

IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR – IF NOT US, WHO?

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Education International (EI) and Public Services International (PSI) have agreed to publish jointly in areas of common concern and we have identified a number of areas where future publications could be developed. PSI is the international federation of public sector trade unions, EI the international federation of workers in education.

This is one in the series Policy, practice, programme. The papers in this series are meant to serve several purposes: to help trade unionists understand some of the issues; to enable trade union educators to run short sessions on education and public sector issues with their members; to provide material for union leaders writing speeches or informational material for wider audiences; and for distribution to a range of interested people. Further copies can be obtained from:

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Introduction

The traditional position of many unions has been that it is management's job to manage and the union's job to represent the workforce in responding to those management decisions.

That position can no longer stand in today's public service.

There are too many forces threatening to weaken and hobble public services—well-orchestrated forces that can and need to be challenged. We must not and cannot accept that the decimation of public services is inevitable. As public service unions we must stop the tide of privatization, the deliberate weakening of public services and the outright sell off of the public's right to access quality and public services.

In too many cases, governments are deliberately choosing to undermine public services. They do this by pursuing a domestic and international economic and social policy that directs public funds from public services into the pockets of wealthy individuals and corporations. They do this by funding tax breaks for the wealthy and private businesses. They do this by refusing to forgive the debt of developing nations. They do this by putting in place global trade agreements that effectively treat public services, programs and government protection of the public good to be unfair trade barriers. They do this by putting the rights of transnational corporations ahead of the public's right to public services that give people access to such fundamental human rights as education, shelter, health care and to a safe and clean environment.

For those who deliver public services, those who believe in them and understand their value, to stand idly by while this wholesale decimation continues would be at best negligent, at worst completely irresponsible. We have a responsibility not only to protect public services but also to fight for improved quality of service, for better access to public services—in fact to fight for universal accessibility of an expanded range of services. We also have a responsibility to fight for economic and social policies at home and abroad to ensure that the public's right to

quality and accessible public services can be achieved. This includes fighting for adequate funding of public services, for the democratisation of public services and for measures that make the management of public services accountable to the public.

The equation is simple: without human and trade union rights there can be no democracy; without democracy and effective public services there can be no civil society. For trade unions in countries in which this equation is accepted, this paper and its implications for trade union strategy should pose no problem. This equation is also the basis on which the two versions of PSI's alternative strategies¹ have been based. Each of these, in exploring the neo-liberal agenda of conservatives of the 1980s and 1990s, has outlined a positive agenda which trade unions can explore **if governments and other employers of public sector workers are prepared to engage in genuine social dialogue where unions are treated as full partners in free collective bargaining.**

Without those preconditions, public sector trade unions have no choice but to explore other ways of using this publication such that their government is encouraged to adopt a more productive manner of working. Core labour standards – the ILO's human rights standards for all workers – are liberation tools and tools for preserving workers' gains.

It should also be made clear at this point that the material in this publication is not aimed at suggesting prescribed solutions but rather processes and principles which unions might wish to explore in their efforts to improve the effectiveness of the public sector.

Public services are essential to the quality of life of the citizens of the world's communities. However those public services have been under significant strain for the past decade or two and in many countries have been significantly weakened. Public services need to be defended and indeed improved – and if not by public sector workers, then by whom?

The PSI Public Sector Working Group (PSWG) has produced several publications which form a suite of work. These include the two versions of

the PSI alternative strategy noted above, a paper (which is being constantly updated) on globalisation and what it means for public sector workers and their unions (including material on the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and the World Trade Organisation) and a paper on organising public sector workers. These will be complimented by a paper still in production on strategies for public sector unions to consider after a service is privatised. These publications are all in all of the PSI official languages and are on the PSI website (www.world-psi.org); The publications are:

- *Public services in a global economy: the PSI alternative strategy revisited*
- *Stop the world!*
- *Organising public sector workers*

The Group intends to produce an educational guide on how to use these publications most effectively in addressing the everyday concerns of workers.

The PSWG has also asked PSI affiliates to provide short case studies which illustrate positive aspects of any of the issues raised by these publications so that a data-base of such studies can be made available on the PSI website extranet for other affiliates to use.

Why reform public services?

There are a number of factors that compel public sector unions to engage in the process of public service reform.

- 1) The fact of government deficits and debts has in many countries been used as a political weapon to attack public services, even though most government's deficits were not caused by spending on public services in the first place. Public services that are portrayed as ineffective and wasteful have been and will continue to be very vulnerable to this misdirected response to government fiscal concerns.

- 2) Most employees want to do a good job in their chosen occupation, but public sector workers especially have a pressing desire to do their jobs well because they believe in the value of the service they are providing. Someone who believes in providing good quality health care for example, and who has chosen to make that his or her life work, will be exceedingly frustrated by a system that prevents the work from being done well. Many public sector unions can relate stories of members who agreed with the privatisation of their workplace because they wanted to escape a system that prevented them from doing their jobs the way they wanted to.
- 3) States all over the world have cast off their role as administrator of public services by transferring them to the private sector and have subjected them to ineffective legislative and regulatory mechanisms, as if that absolves them of any further responsibility, as happened under the Thatcher-Major Tory governments in the UK. It is in the field of regulatory regimes that trade unions must join forces with organisations defending users' rights and play a role in drafting and monitoring regulations for each sector. In the USA, unions and others have been able to use the advantages which come from strong federal and state freedom of information legislation to impact on the regulatory regimes and decision-making bodies established for public utilities. However, they note that the increasing costs of 'freely' available information are beginning to limit the usefulness of this.
- 4) Public sector services of all descriptions are being 'reformed' – restructured, re-engineered, reorganised and revamped - all around the globe. Most workers are very clear about the fact that if public sector reform is taking place they want their union to be involved in a constructive way in the reform. Often the most strategic way of defending the public nature of these services is for the union to take the lead on reforms
- 5) There are governments that genuinely want to reform public services from a progressive perspective; without the involvement of public sec-

tor unions and front line workers their chances of successfully revamping their operations are hugely reduced if not completely eliminated.

- 6) The private sector is not, contrary to myth, universally efficient and well managed. However we must admit that the public sector is often managed on a hierarchical, top down basis that is designed more to protect the political masters than to produce effective and responsive service to the public. This kind of 'British imperial army' command and obey model is the opposite of the decentralised, empowered workforce required in an effective modern workplace. The current highly centralised authoritarian model is very frustrating for employees who know best how to do their jobs well.
- 7) Both because they are public sector workers, and because they are also taxpayers, citizens and users – themselves and through their families - of public services, our members have an interest in quality public services.
- 8) "Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad". In the same way those public services that right wing governments (and too many supposedly left-wing governments, too!) would destroy they first make ineffective. When governments have the long term goal of eliminating a service, they have often first starved it of funds, understaffed it, made it ineffective - and by doing so have made it frustrating to those who want to use it, inflexible, hard to access. The public is driven to conclude that there must be a better way, and they won't defend the system against privatisation or elimination because they don't like the system that it has become. An effective public service is the best defence against privatisation or other cuts.
- 9) Where public services are ineffective it is an easy matter for governments to lay the blame for this problem on the workers themselves, even if in fact the real problem is underfunding, understaffing, overly bureaucratic control, bad direction, or a combination of all of the above. Only by showing the real causes and working to eliminate the problems can we hope to over-

come this 'blame the front line worker' strategy. The public after all sees the front line worker as the one not delivering the service, not working fast enough to avoid the frustrating line-ups, handing out the bad news about lack of coverage.

- 10) There are too many documented cases where what is described by politicians as 'public sector reform' is actually a cover for a process by which the cronies and lobbyists who fund a particular political party are rewarded with what appear to be tendered contracts or asset sales. These are, in fact, dishonest or rigged operations by which public assets or income is turned over to these people, to the detriment of the public purse, the service users and public sector workforce.
- 11) The public does by and large value public services, and wants effective services for the taxes they pay, but they don't much care who delivers them. They don't much care if it's public or private sector workers that do it. Part of our task therefore, is to demonstrate that the best way a public service can be effectively improved is by keeping the service public. The public still has greater control of the service and therefore some say over the improvements, if it's in the public realm. If it becomes a private enterprise, nobody is answerable for it.
- 12) The reality is that many public services have been, and will continue to be, provided by private sector workers, often in competition with public sector employees. Thus, the setting and implementation of standards for service delivery becomes critical to counter the constant tendency to increase private profit at the expense of service delivery.

Finally, a number of the above comments point to a congruence of interests of the public service body or agency, public sector workers and citizens in the provision of quality public services. Such a congruence surely sits well alongside society's basic belief in democracy. A belief that requires individuals to have a voice in, and be able to influence, decisions that affect them. This must include decisions in the workplace – that is, economic democracy.

The conclusion from all of this is that public sector unions have to be heavily engaged in the effort to improve the public services that their members deliver.

Negotiating quality in public sector reform

That does not mean adopting every management idea, every new co-opting theory, co-operating in the destruction of public services under the guise of ‘reforming’ them.

Our members are increasingly faced with words like ‘restructuring’, ‘efficiency’, ‘eliminating duplication’, ‘bringing service closer to the people’, ‘partnerships with the private sector’, ‘partnerships with the volunteer sector’, ‘reinventing government’, and so on. These kinds of terms are becoming part of the popular culture and language. While some of these labels sound innocent enough, even positive, they are often used to mask efforts that are fundamentally aimed not at improving but at weakening the public sector.

In fact it can accurately be said that there are two fundamentally different motivations for reforms, both of which can sound the same because the same language is used in either case, but the objects of which are almost polar opposites.

One motivation is based on the real intention of achieving reform to make public services better for people. Such an approach is genuinely aimed at improving public services and involves workers and their unions in order for the reform to be successful.

Public sector workers can work in partnership in such an approach, although partnership should not be taken to mean that unions have to surrender their identity or their mandate to represent their members. Collective bargaining is an expression of the most genuine form of partnership, based on mutual respect and involving two parties with relatively equal authority.

In fact, the work of improving the quality of public services, if it is to be genuine, has to be placed in a collective bargaining framework – two parties, each

respecting the other, each with different mandates and responsibilities, reaching an agreement that is concrete and enforceable. That does not speak to the style of the process; which can be very different and still successful, but rather to the intrinsic nature of the relationship.

Genuine reform in this context has to be based on the interests of both parties in the workplace so that the real winner is not one or the other but the public who will receive better service.

The other motivation is inspired by the real intention of weakening or even destroying public service but where the rhetoric of “reform” obscures the real intent.

In these cases, unions need to be more aggressive in ensuring that the issue is dealt with in a collective bargaining framework – otherwise the reform will be purely negative and the result will be the loss of public sector jobs and services. Governments of this persuasion will not always welcome the involvement of their workforce and their unions, but they must be forced to accept it.

It is important to note that the kinds of motivations discussed above can appear simultaneously in the same government. Individual government ministers may bring their own pro/anti-union position to their task or, in a coalition government, one or more ministries may be under the control of a party with different attitudes from that of the dominant coalition partner. It is important for unions to deal with political behaviour, not with political affiliations.

In dealing with this kind of situation, public sector unions need to take back the language of reform as well as the content; we cannot be against ‘efficiency’, but we can insist on a definition that respects the core values of public service, not one that incorporates the cold logic of the for-profit sector.

As one example, employers often say they need greater co-operation and flexibility from workers and their unions, when what they really mean is their desire, irrespective of what the collective agreement says, to decide unilaterally on all kinds of issues having to do with the way the workplace operates.

Much of the restructuring currently taking place capitalises on the genuine desire for real reform of

public services, to justify giving management many more rights. Management, in a purely management-driven reform approach, sees reform of the public service as simply an initiative to transfer more power to them to promote, hire, fire and do practically anything to ensure that public services are administered strictly from a financial bottom-line perspective.

In order to be successful at challenging this strategy, we have to fundamentally challenge management's unilateral right to manage, especially their right to mismanage.

This means going to the bargaining table and saying to governments - our employers - 'look, we'll tell you, we'll negotiate with you, we'll put under the collective bargaining framework how effective public services can be delivered.'

For example, a union may be preparing to bargain for the public service and will be taking to the bargaining table the demand that the government start realistic planning for the huge transition that is looming, as very large numbers of workers will all reach retirement age in a very short number of years. The union is pre-empting management, in a sense, demanding that the employer take steps to ensure the public service will work properly in a time of major transition.

Partnership

Danish unions have adopted a strategy they call 'offensive co-operation' by which they mean that the unions will co-operate in reform discussions in a partnership model, as long as the partnership is a real one, but if the process is really just a management attempt at co-option, then "the gloves are off" and the traditional adversarial relationship is hardened. As noted already, this is more fully explored in PSI material looking at alternative public sector trade union strategies for the public sector. However, it is necessary to explore further just what PSI means by 'partnership' since it has become a vogue word in recent years.

Partnership is an active relationship based on recognition of a common interest of public sector

employees and employers to secure the viability and robustness of government or public ministries, departments or agencies. It involves a continuing commitment by public sector employees to improvements in quality and appropriate efficiency and the acceptance by public sector employers of employees as stakeholders with rights and interests which must be considered in the context of major decisions affecting their work and employment.

Partnership involves common ownership of issues and problems, implying the direct collective participation of employees through their union and an investment in their training, development and working environment.

See also below, under the section on 'A framework for partnership to achieve quality services'.

The New Zealand Public Service Association has developed a strategy of 'Partnership for Quality' as a means to ensure economic democracy. That quality service can only result from a combination of quality jobs and quality management leads the NZPSA to be concerned (and demand involvement) in the management of the service at all levels. This maximises the union's collective involvement in and understanding of the relevant service. This, in turn, means that the union must consider the needs of the service, just as the employer is required to consider the needs of the union and its members.

To negotiate for quality - quality of work, quality in the workplace, job satisfaction for our members and improvements in services we provide to the citizens or our communities - we need to go back to one of the lessons we've learned on how to fight privatisation. That is, we need to position the union as an ally of the public, allied against management moves that would in the end deny effective service to the public.

Economic democracy means the participation of workers and their organisations in the making and implementation of decisions on economic issues. There are two parts to this. Making decisions is about process, about being involved in various ways in reaching decisions. Implementation is about administration, governance and the management of economic matters. The pursuit of economic democracy has been a long-standing goal of the political

and trade union wings of the labour movement.

The narrower term of “industrial democracy” is focussed on decision making within enterprises. Economic democracy includes this but goes further: it is about both the production and distribution of wealth, of the gains of economic growth, of productivity gains. As such it is not limited to matters concerning wages, but spills over into areas such as the social wage - welfare benefits, public health, education, etc.

To do this effectively means building links with the community we serve, reaching out to community groups that we can form alliances with, reaching out as well to the members of the community in general. We need to do this for two reasons. Firstly the definition of effective public services is not an abstract one but depends in part on how the services are seen by the recipients; we need to work directly with the recipients of our services to ensure that quality improvements are relevant to the public. Secondly we need to have the support of the public because that will help to convince politicians that this is the route they must travel.

We also learned in those privatisation fights that many public sector managers weren’t any more in favour of the erosion of the public sector than we were and that they were potential allies, either covertly or overtly, who in fact welcomed our moves to defend the public sector.

To negotiate quality improvements in the public service is about a million miles away from the old model of co-option, if we do it as unions fighting for our members and the public.

As soon as one understands what PSI is saying about partnership in this more inclusive context, it becomes obvious that both the employer and the workers must treat the users, the community, as partners. Especially when one is talking of direct services, it becomes impossible to have a partnership focus which has quality as a key objective that does not also include the users and local decision-makers as partners. It means that the very structure of the public services has to change.

It is not possible to tell the users and local community leaders that they are partners in designing, prioritising and evaluating the services meant for

them if they have to fit into an old-style hierarchical bureaucracy. The service concerned has to empower the front-desk worker and the technician who is installing or repairing a user’s services to deal with the user/community in such a way that he/she can make operational decisions which are user-friendly and user-responsive. Of course, for many unions, this will also mean that the way their members deal with local management may also have to change. Unions may also have to restructure to allow local members/activists to negotiate a more user-friendly and open service (and possibly some of the working conditions).

If management is incapable of or opposed to drawing up guidelines of how to work with users in designing and improving services, unions should seize the initiative in doing this.

The issue of direct services at the municipal level is not as simple as is presented in the main text. Some countries do not have a democratically elected/accountable local government system (ignoring the question of whether some countries have a national system which fits these criteria!). There are several countries in which the central government still appoints all regional/municipal leaders and administrative bodies. Whilst there have been genuine concerns in some countries about whether there are enough institutional and talent resources to manage sub-national levels of government in a democratic fashion, this is seen to be disingenuous today.

However, some unions which have lived under such regimes may find it challenging, in a transition to decentralised democracy, to develop a union structure and a collective bargaining structure which accepts the necessity of local government and local union democracy. It is true that decentralisation can, without adequate legal and institutional arrangements at the national level, give local elites power to accumulate all public resources in their own hands and, at the same time, to marginalise unions which have not developed local level collective bargaining or decision-making skills. However, the solution in

dealing with decentralisation is not to impede the urgent democratic desire for local participation but to develop new union skills and structures as quickly as is possible. The objective is to ensure that the development of municipal services is based on the same need to achieve excellence as applies in other parts of the public sector.

It is also important for unions to develop a political position on questions such as local service charters. “Citizens’ Charters” earned a deservedly bad reputation under Margaret Thatcher but many other countries, such as Sweden and Finland, have developed genuine service charters in which the workers and the users have defined the desirable and the possible in a way which legitimises quality public services which meet the needs of users and which make public sector workers feel proud of their work.

Unions have a history of negotiating quality

We’ve had fights about quality improvement in the public services throughout our collective bargaining history in the public sector, although we didn’t always refer to it as negotiating quality public services. A strike in an educational institution about the amount of time that instructors would be allotted to prepare their classes was not labelled as a fight to improve the quality of instruction; it was considered a fight for workers’ rights.

We’ve seen situations where correctional workers participated in job action over overcrowding and understaffing. We never called that quality improvement, but that’s, in effect, what it was.

Unions in the public sector have organised workers, especially in non-government organisations (NGOs), after the workers were told that the union probably couldn’t get them better wages and benefits. They joined anyway, simply because they had no control over their work and no ability to politically influence the development of the service they provided - like homes for battered women, for example.

They wanted to exercise some control within their workplace and be able to influence the way their service was delivered to the public. That was more important. These bargaining units were basically offered a chance to negotiate quality improvements in the public service. The issue wasn’t articulated that way at the time because our language hadn’t caught up.

It is important to note that public sector workers have an enormous amount of information on how the services they deliver do and do not work. This information, coupled with the comprehensive data which can be gleaned by using freedom of information legislation where it exists, means that we do not start from nor need to stay in an atmosphere of ignorance. Information can be powerful.

The definition of quality service

Quality service is an interesting concept. It is perhaps easier to say what it isn’t than what it is.

Quality isn’t the same thing as efficiency. In many public services efficiency is almost the direct opposite of quality; as an easy example, is it really an improvement if a doctor sees twice as many patients in an hour, even if it might be by some technical measure efficient?

Quality services have to be measured on a different scale. In fact the definition may well change from service to service. Quality environmental protection has to be measured in the end against only one standard: how well was the environment actually protected? Quality social services have to be measured against the wellbeing of the clients and the social objectives of the community. Quality health care presumably has to be measured against the effectiveness of the system in preventing disease and treating the sick, against the backdrop of the cost of the system to the community compared to its resources.

Certainly there are two elements of quality that will be fairly constant; are the recipients of the

service satisfied with the service they are getting, and are the workers who deliver the service satisfied with their ability to do their jobs well, and with the working conditions attached to their jobs?

Quality services can be hard to define because each component of public service is unique, especially in sectors such as health, education, welfare, water, gas, electricity and communications. Yet they are often treated, under the theory of “New Public Management”, as if they can all be dealt with and ‘distributed’ in the same general way. When one looks at the different outcomes in each service, this is obviously unacceptable. Is this an accident? For public sector unionists to be able to promote and defend the notion of quality service for each sector, it will be necessary, especially in sectors where services have been given over to multinational companies, for PSI and other ITSs to establish world workers’ councils both to defend the interests of workers but also to redefine and demystify the modern meaning of ‘quality services’.

A framework for partnership to achieve quality services

Achieving these twin goals of quality – user satisfaction and quality working conditions - depends on a commitment by both parties – management and employees/unions - to a genuine partnership based on equality. In assessing whether we are achieving such a partnership, the following are critical considerations (some of these considerations are about the readiness of our own members to act in a spirit of partnership, others are about commitments from the governing authorities). We may not always be able, in our particular countries’ circumstances, to get every consideration in place as a pre-condition for partnership agreements but we should not, on the other hand, venture into this terrain without carefully weighing the likely positive and negative outcomes. The following matters can help us achieve balance:

- Pre-eminently, governments must recognise the rights of their workers, especially through respecting the ILO conventions on the rights of workers. Failure to build from this essential base will doom any effort to involve workers in genuine reform, and without the participation of workers genuine reform will be impossible.
- The process must have a stated commitment to employment security;
- The process cannot be defined by a pre-determined agenda of management;
- There needs to be a commitment from government to fund at least some of the costs of the exercise;
- The process must lead to worker empowerment;
- There must be a strong union with equal standing with management;
- The union and management must acknowledge each other’s legitimate roles and functions;
- Management must be willing to share authority, including for strategic decision making;
- Support and involvement of the membership at all levels is required;
- Both parties must be committed to organisational success and be willing to assume responsibility for achieving it;
- The process must take place within a collective bargaining framework and not be a substitute for collective bargaining;
- Unions must have a say on the use of any cost savings achieved as a result of the process;
- There must be full and open disclosure of information from management.
- There must be an environment of basic respect, trust, and value for all employees and the diversity they bring to the workplace;
- The union must be the conduit for all discussions and decision-making related to the reform process;
- The union needs effective bargaining rights like the right to strike as in any other bargaining;
- There must be monitoring and evaluating of the process as it unfolds. This must be done at the

workplace with involvement in the monitoring and evaluation;

- There must be independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and the members need adequate training in using those mechanisms;
- We need to develop appropriate citizen or services user satisfaction measurements;
- It is critical that the union choose its own representatives for all and any workplace committees;
- The union must devote central resources to develop and implement appropriate education and training sessions for all members involved in the process²;
- The union must be able to ensure that our participation in the process does not restrict our advocacy role on behalf of the members;
- We must ensure that our members will not be disciplined by the employer for exposing waste and inefficiencies of management - we need 'whistleblower' protection;
- The union must establish an effective communications strategy and central reporting and evaluating mechanisms;
- We must reinforce with our members that we are in favour of reform or redesign of public services if the objective is to make them more effective, accessible, and accountable to the public who rely upon them.

We must state clearly and concisely what we are doing - we are challenging management's right to mismanage and we are negotiating improvements in the services that our members deliver to the public.

This list implies, in many cases, an enormous training task. Managers and both staff and key union activists need to develop the skills and attitudes to be able to make both parties effective in reaching win-win solutions. Experience in many countries suggests that better results are achieved if management and unions - as well as the government itself in many cases - undergo this initial training together and if the inputs come from both sides of the fence, as well. The Danish LO training 'game', *Work Development*, is a useful resource for this, since it is explicitly aimed at both management and workers.

Quality services after privatisation

One of our goals in calling for union involvement in negotiating improved public services is to stop the privatisation of services. We want to stop those who seek private profit from public services at the expense of quality services, of decent working conditions for public service workers, and at the expense of public accessibility and affordability. We also want to expand the role of the public sector and reclaim some of the services that have already fallen into private hands.

We cannot ignore the fact that many services funded by the public are delivered through private sector enterprises. Our demands for reform and quality cannot apply only to public services delivered by public institutions and governments. We must also demand that the private sector comply with rigorous standards—standards that protect the public interest, and standards that make the privatisation of services less profitable and therefore less appealing and less likely.

We need to deal with the quality of public services however they are delivered, and if a service is delivered through the private sector, then quality must be ensured through a proper effective regulatory system. That requires workers and their unions to have access to the regulatory process by which regulations are designed and monitored.

When we talk about 'public services' in this paper, it is important to understand that we are talking of services provided by the national/federal government, provincial/state/municipal governments, publicly-owned corporations, the private sector, the 'third' sector or a mix of any of these; as well, we are talking of the accountability of the public authorities for some services which are provided by non-state actors (such as private companies, charitable and religious organisations, etc.). It is the nature of the service that determines its 'public' status.

In other words, for PSI affiliates, a service is public not because the employer of the service delivery staff is a government or public authority but because the service provided is such that the public

authorities must be finally liable for all that happens in that sector: its funding by the state; the universal access requirements for the service; the quality of the service/product concerned - such as the cleanliness of water for public consumption; continuity of supply; etc.

Whoever is the provider, public services are essential to the quality of life of citizens³ in all societies in the world. This concept explains why PSI and its affiliates rank the social quality of services very highly - the notion that public services must be delivered to all groups, without exception, and that we should avoid treating citizens and users as customers.

Trade unions must struggle to make sure that public services are seen as being part of fundamental human rights, as in the European Union concept of “services of general interest” required by all people, regardless of their financial status, to be able to live in a democratic society. With such services, water, for example, can only be declared a human right if its cost makes it accessible to all people in a society. Even if this sometimes makes the delivery more complicated, such an approach requires all sectors of society to treat services for the general good accordingly.

An efficient public service must be the overriding aim of those responsible for delivering the service; the quality of life that they bestow is the concern of all.

In most countries, the process of privatisation in its many forms has shown how the opportunity for the new owners/managers to make money has spawned a system in which workers become the adjustable variable in the equation. This results from the dramatic downsizing which they have been able to implement, often under the protection of revised labour legislation which makes hiring and firing follow the rules of the new ‘flexible labour market’. The result has frequently been the loss of key skills and institutional knowledge. Wages and working conditions have often been negatively affected. The results have time and time again been serious shortcomings in both service quality and in health and safety provisions for workers. Managerial staff are in many cases pressured into filling in the gaps created by reduced staffing by working longer hours

themselves for no extra pay and they, in turn, either fall victim to stress or perform at a lower standard. This is no reflection on the workers providing the service. They want to do the best they can, whether working for a public or private provider, but it is politicians, owners and managers who try to cut corners.

These factors merge so that quality services, quality employment and quality lives all become part of the same essential public sector trade union struggle.

Fundamental tests of the outcome

There are three fundamental tests we can apply as to whether the process is one we should endorse: have workers gained more control at the end of the exercise; is the union’s role and authority enhanced or diminished; and have the services to the public actually improved?

There are five principles that should form the basis of rebuilding and reforming public service. Public services should be publicly owned and controlled. In many countries, the quality of public services must be improved so that they are universally accessible and so that they meet the needs identified by the people. The reform process has to be driven by the people and be democratically accountable to them. The reforms must involve and be agreed to by the workers through their unions. Finally, the reform has to reposition control and authority at the front-line service delivery level.

Resources necessary

For unions to follow this strategy of pursuing this kind of quality improvement in the services their members deliver will put heavy requirements on the unions themselves. Many smaller unions, not well equipped in general, will need to consider carefully the resources they will need for a successful use of this kind of strategy, and may well need the assist-

ance of PSI itself and other PSI affiliates to be able to carry out their plans.

One specific resource which many unions would find useful is the presentation of case studies by unions which have been through some of the experiences outlined too briefly in this paper. Affiliates which have such possible case study material are asked to contact the PSI Secretariat so that arrangements can be made to collate these in a relatively common and useful format.

- 1 See these two publications in the PSI Policy, Practice and Programme (PPP) series: A Public Sector Alternative Strategy – the PSI Vision, (PPP 1995/1) and Public Services in a Globalised Economy: the PSI Alternative Strategy Revisited, (PPP 1999/2).
- 2 This resource item is critical but also not that easy for many unions to implement, and in turn, relates back to the fourth item in the list about the willingness of governing authorities to acknowledge that reform needs to be funded – even if one of its ultimate objectives is to work within budgetary restraints. In many cases - and South African affiliate SAMWU notes its reality in that country – the authorities are usually more than willing to waste funds on consultants fees in order to privatise, but seldom to support financially the type of participatory and information-sharing exercising needed for public sector reform.
- 3 For the purposes of this publication, ‘citizens’ are understood to include not just those people who have a special legal status which gives them voting rights and legal status before the nation’s courts of law but to all people who are legitimate, long-term residents in a territory.



Public Services International

PSI is one of the oldest international trade union organisations in the world. It was founded in 1907 to develop bonds of solidarity between workers in public utilities in Europe, but over its history has expanded to cover almost all areas of public services throughout the world. PSI's membership currently stands at over 20 million.

PSI's aims however remain much the same:

- To promote co-operation amongst the affiliated organisations with the objective of coordinating their activities directed at establishing social justice, and to promote reciprocal assistance in the pursuit of their aims and objectives.
- To represent and defend the interests of employees in the public service before international authorities.
- To ensure the right of those employed in the public service to form and join professional or trade union organisations for the defence of their rights and interests.
- To uphold the right of organisations representing public employees to participate in the determination of conditions of employment by means of free negotiations.
- To campaign for the implementation of ILO Conventions, Recommendations and Resolutions which have a bearing on the well-being of public employees.

HOW DOES PSI WORK?

The highest authority is the Congress, which is composed of delegates from PSI's affiliated organisations and meets every five years. Between Congresses, PSI is governed by an Executive Board elected from PSI's 25 geographical constituencies. Congress also elects a President - who presides over Executive Board meetings - and a General Secretary - who is responsible for the management of PSI's day to day business.

Regional structures have been created to ensure that

the special needs and problems of particular areas are properly dealt with. Within each Congress period, a special Conference is held in each of PSI's four regions - Africa and Arab countries, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Interamericas - in which all affiliated organisations from the region are entitled to take part.

WHAT DOES PSI DO?

In carrying out the fundamental aims of the organisation, PSI organises an extensive programme of education and training for public service trade unionists at all levels. The objective is to help public service unions all over the world to develop into effective, independent organisations, so as to enable their members to play a full role in decisions that affect their work and life.

In addition to education, PSI engages itself in disseminating information on public service and trade union issues and organises a large number of meetings on vocational and technical subjects, including health and social services, workers in public administration, privatisation, trade union rights, globalisation, pensions, public utilities, multinational corporations, international financial and trading institutions, etc. Particular attention is given to women and young people in the public service.

Despite all the efforts of the free trade union movement over many years, there are still many countries where basic trade union rights and freedoms are not allowed or are being abused. PSI is consistently campaigning for the respect of human dignity, and the right to belong to a trade union.



The PSI Policy, Practice and Programme series:

1993/1	PSI Water Programme
1993/2	PSI Energy Programme
1993/3	PSI Worldwide Policy Programme for the Health and Social Services
1993/4	PSI Policy and Strategy on the Role of the Public Sector
1994/1	Managers and Public Sector Trade Unions
1994/2	A Public Policy for Science and Technology
1994/3	Environment Action Programme
1995/1	A Public Sector Alternative Strategy
1996/1	PSI Waste Programme
1996/2	Social Services Policy
1996/3	Report on the PSI Survey on Equal Opportunities
1996/4	Going out to Work: Trade Unions and Migrant Workers
1999/1	Organising Public Sector Workers
1999/2	Public Services in a Globalised Economy: The PSI Alternative Strategy Revisited
2000/1	Stop the World!
2000/2	Great Expectations: The Future of Trade in Services
2000/3	Stop the World! 2000
2001/1	Improving the Effectiveness of the Public Sector – If Not Us, Who?

The PSI Policy, Practice and Programme series includes publications falling into a number of categories: some are fully debated policy papers which have been formally approved by a PSI World Congress; others are more in the nature of discussion papers which have been approved by the PSI Executive Board for release to stimulate debate and feedback so that PSI can further develop its policy in a particular area; others are the production of a PSI specialist committee, such as one on the environment, containing a mix of discussion items and practical suggestions for how trade unions could incorporate work on that particular

subject into their daily practice. Not surprisingly, there is no hard line to distinguish the content of these papers since they are all aimed one way or another at helping trade unions to strengthen their organisational and campaign work on the basis of democratically agreed principles which can be incorporated into a trade union's long term programme of work.

PSI welcomes any feedback on these papers and would be very grateful for any documents which readers care to send to PSI in the event that any revision of the material is undertaken.

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