

WORKERS

www.workers.org.uk

DECEMBER 2006 £1



LONDON'S BUILDING – BUT WHO'S BUILDING IT?



Blair follows his leader | 06



Drax – after the eco-warriors have gone | 08



25 years on, why is Ireland bowing to the EU? | 09

WORKERS

“Go red for green

AMID ALL THE talk of green taxes, carbon footprints and global warming, one country is ploughing ahead with moves to reduce energy consumption on a massive scale. Last year, socialist Cuba declared that the year 2006 would be the year of the energy revolution.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which supplied all Cuba's oil for power stations and transport, Cuba was forced to buy expensive oil from Europe because of the US blockade of the island. This led to constant power cuts and a severe reduction in petrol or diesel for transport. Last year, Cuba signed a deal with China for substantial credits, buying new highly efficient, low energy, low emission local generating capacity to replace its ageing power stations.

Cuba also bought new energy-efficient

cables to replace the national electricity grid. It has begun rewiring all buildings, and has bought five million energy-efficient refrigerators, rice cookers and steamers, sufficient for every family in Cuba to buy in national currency. The government is investing in solar and wind power.

Around 10,000 energy efficient vehicles have been bought including locomotives, rolling stock, buses and trucks, and new energy-efficient motors for existing trucks and buses. And a new pricing structure for electricity which will mean that the more that is consumed, the higher the tariff.

This contrasts with Britain's tariffs, which reward high consumers with lower prices. It's amazing what can be done when the working class holds state power, isn't it?

PFI: no debt for the wicked

THE COSTS to the NHS of Private Finance Initiative schemes have now been quantified at in excess of £53 billion over the next 30 years. Profits for the consortia that have funded PFIs are showing returns in excess of 1,000 per cent at Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust and over 1,361 per cent at South Manchester University NHS Trust.

This £53 billion in debt is paying for only £8 billion in assets – a 540 per cent return to

the investors. The NHS financial deficit for this year is estimated at around £600 million. This pales into insignificance at the daylight robbery being performed in the name of PFI.

The government argues its approach to health provision is non-ideological – it doesn't matter who provides the health care as long as it is provided. But providing over £45 billion in profits to capitalists is ideological, and only a government moron would argue differently.



WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB
ISSN 0266-8580

www.workers.org.uk

Issue 99, December 2006



Contents – December 2006

News

Divers come up for pay rise, p3; Unison health workers vote for pensions settlement, p4; Revolt in national newspapers, p5; News Analysis: the cost of the 'war on terror', p6

03

Features

Blair at his lowest ebb as Bush fades, p6; The eco-warriors have gone – and Drax carries on making itself cleaner, p8; EU focus blocks progress in Ireland, p11; London's building, but who's building it? p12

06

Book Review

The invasion of Iraq: they were wrong, we were right.

14

**NORTH SEA**

Divers win pay rise

FOOD

Jobs to go to Thailand

HEALTH

Yes vote on pensions

UNIVERSITIES

Strike vote at Middlesex

MEDIA

Revolt in the nationals

SHIPBUILDING

EU rules strangle Clyde

SCIENCE

Fight for physics at Reading

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NEWS ANALYSIS

Cost of the 'war on terror'

Divers come up for pay rise

ON THE TENTH day of their solid strike last month – and quite prepared for lengthy action – divers in the North Sea oil and gas industry have settled their dispute with the seven companies involved. They have achieved a greatly improved offer after a two-stage struggle, the first of which was reported in the November issue of *WORKERS*.

Rejecting the employers' second offer recommended by their union, they have through their strike won 25 per cent rises in all rates, with further increases over the 3-year deal period. Of nearly 1,000 RMT union members out, 80 per cent voted and only 16 per cent were against. With better collective bargaining procedures achieved as well, the divers will aim for further improvements to their conditions. For a start, bank holiday leave has been doubled to eight days.

After years of pay erosion the action will help to re-establish the British offshore industry as a benchmark for workers' standards worldwide. It has pioneered many technical advances in work that involves welding and other maintenance on pipelines, well and platform structures at over 300 feet deep in freezing conditions, with lengthy periods in pressurised diving chambers. The job entails ongoing training and achievement of safety qualifications.

The employers include KD Marine, Well-Ops, Integrated Subsea Services and SubSea 7 – all signatories to this new Offshore Diving Industry Agreement which will be in place until the beginning of November 2009.

The strike happened to coincide with the conference, in Aberdeen, of the UK Oil Operators Association, where employers considering the soaring costs of exploiting the remaining North Sea oil and gas feared skills shortages and newly-inspired claims from other North Sea workers. They pointed to the solution of moving towards "diverless intervention" – automated techniques being tried in the Norwegian sector of the industry.

All this comes at the end of an era for the British economy – an end to its surplus on trade in oil and the beginning of a downward trend in value and volume of oil exports for the first time since the late 1970s. Investment is not increasing, and by 2010 production could fall to half of what it was in 2000.

But new gas fields are being discovered, albeit in increasingly difficult conditions to exploit: the global gas company BG Group – with US operator ConocoPhillips holding an interest of over 36 per cent – has secured five new discoveries in the past year. Its latest, one of the biggest finds in a decade, was announced last month. With recoverable reserves put at over 250 million barrels, it is 200 miles east of Aberdeen. The resultant gas stream is destined for the Norsesea oil terminal at Teesside.

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us or fax on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to rebuilding@workers.org.uk

FOOD**Jobs go to Thailand**

IN A CRAZY act of globalisation, hundreds of tonnes of fresh langoustines are to be sent annually on a 12,000-mile round trip from Scotland to Thailand for hand-shelling by cheap labour, resulting in the loss of 120 processing workers' jobs in Annan, in Dumfries and Galloway.

Pledging to campaign against the move by Young's Seafood, Transport and General Workers' Union regional industrial organiser John Holroyd described the losses as "absolutely devastating" for the town of just 8,000 people, quite apart from the environmental impact.

It also represents abandonment of mechanisation – hand shelling disappeared in the British industry decades ago. Twenty-five shipments will be made annually, each return journey taking six weeks at sea.

The factory in Annan has been the largest "breaded scampi" facility in Britain, employing about 250 workers. The Thailand operator is its sister company Findus. This follows the loss of 70 jobs in September when Dawnfresh of Glasgow announced the transfer of shellfish processing to China.

EMPLOYMENT**Record low for manufacturing**

UNEMPLOYMENT has reached its highest level since 2000, at 5.6 per cent on the International Labour Office measure. The number of manufacturing jobs fell by 77,000 to just three million, its lowest since records began in 1841.

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

All this, and expenses too...

GLENYS KINNOCK, champion of the Third World poor, is to lead 70 members of the European Parliament and 84 EU officials to a Barbados resort for a conference on deprivation. This assembly meets twice a year, and is famed for its lavish hospitality. The five-day trip will cost taxpayers more than £200,000.

And the MEPs will still be entitled to claim a further £90 a day in expenses!

The EU, joblessness, and the young

A STUDY by the City investment bank Barclays Capital suggests that the 600,000 migrants from Eastern Europe over the past two years may have contributed to the 2.7 per cent (or some 124,000) rise in unemployment among British 18- to 24-year-olds. This is a much sharper increase than in any other adult age group.

The report said, "it seems reasonably safe to say that a 124,000 rise in unemployment for 18- to 24-year-olds has been the result of the inflow of 183,000 migrants of this age."

Peasants revolt

FARMERS IN Burkina Faso are campaigning against the EU's controversial economic partnership agreements (EPAs). François Traore, head of the Burkina Peasant Farmers' Confederation, argues, "These agreements will just reduce the poor peasants of the south from being producers to being simple consumers suffocated by heavily-subsidised products from the rich countries."

Robbing the poor to pay the rich

ONLY THE European Union could come up with a policy that takes money from the NHS and gives it to big oil companies. In January 2005 the government compelled all hospitals to join the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme, forcing hospitals to pay nearly £6 million, which would have paid for over 300 more nurses.

When the government launched the scheme, it claimed that carbon trading would curb the damage big business does to the environment. But Shell has made £49.9 million by selling its unused allocation and BP has made £43 million.



March 2006, London: aspiring Unison members getting their demands in early...

Yes vote on NHS pensions

UNISON members working in the health service have voted to accept proposals for a new pension scheme in the NHS. The new scheme is the result of 3 years negotiation between NHS trade unions and the government, and is endorsed by the unions. Of those who voted, 95 per cent were in favour of the proposals, supporting the recommendations of their negotiators.

These results will now feed into the NHS-wide consultation on the scheme with a view to it becoming operational in 2007. Major changes include the introduction of a new contributions scheme which varies depending on salary, dependents' benefits and, crucially, the retention of a final salary scheme.

Progress made here is in stark contrast to the continuing mess in the Local Government Pension Scheme, which is subject not only to a massive forthcoming ballot, but also to what we predict will be a spectacularly unsuccessful lobby of parliament on 22 November. Unsuccessful, that is, in achieving union objectives of protecting the provisions of current arrangements.

The sooner the unions and their members learn that lobbying those who create the problem is not the answer, the sooner they will turn their attention to their own strength of organisation and force an acceptable outcome on our enemy.

UNIVERSITIES

Strike ballot at Middlesex

MIDDLESEX University teachers are making progress in a bitter pay battle.

In June 2006, after a hard fought dispute, AUT and NATFHE members – now merged as the University and College Union (UCU) – voted for a pay settlement that would have seen their members receive 3 per cent in August 2006 and 1 per cent in February 2007.

In the small print was a clause saying that "if a Higher Education Institution is in serious financial difficulty it may defer implementation of any of the above increases by up to 11 months in order to minimise job losses".

Only one institution sought to implement that clause – Middlesex University in North London. The local UCU branch swung into action and took the management through the internal

collective disputes procedure which culminated without success on 3 November at ACAS. On 16 November an extraordinary general meeting of the branch was called to decide the next steps.

Clearly not wishing to be outdone on the "extraordinary" front, on 15 November the Vice Chancellor, Michael Driscoll, called the Branch Chair and said that an "amount of money" had been identified and maybe the staff could be paid by Christmas. But he was rather vague on the February part of the deal and equally vague on the National Framework arrangements which again should have been implemented by August 2006.

The branch decided to ballot for industrial action to ensure all their weapons would be place in case the "amount of money" should vapourise, and to see whether further amounts could suddenly materialise once the Vice Chancellor realised that he faced a unified response.

SHIPBUILDING

EU rules strangle the Clyde

THE DELIBERATE neglect of shipbuilding strategy in the face of EU-wide compulsory tendering and procurement rules has forced the last remaining independent commercial shipbuilder on the River Clyde into its third year of severe losses and lack of orders. Last year the Scottish Executive colluded in the loss of Ferguson Marine's contracts to a cheaper Polish shipyard in Gdansk (where is Solidarnosc now?).

Last autumn one of the very few real solidarity meetings to try to bring together the public with all the unions involved was held in the town hall in Port Glasgow

where the yard is based. Building a campaign in support of the yard was agreed and now that campaign will have to be renewed and stepped up.

Unusually, the meeting was chaired by the regional chairman of the Musicians' Union and called by the Campaign Against Euro Federalism – a symptom of the lack of organisation on the ground and of the demoralisation of the local community since the struggle at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1971, when workers occupied the yard to save their jobs.

But they are hanging on – 272 workers are still engaged on building a car ferry for the Largs-Cumbrae route; but beyond 2007 the 104-year old yard has no major orders.

Revolt in national newspapers

BATTLES are erupting all over national newspapers as companies desperate to suck more and more profits from the industry are being met by a resurgent National Union of Journalists. The focus for the fights is the new buzzword, "integration" – the term used for getting print journalists to become multiskilled and write also for the web as well as do video, photography and podcasts.

At the Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph, the NUJ chapel suspended its planned strike in November when the company backed down and agreed to negotiate about integration, rather than simply impose it. The company has agreed that there will be no compulsory Saturday working for Daily Telegraph staff. Journalists there also want some reward for extra work, facing a company adamant that it won't pay any more. John Carey, father of the NUJ chapel, told a meeting of journalists in Victoria, London, last month that the employer had invested hundreds of millions in new plant and facilities, but nothing on journalists.

Meanwhile, as WORKERS went to press, journalists at Guardian Newspapers were waiting for the results of their strike ballot. They are in dispute with the employer over two interwoven principles: integration, and pay for online journalists. In advance of a formal improved pay offer, the company hiked salaries for the poorly paid online journalists by up to 23 per cent – and this while just 3 per cent was officially on the table.

At both newspaper groups, and throughout the country, journalists are fighting to maintain quality in the face of cuts. "Media owners are looking to see how far they can drop the standards. It's our job to see they don't," said Guardian chapel leader Helene Mulholland. That fight is already reaping rewards, on several fronts. At the Guardian, the chapel has recruited 80 new members, pushing membership to over 95 per cent.

SCIENCE

Fight for physics at Reading

AS WORKERS went to press, pressure was building to save the physics department at Reading University.

The students at Reading and the lecturers' union UCU have been fighting the proposed closure at a local and national level.

Since the proposed closure was announced Blair has said that the development of science is equally important as economic stability for future prosperity. (What "economic stability" WORKERS readers might ask?) He also

outlined how to encourage people to take science subjects at school and university.

When Sally Hunt, joint general secretary of UCU, heard the Prime Minister's remarks, she said, "To listen to what ministers, business and academics have to say about science in this country one would assume that the future is bright.

"However, 70 science departments have been shut in the last seven years, whereas in China and India they are opening, not closing, departments. If individual vice-chancellors, like Gordon Marshall at Reading, still have the power to fly in the face of expert opinion and wield the axe then clearly the system is not working."

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

DECEMBER

Wednesday 2 December, 12 noon, Chertsey, Surrey.

NHS Together rally to save St Peter's and the Royal Surrey County hospitals

Organised by the local alliance of unions and the community All welcome. Abbey Fields Recreation Ground, Windsor Street, Chertsey, Surrey. For further information, see www.nhstogether.org.uk

HEALTH

Pay fight moves to Moorfields

FOLLOWING the success at Whipps Cross Hospital against the hospital trust and Initial Hospital Services, Unison health workers in London are now targeting Initial staff at Moorfields Eye Hospital.

This centre of excellence, now a foundation trust, believes it is a power unto itself. Cleaning, domestic and portering staff have seen their wages rise by a staggering 1p this year – from £5.34p to £5.35p an hour – bringing them into line with the minimum wage.

The trust refuses to recognise the Agenda for Change minimum rates (£6.03p per hour) agreed nationally with the unions. Initial is sticking to what it put in the original contract bid. Initial staff are 20p worse off than their counterparts were at Whipps Cross before they took strike action in July.

Union recruitment is under way, petitions across the hospital are being signed, and a lobby of the Trust Board is planned for early December.

CUBA

50th anniversary of landing

THIS MONTH marks the 50th anniversary of the landing of the Granma, the yacht carrying Cuban revolutionaries from their base in Mexico to the Sierra Maestra mountains in eastern Cuba on 2 December 1956. Just over two years later, they entered Havana.

Every year, Cuba proposes a motion to the UN General Assembly, condemning the 45-year US blockade. Year on year, this motion is agreed with a bigger majority. This year Cuba's motion gained a record 183 votes for and a mere 4 against. Australia tried to amend the motion to say that the US was motivated by "valid concerns" about human rights in Cuba, but this was overwhelmingly rejected.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The cost of the 'war on terror'

THE US and British states are using 60,000 mercenaries in Iraq, described by US senators as the 'largest private army in the world'. They have so far cost more than \$1 billion. The Bush and Blair governments protect them from any regulation, encouraging them to commit abuses. There are almost 21,000 British 'private security guards' in Iraq, three times the number of British troops. These 'security' companies are making vast amounts of money from the war. Aegis Defence Services (UK), for example, increased its turnover from £554,000 before the war to £62 million last year.

Iraq has paid £21 billion in 'war reparations' to some of the world's richest states and companies. The USA and Saudi Arabia have both gained, as have corporations like Halliburton, Bechtel, Mobil and Shell. Kentucky Fried Chicken and Toys R Us have also received compensation, for a 'decline in business' due to the war!

This sum is far greater than Iraq's annual budgets for health and education combined. Payments are, not surprisingly, well behind schedule and will continue for years, so Iraq has to borrow from the IMF, with all the hardships entailed.

Afghan officials report that NATO forces killed 85 Afghan civilians in the district of Panjwayi near Kandahar on 25 October. A NATO spokesman said that NATO always used 'precision strikes'.

No picnic

General the Lord Guthrie, who retired as Chief of the Defence Staff five years ago, said, "Anyone who thought this was going to be a picnic in Afghanistan, anyone who had read any history, anyone who knew the Afghans, or had seen the terrain, anyone who had thought about the Taliban resurgence, anyone who understood what was going on across the border in Baluchistan and Waziristan [should have known that] to launch the British army in with the numbers there are, while we're still going on in Iraq, is cuckoo."

Authorised by the White House, the CIA has transported hundreds of prisoners to foreign jails to face torture, endless interrogations and detention without charge. Now the CIA has stifled the feeble EU criticism of its secret rendition flights by offering Germany access to a German al-Qaeda suspect being held in Morocco. In return, Berlin agreed to help with 'averting pressure from the EU' over Morocco's human rights abuses. Subsequently, all the EU countries have muted criticism of the torture practised in countries where terrorist suspects are held, including Poland, Rumania, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq. They have also sidestepped questions about the CIA flights, partly because of the growing evidence of their own complicity.

Blair assured Parliament, "I have absolutely no evidence to suggest that anything illegal has been happening here at all." But records show that more than 200 CIA flights have passed through Britain, including a CIA Gulfstream V jet which flew prisoners to Diego Garcia, the British Indian Ocean Territory where the USA has a large detention centre.

Talk about hitching your ride to a Army's desperate plight in Iraq h

Blair at his lowest ebb

AS THE neo-conservative project finally dies in the USA, Tony Blair and his government are left stranded. The recognition that the war against Iraq is lost plus the overwhelming hostility of the US people to the war, shown in the electoral defeat for Bush in the midterm elections, has forced the US government to look for face-saving ways to get out of the mess it has created in Iraq.

So Bush has subcontracted development of a new foreign policy to the Iraq Study Group, which among other ideas is considering talking to Syria and Iran to secure their cooperation for a solution. This has wrong-footed Blair, particularly after he and his MPs refused a Parliamentary demand for an inquiry into the invasion. In our 'democracy' it would appear that there is no way to hold this government accountable for its actions despite the overwhelming opposition to the war among British workers. "We'll see the job through," says Blair. "An inquiry at this stage would undermine our troops' morale," whilst another four British soldiers are killed by the resistance.

British forces in southern Iraq are mainly confined to their bases, as it is unsafe to venture outside. Their vehicles are bombed if they use the roads, their helicopters are shot down if they travel by air, and now their boats are blown up if they travel by water. The local police have been taken over by Islamic militias. Even if the soldiers stay in their bases, they are killed by mortars fired into the base. Is this victory or defeat? No wonder army chiefs are demanding a withdrawal.

Manipulated

Carne Ross, who was head of strategy for the UN mission in Kosovo, and played a leading role in devising policy on Iraq and Afghanistan, recently told MPs, "I think the presentation of intelligence to the public on weapons of mass destruction was manipulated and I think that the proper legal advice from the Foreign Office on the legality of the war was ignored." He added, "Policy making in the run up to the Iraq war was, I think, extremely poor in that I don't think the proper available alternatives to war were properly considered."

On Iraq, he said the measure of success in foreign policy should be 'minimisation of suffering' and "if that is your measure, our policy has been a rank disaster in the last few years in terms of blood shed. By that measure that invasion has been a much greater disaster even than Suez." Since the invasion, 655,000 Iraqis, 2,855 US soldiers and 125 British soldiers have been killed (as of 16 November).

Yet Blair tells parliament that the biggest threat to British troops would be an enquiry into how the government got them into this mess, and his docile Labour MPs support him.

The sectarian civil war, which he says will get worse if British troops leave, was created by the Anglo-US invaders. Having disbanded the Iraqi Army, they created a ramshackle new army, composed mainly of Iraqi Shias or Kurds, including the Kurdish Peshmerga who allied themselves to the US invaders. These 'troops' were then used to try to quell areas of resistance like Fallujah in mainly Sunni areas where those Sunnis who had joined

falling star. Bush's defeat in the midterm elections and the US have left Blair unsure which US mouthpiece to echo...

as Bush fades – and the war gets worse



US troops in Iraq: overexposed, overnervous, and over there.

the new army soon defected to the resistance. And so, in true colonial style, the occupiers set one group against another. They set up Shia death squads to assassinate resistance leaders and so it escalated to the scale of today.

But the minute that James Baker of the Iraq Study Group mentions the possibility of talking to Iran and Syria to find a solution, Blair sends his loyal man Dennis MacShane to tell the Sunday papers for the first time that, "We must talk to Iran and Syria." Blair then addresses the Lord Mayor's banquet in London with a speech trailed in advance as saying the same. Having subcontracted British foreign policy to Bush, he now finds it being further subcontracted out to the Iraq Study Group and he has to try and

keep up.

But he couldn't quite find the words to invite Syria and Iran to join him in finding an exit strategy. He gave them a choice – "They can either be part of the problem or part of the solution..." "Iran must stop interfering in Iraq," he said, meaning "It's our colony so keep your nose out." "You must stop supporting terrorism and stop enriching uranium," he told Iran whilst preparing for a new generation of nuclear weapons to replace Trident. "You must stop supporting Hizbullah," he told them both, although he would not call for a ceasefire when Israel was pouring bombs on civilian areas of Lebanon. And perhaps his most laughable utterance, "You can either be partners for peace or face isolation".

Isolation from whom, may we ask? Blair and Bush would say "isolation from the 'international community'". So just what is this so-called 'international community'?

Well, you could argue that it's the United Nations. But the body of the UN General Assembly has consistently voted against aggression, colonialism, and in general against the foreign policies of the US, Britain and the EU.

Perhaps it's the UN Security Council. But they did not support the invasion of Iraq. Maybe it's the permanent members of the Security Council who represent the victorious powers from World War II. But despite the collapse of the USSR and China's embrace of capitalism, they will not isolate Iran and Syria.

Loyal Blair

After Hizbullah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and Israel responded disproportionately by cluster bombing Lebanon, Israel's spokesman declared it had the support of the 'international community'. On this occasion, it turned out to be George W. Bush and his loyal follower Blair.

Maybe the International Community is not Bush and Blair but the 118 developing nations attending the Non Aligned Movement's conference held earlier this year in Havana. They condemned any attacks on Iran, upheld Iran's right to develop peaceful technology and urged Israel to accept the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. Or maybe it's the 135 nations at the UN that elected Cuba to the Human Rights Commission when the US didn't even dare to stand. Or maybe the 182 nations who voted at the UN this year to condemn the US blockade of Cuba.

Blair now stands naked with his credibility in the world at its lowest ever. In Britain, he is waiting for the bobby to knock on his door, asking him to help with police enquiries into the loans for peerages scandal. Historically, imperialism lashes out at home when it suffers defeat abroad. Now is a challenging moment for our trade union movement and our class when Blair is at his weakest.

Environmental extremists have moved on from Drax. They never workers, though, the future of energy is something that needs p

The eco warriors have gone – and Drax car



Environmentalist target: Drax, West Yorkshire.

THE DUST HAS settled on this summer's eco protest at Drax power station in North Yorkshire (see October issue, p 5.) The "action camp" has moved on, the police have resumed other duties and the media crews are busy elsewhere. But the argument remains; the debate will not go away. At its heart lies the question – does electricity production on such a large scale pose an insurmountable threat to

our future?

For some it is an article of faith. Renewable energy (wind, wave, solar etc) = good, traditionally generated energy (coal, gas, nuclear) = bad.

For the self-styled 'eco warriors' there is no debate. Power stations pollute and therefore must be shut down. Transport pollutes and must be stopped. They conjure up a picture of a cosy pre-

industrial society of windmills, small-scale craft working, clean rivers and happy agricultural workers swapping produce and making necklaces by firelight. They might relish such a peasant existence, but as a modern nation we have to dismiss the idea. For 500 years we have been moving away from dependence on the elements and human muscle power. We have become sophisticated, and have developed modern industry to meet the needs of a large and active population. We cannot agree to go backwards in terms of development.

On the other hand, we cannot close our eyes to the problems posed by power generation, large-scale heavy transport and all the ways we transform nature to make modern life possible. It cannot be denied that pollution is an issue. But the point is, can anything be done about it? Smog was a fact of life in pre-war industrial cities, but clean air legislation, smokeless fuels and improved technology helped charter a way through that particular morass.

Emissions

This is no less true today. The emissions associated with the burning of fossil fuels are harmful. Carbon emissions, particularly in the form of carbon dioxide, are the most prevalent, and represent a significant threat to health. Last year, carbon emissions for the UK totalled 157 million tonnes, a figure that has changed only slightly in the past 15 years.

But workers are nothing if not inventive. A closer look at Drax illustrates some of the innovative ways in which carbon and other noxious emissions can be curtailed. In their annual report, Drax identifies four significant carbon abatement technology options to pursue (see Box, page 9).

The related question of climate change is presently generating more hot air than Drax. It centres on the assumption that global warming is an undeniable fact, that ecological disaster is looming, and that humans with their dirty industry are entirely to blame. What cannot be denied is that we are presently

wanted a debate anyway, just a photo opportunity. For proper discussion – not a lurch backwards in history...

tries on making itself cleaner

“What we have is not so much an exchange of views as a hysterical screeching of an entrenched position...”

experiencing a phenomenon that could be described as ‘global warming’ much as earlier periods in our history could be described as ‘global cooling’. The history of our climate is the history of climate change. The challenge today is to confirm the extent to which human activity is a contributing factor, and identify the means by which it may need to be modified. This is a scientific question, which demands a dispassionate scientific debate. What we have is not so much an exchange of views as a hysterical screeching from an entrenched position. Battle lines are drawn up within the USA, which regards itself as world leader in thinking on this subject, and everyone else is expected to follow after.

Of course the truth is an early casualty. The question too often is not “what are you saying?” but “which side are you on?” And beware pseudo scientific agreements like the Kyoto protocol, which condemns industry but then argues that some of us have already got it, for good or ill, so nobody else should. It’s a non-proliferation treaty for industry.

The one thing which cannot and should not be accepted is that we are helpless, there is nothing we can do. Human progress can in many ways be described as first identifying a problem and then doing something about it. Wailing, or burying heads in the sand only delays resolution and prolongs misery.

To return to Drax with its twelve huge towers and plumes of steam – should we see it as a beacon of progress or monument to folly? Perhaps somewhere



Photos: Workers

Four roads to carbon abatement

- A short-term solution is co-firing, where coal is burnt at the power station in a mix with ‘biomass’ – a range of largely plant-based materials grown specifically for this combustion purpose. Drax has pioneered the use of tall oil, derived from wood pulp. Tall oil is an environmentally friendly substitute for heavy fuel oil, which reduces carbon dioxide emissions at Drax by 300,000 tonnes a year.
- Further reductions of up to 20 per cent of carbon emissions can be achieved by pre-heating the water fed to the boilers, using either gas or biomass. As in many areas, modern plant designs are cleaner and more energy-efficient than older models. The benefits come from well-designed plant integration, which is an area of strong engineering expertise in Britain.
- Advanced supercritical boilers use the most up-to-date turbine technology to raise efficiency and at the same time reduce emissions.
- Carbon capture and storage technology is as yet in its infancy, but offers scope for the future. Essentially, carbon is extracted following combustion, collected and then transported to and injected into depleted oil and gas fields, spent coal seams etc. All of these technology options are cumulative in the impact they have on carbon emissions, which means each investment brings additional savings.

between the two, representing a stage in our development. We need to control power generation with due regard for the future. To its credit, Drax has consistently identified problems and worked systematically to find a way towards a solution. In the process it has given a new lease of life to the coal industry as a viable component of the fuel mix. In the medium term, coal is abundant

worldwide, and new extraction technology suggests that seams in Britain previously thought unworkable can be recovered, and new deposits extracted.

Drax is the ‘cleanest’, most energy-efficient coal fired station we have, provides on its own 7 per cent of the nation’s electricity, and confirms that modern industry can be a pointer to the future rather than a relic of the past.

Reg Birch:

engineer, trade unionist, communist

AVAILABLE NOW, £10 (inc p&p)
308pp, ISBN 0-947967-33-8

Engineer, trade unionist, communist, steeped in the industrial battleground of Park Royal, the largest concentration of engineering workers in the country — for half a century Reg Birch led the struggles of the industrial working class and founded Britain's first genuine Communist Party.

This is a story to provoke reflection about the tactics and strategy of struggle, about working-class morality, about the place of communism in a modern Britain — and about the very future of our nation.

PUBLISHED BY BELLMAN BOOKS
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB
020 8801 9543

Will Podmore

It is the 25th anniversary of the Irish Hunger Strikes. Despite that brave legacy, sovereignty has been given away to Brussels...

Why is Ireland now bowing to the EU?

IT IS 25 years since the northern Ireland Hunger Strikes ended, on 3 October 1981. This anniversary is a good time to reflect upon the many changes that have taken place in the politics of Ireland since then.

The Hunger Strike, begun when Bobby Sands MP first refused food on 1 March, saw 10 Republican prisoners starve themselves to death in support of their demand for the reintroduction of political status and the five rights associated with it: the right of prisoners to wear their civilian clothes at all times; the right to free association within a block of cells; the right not to do prison work; the right to educational and recreational facilities; and the restoration of lost remission of sentence.

The rights disappeared when the prison authorities, at the behest of the Thatcher government, attempted to impose a criminal regime on the prisoners in denial of the political nature of their struggle against 800 years of British oppression and exploitation.

At the time it seemed that the sacrifice of the ten young men, Bobby Sands MP (26), Francis Hughes (25), Raymond McCreech (24), Patsy O'Hara (23), Joe MacDonnell (30), Martin Hurson (29), Keven Lynch (25), Kieran Doherty (25, and a member of the Dáil), Thomas McElwee (23) and Michael Devine (27), and the international support that grew up behind them, would prevail and change utterly the relationship between Britain and Ireland – which had been used for so long to oppress British workers as much as Irish ones. In the elections that followed in northern Ireland in 1983 Sinn Fein obtained 13.4 per cent of the votes cast without really trying and seemed set to consolidate this success in a new phase of the struggle.

But 25 years on and eight years from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement the picture seems somewhat different. Back from fresh talks in rather grand surroundings in St Andrews where Robert the Bruce held his first Parliament, the political parties continue their will they/won't they dance. Meanwhile the industry disappears and services continue



A mural in Derry's Bogside commemorating Irish hunger strikers

Photo: Zubro, 2003

to decline as Peter Hain, the Gauleiter of the north, practises his acceptance speech as Labour's Deputy Leader in waiting.

Nothing much was to have been expected of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, whose vocabulary of No continues to reverberate through the halls of political dialogue. But Sinn Fein with its legacy of the struggle of those young men 25 years ago should have achieved some sort of progress to show that they had not sacrificed their lives in vain.

Just a sideshow

For Sinn Fein, however, political progress in northern Ireland is only a sideshow. Their main aim is to break through their 8 per cent ceiling in elections to be held in the Irish Republic in 2007, and to do that all they have to do is show that, whoever is to blame for the current situation in northern Ireland, it is not them. Only by appearing moderate can they access the consensus that is the most significant change in Irish politics in the 25 years since the end of the Hunger Strike.

In the Irish Republic no one talks about nationalism or republicanism anymore except as a totem, as an excuse for a few drinks on a Friday evening when the Guinness flows and the songs of Irish freedom give rise to maudlin tears and a

hangover the next day.

Eight centuries of struggle against British imperialism give way without a fight to meet the demands of the European Union and ever more power to Brussels. Even the vote against the Nice Treaty, so shocking to the political class in Dublin at the time, was quickly reversed once the abortion question was resolved and another referendum rapidly organised. It is all very well to ask what the people want, but quite another for them to be listened to when they come up with the 'wrong' answer.

In essence there is no real opposition to the European Union in Ireland as long as the money flows to the corporate sector and the ruling class can get ever richer on the spoils from the big men's table.

The debate on the European Union in Ireland is long overdue. What it means for a country, what it means to be independent, how the working class can regain control of its own future. It is a debate that needs to take place on both sides of the border at the same time, for the outcome will affect everyone equally whether republican or unionist, protestant or catholic. Surely, as we remember the ten young men who died so that they could wear their own clothes in a British prison, it is a debate worth having.

Leave it to the employers, and they will import cheaply the skills needed to build the capital's big projects – leaving local youngsters out of work.

London's building, but who's building it?

ANY CITY has to have a dynamic existence that enables its people to live: be housed; travel; work; obtain healthcare; partake of leisure and trade. London, existing for 2000 years – bombed, burnt and ravaged by disease – has been one of the most successful in rebuilding and regenerating itself through the skills of its citizens.

Love it or loathe it, that process continues today. Survey the London skyline from any South London vantage point and from Battersea in the west to Canary Wharf in the east, and the activity in the construction industry is there to see. Cranes portend the rise of new towers; old stalwarts like the Battersea power station are getting the makeover treatment.

The lower Lea Valley will shortly become the Olympic village. London Bridge will be the site of the 1016-foot high "Glass Shard" with a new station beneath. St. Pancras will soon be receiving its new high-speed euro services – two hours to Paris, via the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

If the Mayor gets his way – and the chances are he will – then an even more ambitious tunnelling project than the Stratford/St. Pancras link will start next year: the Crossrail project. Driving under

the heart of the city from beyond the western suburbs to the fringes of Kent, the Crossrail transit system will enable large numbers of Londoners to cross the city to Heathrow and beyond in record times.

Infrastructure projects such as those listed will employ tens of thousands of Londoners for the next five or six years. Additionally, speculative building projects – regeneration schemes such as the enormous Elephant and Castle rebuild along with the Heathrow extensions and King's Cross development – will provide thousands of jobs.

Crucial

All this on top of the estates and private housing repairs is crucial to London's future and the future jobs of its workers. Over 200,000 workers are presently employed in construction in London. More still are employed in related infrastructure maintenance and repair. Should the Thames Gateway ever happen, then even more jobs will be created.

Beyond the sheer number of jobs – actually only one-sixth of those employed in business services (1.2 million) – the skills of those in the construction trades are vital to us as a class. The specific skills of architects and civil engineers, plumbing, brick laying, carpentry, plastering etc are central to any nation's ability to physically regenerate the built environment and create anew the shelter we require to exist.

We keep those skills by keeping them employed. We may cavil at some of the idiocy of speculative building and despise the greed of rapacious landlordism. Nevertheless the growing need for homes and the burgeoning population of the capital require us, as a class, to take the future of the city seriously. We need to be clear on what we should keep and what needs to go. We should be clear about the need to organise in construction. The London building industry in its entirety is worth £8 billion. In recent years the employers have done very well, with productivity rising since the early 1990s. At that time, 300,000 workers employed in construction produced less than what 200,000 do nowadays.

The proportion of self-employed workers remains the same at about 45 per cent. Such workers remain largely employed in refurbishment and repair work. Employees of large firms employing over 150 workers tend to work in large-scale infrastructure projects such as transport schemes, the Olympics, the Dome. Medium-sized firms usually have a foot in both camps. The value of work done against the number of workers shows that output per worker in large-scale enterprises is worth £141,000; in medium firms £128,400 and in small firms £44,250. Large-scale new projects are where the big money is as far as employers are concerned.

High value-added industrial companies will still need London premises and are likely to increase even though manufacturing jobs will probably see a reduction of about 80,000 by 2016; business service occupation is scheduled to increase under the London Plan and wholesale and retail warehousing will increase as well.

With employers acknowledging skills shortages in London (although not

Housing

SOME 30,000 new dwellings every year are needed to reduce overcrowding and poor housing in London and to keep up with the growth in population.

- Central London needs 107,000 new homes by 2016
- North London needs 47,000 new homes by 2016
- West London 45,000
- South London 42,000
- The Thames Gateway with over 104,000 homes is planned for the East.

All the above need servicing with water and sewerage. Major investment that can't be met by private water companies on their past track records – could be a vision of hell!

Transport projects

Crossrail will account for 5 per cent of Britain's gross expenditure on construction.

Thames Gateway Bridge, linking the north and south banks of Thames beyond Woolwich.

East London Line extension, linking East London with Crystal Palace in Southeast London.

New docking facilities along the Thames to encourage commuting by boat.

Metropolitan Line extension.

Heathrow expansion

Docklands Light Railway expansion with new stations between Canning Town and Stratford.

"Jet" trains from St. Pancras to Stratford in 7 minutes.



Photo: Workers

Construction site, Leyton, East London – across the road from the new high-speed link from Stratford to St. Pancras.

universally) one would expect wage rates to be relatively high, but this is not the case. While skilled construction workers can earn more than elsewhere in the country – £500 gross a week – (hence the lure of London) this is still 23 per cent below the average for skilled workers in other London occupations.

Training

There is a major need for workers to press the Construction Industry Training Board and the Learning Skills Council to get to grips with training – above all for the Mayor's new training powers to be put to use in creating construction skills for the future at all levels. Otherwise, gaps will be filled from abroad. This will leave London youngsters without the wherewithal to enter the industry, thus adding to the already high levels of both unemployment and pitting workers here against migrants from abroad.

Anecdotal evidence of large levels of employment of immigrant labour are not borne out by official statistics – but then the government refuses to collect information about who comes in from the EU, and on its own admission knows nothing about illegal immigrants. Retail,

catering and public services take a higher share. Permission to build should be closely tied to rules about employment opportunities.

For example, the original bid for the Olympics had a built-in requirement to take on unemployed workers from the East End if there could be a skills match. However, out of the first 700 jobs only about 70 went to workers who met the locality criteria.

We have to be sharper, especially as not all job forecasts show construction employment rising forever. Indeed, as projects like the Olympics, Crossrail and Heathrow Terminal 5 go past their completion dates 2012/2016, then, unless

new schemes come on stream, some forecasts indicate up to 50,000 jobs being lost.

We can't allow that to happen – new schemes are needed aplenty if London is to remain the pre-eminent city it is. The Tube needs massive refurbishment, especially if the Public-Private Partnership foisted on the Underground continues to foul up and frustrate all of us who use the Underground every day. The North-South rail links projected on the Thameslink, the East London line extension, the DLR extension to Woolwich, and the new tram systems projected for South London, are all essential to reduce the grind of getting to and from work.

With London projected to increase overall employment to just over 5 million jobs by 2015, there's going to be an additional 800,000 people moving around the capital in 10 years' time.

Londoners are going to need more housing as the population is forecast to continue to grow – it's already over 8 million again and we know not everyone's counted. We should not accept the overcrowding that many Londoners face. Again, we will need the skills to fulfil the London Plan of 2004.

Olympic needs

New housing to accommodate athletes.

New stadia for athletics, football, indoor sports and swimming.

New transport links including upgrade of Jubilee Line trains (albeit imports from Spain).

A new book by a senior American journalist explains why the war in Iraq is the US's worst foreign policy decision – ever

They were wrong. We were right.

Fiasco: the American military adventure in Iraq, by Thomas E. Ricks, hardback, 482 pages, ISBN-10: 0-713-99953-5, Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2006, £25.

THIS IS ONE of the best books on the war against Iraq. Thomas Ricks, the Washington Post's senior Pentagon correspondent, argues that the invasion has been the worst US foreign policy decision ever. With 655,000 Iraqis killed, more than 2,810 US troops dead and more than 21,600 seriously wounded, the occupation of Iraq is a disaster.

The 9/11 Commission concluded unanimously that there was no evidence that Iraq and al-Qaeda ever had "a collaborative operational relationship" and no evidence that Iraq had ever been involved in any attack on the US. The US's leaders presented their wishful thinking as fact – about Iraq's nonexistent al-Qaeda links and about the nonexistent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. So the US's rulers should have had just one target – those who carried out the 9/11 attack. Instead, they attacked three – al-Qaeda, Afghanistan's Taliban, and Iraq.

Differences 'ignored'

A study by Jeffrey Record, published by the War College's Strategic Studies Institute, said, "Of particular concern has been the conflation of al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a single, undifferentiated terrorist threat. This was a strategic error of the first order because it ignored crucial

differences between the two in character, threat level, and susceptibility to US deterrence and military action.

"The result has been an unnecessary preventive war of choice against a deterred Iraq that has created a new front in the Middle East for Islamic terrorism and diverted attention and resources away from securing the American homeland against further assault by an undeterrable al Qaeda. The war against Iraq was not integral to the GWOT [Global War on Terrorism] but rather a detour from it."

Difficulties 'understated'

Ricks also observes that the US's rulers understated the difficulty of remaking Iraq. Paul Wolfowitz, one of the war's architects, characteristically said in December 2002, "people are overly pessimistic about the aftermath."

He also said, "I don't see why it would take more troops to occupy the country than to take down the regime." He claimed the US force would need to be only 30,000 by August 2003, and that Iraq's oil would pay for occupying and rebuilding Iraq. In the real world, the US now has more than 150,000 troops there and the war has cost the US more than \$300 billion.

In a textbook example of how to create an insurgency, the US occupation authority destroyed Iraq's administrative structure, army, police and industries. Oil production is half pre-war levels. A member of the Coalition Provisional Authority described it as "pasting feathers together, hoping for a duck". A four-star general said that it was



A textbook example of how to create an insurgency

almost as if the US was working "to create the maximum amount of chaos possible".

The occupation forces' presence and actions feed the fires. The US and British states are using 60,000 mercenaries, who are unregulated and unaccountable. There are almost 21,000 British 'private security

**NO TO THE
EU CONSTITUTION**
www.workers.org.uk

Say it with stickers

Let Britain know what you think. No to the EU Constitution stickers are now available free of charge from WORKERS. Just send an A4 sae and two first class stamps to:

Stickers
WORKERS
78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB.

[Not to be used in contravention of any by-laws]

War in Iraq represents



...y: the US/British debacle in Iraq.

guards' in Iraq, three times the number of British troops.

The US state institutionalised abuse: its military intelligence ordered, "we want these individuals broken". In the first 18 months of the occupation, 40,000 Iraqis suffered detention in US-run prisons. There were 34,131 insurgent attacks in 2005, up from 26,496 in 2004.

The war has exposed every part of the US ruling class's system as a failure – the executive, the military establishment, the intelligence agencies, the media, Congress, NATO, 'the special relationship'. (Ricks mentions Blair only three times, each time as standing next to Bush.)

The rulers' cheerleaders now lie that "We all got it wrong." No, the US and British ruling classes got it wrong; the working classes of the world got it right, opposing the war from the start, by huge majorities.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

We in the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and others who want to see a change in the social system we live under, aspire to a society run in such a way as to provide for the needs, and the desires, of working people, not the needs and desires of those who live by the work of others. These latter people we call capitalists and the system they have created we call capitalism. We don't just aspire to change it, we work to achieve that change.

We object to capitalism not because it is unfair and unkind, although it has taken those vices and made virtues out of them. We object because it does not work. It cannot feed everyone, or house them, or provide work for them. We need, and will work to create a system that can.

We object to capitalism not because it is opposed to terrorism; in fact it helped create it. We object because it cannot, or will not, get rid of it. To destroy terrorism you'd have to destroy capitalism, the supporter of the anti-progress forces which lean on terror to survive. We'd have to wait a long time for that.

We object to capitalism not because it says it opposes division in society; it creates both. We object because it has assiduously created immigration to divide workers here, and now wants to take that a dangerous step further, by institutionalising religious difference into division via 'faith' schools (actually a contradiction in terms).

Capitalism may be all the nasty things well-meaning citizens say it is. But that's not why we workers must destroy it. We must destroy it because it cannot provide for our futures, our children's futures. We must build our own future, and stop complaining about the mess created in our name.

Time will pass, and just as certainly, change will come. The only constant thing in life is change. Just as new growth replaces decay in the natural world, this foreign body in our lives, the foreign body we call capitalism, will have to be replaced by the new, by the forces of the future, building for themselves and theirs, and not for the few. We can work together to make the time for that oh-so-overdue change come all the closer, all the quicker.

Step aside, Capital. It's our turn now.

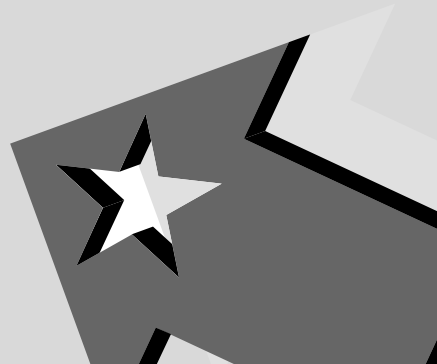
How to get in touch

- You can get a list of our publications by sending an A5 sae to the address below.
- Subscribe to **WORKERS**, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 for a year's issues (cheques payable to **WORKERS**) to the address below.
- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class.
- You can ask to be put in touch by writing or sending a fax to the address below.

WORKERS

78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB

www.workers.org.uk
phone/fax 020 8801 9543
e-mail info@workers.org.uk



Back to Front – Together at last

‘Britain is on the move over health. But the government is trying to look the other way. The health of Britain is being dismantled.’

THE LOBBY of the House of Commons on 1 November by NHS Together, the joint NHS trade union and health care professionals campaign, was successful in that over 2,000 health staff came together. On the other hand, meeting their MPs, especially Labour MPs, was in many instances an exercise in trying to communicate with the dead, or at least with the deaf.

Health workers were particularly aggrieved at the ruthless and farcical rebuttal of the NHS Together campaign briefing. Blair boasted of only 200 compulsory redundancies and only 900 voluntary redundancies having occurred in England.

Stunned health workers could not believe such nonsense. Thousands of vacancies have been cut, posts are unfilled, bank and agency employment stopped, voluntary redundancies are reported across the country.

Ironically, nobody knows what the exact figure is as those who collate such figures – the Strategic Health Authorities – have themselves been cut to the bone. Strategic Health Authorities in London have gone from five organisations to one, losing approximately 400 staff in the process.

This means that London will have only 120 staff planning the capital’s strategic health services, compared to over 500 for Scotland. Yet London has a greater population than Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland put together – over 8 million people, with a commuter band embracing the whole of the south east and with more operations than the above regions put together in a year.

Local demonstrations against cuts in the NHS across England in the past six months have been stunning, but

generally have gone unreported outside the particular areas.

Stoke had 5,000 marching, as did the Forest of Dean. In Stroud 3,000 went onto the streets, in Cheltenham a massive 10,000. The list goes on: Chichester 4,000, Plymouth 3,000, Nottingham 3,000, Epsom 7,000, Haywards Heath 7,000 and Guildford 5,000. Topping them all, magnificent Hale in Cornwall with 26,000. These numbers are only the recorded police estimates, and do not take account of the myriad other marches, protests and rallies that have occurred.

Britain is on the move over health. But the government is trying to look the other way. The health services of Britain are being dismantled. Either by being marketised, the new name for privatisation, into the private sector, the voluntary sector, the charities and the do-gooders, or simply closed.

The forecast shortfall in clinical professionals such as nurses, midwives, doctors – due to age and retirement calculations – has simply evaporated. Not because there are more of them, but because the government has reduced the planned targets needed. For example, in doctor training, a target of 21,000 posts became 9,000 overnight. And the government simply looks to loot the health care services of Eastern Europe.

The NHS has the look and feel of Dickensian England.

The NHS Together campaign, unique in having brought together all health trade unions, has to ensure its campaign is protracted and united. Such an opportunity cannot be wasted.

Health, vital to everyone from cradle to grave, must be one of the reefs which shatters this perfidious government.

Subscriptions

Take a regular copy of WORKERS. The cost for a year’s issues (no issue in August) delivered direct to you every month, including postage, is £12.

Name

Address

Postcode

Cheques payable to “WORKERS”. Send along with completed subscriptions form (or photocopy) to WORKERS 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

Publications

WHERE’S THE PARTY?

“If you have preconceived ideas of what a communist is, forget them and read this booklet. You may find yourself agreeing with our views.” Free of jargon and instructions on how to think, this entertaining and thought-provoking pamphlet is an ideal introduction to communist politics. (Send an A5 sae.)

BRITAIN AND THE EU

Refutes some of the main arguments in favour of Britain’s membership of the EU and proposes an independent future for our country. (50p plus an A5 sae.)

To order...

Copies of these pamphlets and a fuller list of material can be obtained from CPBML PUBLICATIONS 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. Prices include postage. Please make all cheques payable to “WORKERS”.

Workers on the Web

• Highlights from this and other issues of WORKERS can be found on our website, www.workers.org.uk, as well as information about the CPBML, its policies, and how to contact us.