start choosing between which are the deserving jobs and which are the ones that have to go. The alternative is clear. The alternative is to collect the taxes that are due, and the alternative is to grow our way out of recession. Currently our deficit is 52 per cent of gross domestic

product. For more than 50 years in this country that deficit was over 100 per cent – twice as bad as it is now – yet we built a National Health Service, comprehensive education and council houses. Now is the time to invest in transport and housing.

I hope we all agree that we should not accept any cuts whatsoever. But the government are unlikely to be persuaded, so we have to be clear – industrial action is inevitable unless the government are prepared to change direction. The responsibility on this movement, on every trade union represented, is not to wait. It is to start planning now. Getting the representatives to meet in every town and every city. Set up the community based campaigning with service users who will support us if we stand up to defend their services.

If we have to take industrial action the onus is on us to make that action as effective as possible to ensure we can win. That is why we have to learn some of the lessons of history. Those lessons are quite clear – when we stand together we are more effective. When eight unions stood and balloted against the cuts threatened to our pensions by the Labour Government, we didn't even have to take the action before we got an acceptable settlement. If all public sector unions and our colleagues in the private sector stand together not only can we win but we can also offer hope and inspiration to people who are looking to us to stand up for them, to stand up for their public services, and to reject the politics of division and greed from the rich, the famous and this government.

ASLEF the train drivers' union

www.aslef.org.uk



**‘To cut: to lower, reduce,
diminish, or curtail.’**

**This the ConDem vision for our
public services.**

Let's not criticise. Let's organise.

Keith Norman
General Secretary

Alan Donnelly
President