

WORKERS

www.workers.org.uk

FEBRUARY 2008 £1



THE NORTH SEA BATTLEGROUND

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



Aerospace workers take up pensions fight

03



European Union plans Kosovo annexation

06



Running out of midwives

12

IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

All power to the power station

THE DECISION by Medway Council in Kent to support the planning permission for the refurbishment of the Kingsnorth coal-burning power station is to be applauded and supported. The private generator Eon's plan to invest over £1 billion in the mothballed station is also to be welcomed.

Technological solutions to climate and environmental issues are the only real option. The new power station will be state of the art in clean coal technology, with modern carbon capture and storage facilities.

But the final decision rests with the government. Refusal to support the planning application will exacerbate Britain's energy planning problems, guaranteeing that energy shortfalls – power cuts – return to the agenda

as in the 1960s. Refusal to support the modernised station would be a clear indication that the government will not back British companies leading worldwide in research, development and investment in clean coal technology. This technology will grow as developing industrial nations such as China and India – let alone established industrial countries – look to clean coal as gas and oil become dearer or run out.

Kingsnorth would supply over 1.5 million homes in the South East. Energy planning is a long-term project and the government cannot afford to dither or rely upon renewable industry solutions – wind power, solar power, wave power – to meet Britain's (and the world's) ever-increasing demands for energy.

Referendum now!

JANUARY SAW the start of the parliamentary debate on the EU treaty/constitution signed by Gordon Brown in private away from the photographers. MPs will have a little over a month before the final vote is taken.

An amendment calling for a referendum (promised before by all parliamentary parties), tabled by Labour MPs unwilling to collude in this betrayal, needs to build support. Liberal Democrats are attempting to sabotage the

amendment by calling instead for a referendum on EU membership "In or Out" – not achievable at present.

Parliament has a poor record on standing up for British interests against the EU – think about the Nice and Maastricht treaties, and the Single European Act. With honourable exceptions, MPs have caved in before. Time for us all to pile on the pressure. We want a voice: Referendum Now!



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 112, February 2008



Contents – February 2008

News

Aerospace fight for pensions, p3; Nuclear decision, at last, p4; New thinking needed on public sector pay, p5; News Analysis: Inside the EU's structural funds, p6

03

Features

European Union plans to annex Kosovo, p6; Railways: struggle ahead as bungling employers look for more profit, p8; North Sea oil workers flex their muscle, p10; Death rates on the rise as midwifery hours fall, p12

06

CPBML at 40

1969. Focus on the engineers, and on Britain, p14

14

**AEROSPACE**

Goodrich pensions fight

EDUCATION

Teachers' pay offer

ENERGY

Nuclear power decision

HEALTHCARE

Cuba vs California

ECONOMY

Deficit grows

PUBLIC SECTOR

Pay: new thinking needed

TRANSPORT

All aboard the gravy train

NEWS ANALYSIS

The EU's budget

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

EURONOTES

The latest from Brussels

Aerospace strike for pensions

AROUND 1,600 workers at the Goodrich aerospace sites in Hall Green and Marston Green Birmingham, in Hemel Hempstead, in Liverpool, and at one of Wolverhampton's biggest factories, have voted in favour of strike action after proposals to change the pension scheme took effect on 1 January, closing the final salary scheme to new workers.

Staff at Goodrich Engine Control Systems, which was Lucas Aerospace until bought by the US Goodrich Corporation in 2002, fear that changes to their pension scheme – which will see all members paying an extra 3.5 per cent each month – will leave them worse off when they retire.

Unite regional officer Andy Taylor said: "This is outrageous behaviour from an aerospace company which has a well-funded pension scheme and a £7 billion order book. Our members will not accept the decision to close the final salary pension scheme to new entrants and are calling for watertight assurances concerning the scheme for existing members."

The Unite union said its members backed industrial action by 2 to 1 in protest at the changes. The union warned that industrial action would have a "serious knock-on effect" on the aerospace industry because Goodrich is a leading supplier of many aircraft systems.

Goodrich spokesman Martin Butler insists the changes are due to volatile interest rates. The company supplies fuel system control equipment for all the major aero engine manufacturers, including Rolls-Royce, and aircraft flight control equipment from its European sites.

A fitter at the Wolverhampton site, said: "There are 3,000 employees in the pension scheme and 1,600 of them are in the union, which is more than half the workforce at six sites. If we strike it would bring production to its knees."

The newly defined contributions scheme will mean a set level of pension would not be guaranteed. In recent years companies like Rolls-Royce have actually re-opened their final salary schemes in an effort to retain skilled workers.

EDUCATION**Teachers' pay offer**

TEACHERS in England and Wales have been offered a three-year pay deal which breaks the Treasury's public sector cap of 2 per cent. The government has accepted the review board's recommendation of 2.45 per cent this year, followed by two years of 2 per cent but with a review next year.

The figures and 2009 review have been influenced by a strong initial campaigning position adopted by the NUT, echoed in part by the NAS/UWT, that teachers would not tolerate a low offer this year. There has been much fighting talk, and good campaign literature sent out to NUT members. The NUT executive is due to decide on a strike ballot as WORKERS goes to press.

The government has made a clever offer, wanting to remove teachers from potential public sector pay bother over the winter. But with inflation running even on official figures (Retail Prices Index) at 4 per cent (including housing, fuel and energy) this offer is a pay cut. Schools will receive only 2.1 per cent to pay for increased salaries.

The NAS/UWT will poll members, although general secretary Chris Keates has broadly welcomed the deal. The NUT predicts a "robust response". The real problem, hardly mentioned, is that teachers have no negotiating rights.

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

EURONOTES

The latest from Brussels

No right to strike, says Court

THE EUROPEAN Court of Justice has ruled against Swedish unions blockading a Latvian construction company that employed cheap labour. The right to strike is supposedly a fundamental right under EU law. The Court said the action was against the public interest and the free movement of services. A previous judgement (the 'Viking' case) held that the right was limited by EU or national law, or if it affected the "smooth operation of the market". EU law does nothing to legitimise strikes and makes them illegal in many circumstances.

Capitalism's health paradise postponed

THE EUROPEAN Commission has delayed its proposal to "marketise" healthcare after protests from Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands. The official reason for withdrawing the draft directive on cross-border healthcare was an "over-loaded agenda". Commission officials have now admitted it was member states that "thought it would destroy their national health systems". This directive could still be passed by qualified majority vote because it was proposed under the internal market. The British government did not object.

The directive would wreck the NHS and end national control over the unique British healthcare system. The NHS would be compelled to fund outpatient treatments in Europe if the patient had been referred by a medical professional and was suffering delay. It would enable patients to seek private treatment in foreign hospitals. This is similar to the Conservatives' "patient's passport" proposal, rejected at the last election.

The directive proposes a new EU health committee chaired by the Commission, which sees a greater role for itself in health policy. The revived Constitutional Treaty would end a member state's veto over public health issues. The Commission may also move towards setting clinical priorities. For example the directive provides for the setting up of EU "reference centres" – (specialist centres of excellence for "patients who have conditions requiring a particular concentration of resources or expertise"). This would soon lead to arguments for greater specialisation and rationalisation of health care on an EU-wide basis.



The ageing Magnox power station at Oldbury: due to be decommissioned this December.

Nuclear decision, at last

FINALLY, AFTER MUCH dithering, the government has brought out its white paper on nuclear power. Nuclear power stations currently provide 20 per cent of our electricity, but they are all scheduled to close over the next 15 years or so. They need to be replaced to ensure Britain is not over-dependent on foreign sources of energy, such as the Middle East or Russia, as North Sea oil and gas runs out – and to ensure that we have the energy we need to run industry and light our homes. As it is, they may not be built in time to avoid electricity shortages.

Well-constructed nuclear power plants are extremely clean, and radioactive material produces vastly more energy than the equivalent amount of fossil fuel. One nuclear fuel pellet about two centimetres long produces the same amount of electricity as 1.5 tonnes of coal. Nuclear fission produces no greenhouse gases. Renewable energies can and should be encouraged, but the idea that wind and solar power could provide Britain's energy needs is simply wishful thinking. They currently produce about 2 per cent of the world's energy.

There are four existing reactors in Scotland but the Scottish National Party, unhelpful as ever, says that it will use planning laws, which are devolved to Holyrood, to fight the construction of any replacements.

Six British energy companies, including British Energy, are likely to put in bids to build these new power stations – although the most experienced builder of nuclear stations, Westinghouse, was sold by government-owned BNFL to Toshiba in 2006. We need to ensure that British firms get the contracts – and that the stations get built.

HEALTH

Cuba vs California

AS CALIFORNIA'S health care collapses, Cuba announces new health advances.

The latest Healthcare Bill passed by the California Assembly has been severely criticised by the California Nurses Association on the following grounds:-

- Insurance companies can continue to deny medical care they brand as not medically necessary or experimental, deny access to specialists, and deny tests – even when those care options or treatments are recommended by a physician.
- Insurance companies can continue to charge whatever they want. The bill has no limits on escalating premiums, deductibles, or other rising costs.
- Individuals are still forced to buy insurance without guarantees of what they are buying or whether they can afford it.
- The bill fails to include provision for

employer contributions.

Compare this situation in the richest state in the USA, with the 5th or 6th biggest economy in the world, with the island of Cuba, some 50 miles from the US state of Florida.

For the second consecutive year, Cuba has achieved an infant mortality rate of 5.3 for every 1,000 live births: the lowest in the country's history. Together with Canada, Cuba has attained a lower figure than those registered by other countries in the Americas, in a genuine expression of the most fundamental of human rights. The global infant mortality rate is 52 per 1,000 live births. In Latin America it averages 26 per 1,000.

As experts acknowledge, the true measure of a nation's progress is the quality of care provided for its children, their health and protection, material safety, their education and social care. The infant mortality rate is a key indicator of those advances.

ECONOMY**Deficit grows**

IN 1990, manufacturing was 23 per cent of the economy; in 2005, 14 per cent. So it's no surprise that in 2007's third quarter, our trade deficit was £20 billion (5.7 per cent of GDP). The deficit grew again in the fourth quarter: on trade it was £4.4 billion in November, up from £4.3

billion in October. The goods trade deficit widened to £7.38 billion, compared with October's £7.35 billion.

This size of monthly deficit used to be considered a disaster when it was for the whole of a year. The City was said to be "surprised" by the size of the deficit. Data from the Office for National Statistics showed an "unexpected" decline in our manufacturing sector in November. They don't seem to get anything right, do they?

Pay: new thinking needed



JUST BEFORE the Christmas break the TUC launched a unified and coordinated campaign of all public sector trade unions over pay – the rejection of the 2 per cent ceiling and diminishing offers during the next three years. Cynics will point out that if you want a campaign to be still-born then you ask the TUC to lead it. However all the public sector unions affiliated to the TUC turned up to what was effectively a zero reported campaign launch.

So what is going to happen? All public sector trade unions are going to meet monthly. All are going to coordinate their claims and data supporting their claims. They are going to lodge their claims early. They are going to consult the members about what will be in the claim. They are going to consult each other. They are going to "build" support for a campaign. And that's it.

There is a lot of rhetoric about "smashing" Brown's wage restraint policy but little else. Workers in local government are looking at the comprehensive spending review offering spending increases on services of 1 per cent, 0.7 per cent and nothing during the next three years coupled with a 3 per cent efficiency saving – and seeing a cut.

Yet any minister who has paid the slightest attention to the sabre rattling of Unison over pay in the last 4 years will have noticed the absence of 75 per cent of the membership from even returning their ballot papers. Let alone that Unite and the GMB have rolled over without even going through the charade of a ballot.

There is also the prospect of dramatically extended "shared services provision" across local authorities, with outsourced services if not direct externalisation happening. The concept of the "public sector" worker having comparable terms and conditions and flexibility to transfer between parts of the shared public service – be it local government, civil service or NHS – is being actively developed.

Old boundaries of local services are being deliberately undermined. The breakdown of local and central government roles, devolution, regionalisation, dismantling of the British state under EU directives will destroy traditional areas of demarcation and distinctive roles. Likewise in health we see the concept of an NHS Passport promoted – you are a worker in the NHS but can move or be moved wherever the NHS requires you. The idea that the NHS provides a public service free at point of need irrespective of who owns the means to deliver that service is fundamental to government thinking – a NHS Passport passing seamlessly through myriad private companies, transferred so often that identity is lost. Worse, in the NHS most unions have rushed headlong to adopt pay review bodies to determine their pay, effectively giving up the right to bargain. Three-year deals have been the norm in the NHS for the past six years, so it is no surprise that the government is talking of another three-year deal.

As WORKERS has said previously there is the need for new thinking over public sector pay and how we improve it: the old days of big public sector pay disputes are gone. The challenge to all public sector unions is how to retain membership, bargaining, recognition, density, influence, and so on, in what is a dwindling public sector but growing alternative private, voluntary, and public partnership sector providing services to the public. Brown has clearly indicated he would welcome a public fight with the trade unions over pay – partly so that he can project his adopted aura of Thatcher reincarnate as well as go down in flames along with all his other failing policies. Getting the public sector TUC affiliates together is a start but new thinking, new ideas, new arguments are required to convince members that they can fight for wages – and win.

Photo: Workers

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****FEBRUARY**

Tuesday 26 February, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1, 7.30pm.

EU Constitution: Referendum Now!

Public meeting organised by the CPBML and WORKERS. Worried about the way the government plans to push through the new EU treaty/constitution? Want to discuss what we can do about it? Come to the meeting. Join the resistance. All welcome. Nearest tube, Holborn.

TRANSPORT**All aboard the gravy train**

Photo: Workers

RAIL USERS face price increases of between 4 and 11.1 per cent as the rail companies hike prices – while passenger satisfaction with the rail companies' performance is at its lowest since 2005.

The four major companies involved in passenger services produced the following profit returns: Stagecoach £72.3 million, chief executive's pay £1.04 million; Go-Ahead £66.1 million, chief executive's pay £964,000; National Express £49.9 million, chief executive's pay £864,000; First Group £108.8 million, chief executive's pay £745,000.

The worst performing rail company First Great Western (part of the First Group) which only managed to get 66 per cent of its trains to run on time even with a host of getouts and loopholes, added a performance bonus of £254,000 to the Chief Executive's £754,000. The Chief Executive of Network Rail received £888,000 and his deputy £809,000, despite the failure and chaos of failed planned engineering work over Christmas.

Average chief executives' wage increases were in the region of 13 per cent. The need for public ownership, accountability and efficiency in the rail industry cries out against the profits and rewards paid to failures.

Inside the EU's structural funds

Photo: Workers



THE FOUR EU Structural and Cohesion Funds give the EU powers over investment, jobs, agriculture and fisheries. They account for over one third of its budget: 1) the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF), which is supposed to reduce imbalances between regions and social groups; 2) the European Social Fund (ESF), which supports the EU's employment policy; 3) the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, for agriculture and rural areas; and 4) the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), for the fishing industry.

Where do the funds come from? If they come from our own pockets – as they must certainly do - why do we have to get them back via the Brussels bureaucrats? Why not cut out the middleman and spend the money ourselves?

Have the Structural Funds worked? The European Commission's First Cohesion Report, in 1996, revealed that regional differences in unemployment, income disparity and poverty have increased over the past decade in several member states, especially the UK, Italy and France.

The waste machine

Much of what finally arrives from Brussels is wasted on administration. Simply running the funds costs Britain £670 million a year. Then the money is spent ineffectively. The British government's own National Strategic Reference Framework, published in October 2006, surveyed how the funds have been spent and indicted Labour's record on investment. It also showed how the government has failed to improve education.

Only 10 per cent of the Structural Funds are spent in the poorest fifth of areas. The bureaucratic way in which the EU runs the funds leads to fraud as well as huge administrative costs.

Problems with the funds are one of the main reasons why the European Court of Auditors has not cleared the EU budget for thirteen years in a row. According to the court's latest report, only 31 per cent of the projects audited "were found to be free from error".

The Court found that at least 4 billion euros of the money that the EU Commission handed out "should not have been". Italy's tax and fraud investigator, Guardia di Finanza, noted in its latest annual report that 433 million euros of EU money was subject to outright fraud in Italy alone in 2006.

Half a century ago it was the fascist plans for the ethnic cleansing of t footsteps...

European Union plans

THE EUROPEAN Union is preparing for the annexation of part of a sovereign country, egged on by the USA. Having encouraged the break-up of Yugoslavia by offering first German and then EU recognition to a breakaway Croatia, the EU then offered Slovenia membership, sent troops to Macedonia and along with the US encouraged Muslim separatists in Bosnia Herzegovina with the US actually arming them. The US then armed and encouraged the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), itself a front for gangsters and drug smugglers.

The EU and the US, behind the mask of NATO, bombed what remained of Yugoslavia and occupied the Serbian province of Kosovo. They then encouraged Montenegro to break with Serbia. With the Serbian economy on its knees, US and EU companies bought up Serbian state-owned assets at a knock down price. Now they jointly plan for the EU to annex Kosovo and send a 1,800 strong "police and justice" mission to carry out this task without the consent of and in defiance of the sovereign nation of which Kosovo is an integral part.

This may sound like something out of 19th or 20th century imperialism, but it is the reality that is the EU and the state of capitalism today, looking for any means to breathe life into a capitalism in decline. It is like the way the fascist powers dealt with Yugoslavia and Albania when those countries were invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany and Italy, respectively, during World War II.

In 1939, Mussolini's Italy invaded Albania and installed a collaborationist government. In 1941, Hitler's Germany occupied Yugoslavia, and the bulk of what is today's Kosovo and Metohija were placed under Italian and Albanian collaborationist rule and annexed to Albania. In 1942 the Albanian fascist leader, Mustafa Kroja, said, "The Serbian population in Kosovo should be removed as soon as possible. Serbian settlers should be killed." After the collapse of Italy, Germany took control of Albania and Kosovo and encouraged armed units of Kosovo Albanians to exterminate Serbs (who were associated with the partisan resistance) and Jews.

German troops

In June 1999 as German troops entered Prizren in Kosovo for the first time since World War II, an NBC correspondent reported:

"I was at dinner with a kind Kosovo Muslim family the other night when talk turned to the German NATO troops that rolled into town to make the city the headquarters of its peacekeeping district. The patriarch of the family, a man old enough to remember the last time German troops rolled into Prizren, said they all felt safe now. 'The German soldiers are excellent,' he said. Then he added, 'I should know, I used to be one!' Then he raised his arm in a Nazi salute and said 'Heil' and laughed merrily."

Today's KLA leaders, who continue with that fascist tradition, are quoted as describing the situation in 1941 as a "liberation" by the Germans and one KLA death squad leader known as "the Teacher" has said he dreams of a Kosovo without Serbs. The only difference between the two scenarios is the context. Then the fascist powers of Germany and Italy were trying to create an empire from the Atlantic to the Urals on behalf of capitalism, not only German capitalism that had brought the Nazis to power, but the many other sections of world capitalism that were assisting them.

ist powers of Italy and Germany that marched into Kosovo with the Serbs. Now the European Union is following in their

to annex Kosovo



Serbian industry: the EU is outraged that privatisation has not sold it into EU hands.

Fascism is the dictatorship of capitalism, and it is quite interesting that the European Union wants to incorporate a fascist element in the form of anti-Serb Kosovo. The EU has institutionalised unfettered capitalism and tried to outlaw socialism. It would like to gobble up countries in the Balkans and eastern

Europe including all of former Yugoslavia and Albania, Ukraine, Belarus, Turkey and Georgia. In this they are enthusiastically supported by the USA. Of course, all would be expected to join NATO first, so it is an anti-Russian project of the USA.

“Hang on!” you might say. “That sounds remarkably like an empire from the

Atlantic to the Urals!” And so it is. The annexation of Kosovo must be seen in this context as well. The continuing expansion eastwards of this empire using whatever means is designed to achieve Hitler’s desired outcome, this time in alliance with the USA.

Serbian President Vojislav Kostunica has said that the EU will have to decide between moves towards Serbian integration to the EU as an internationally recognised sovereign state, or the creation of a quasi state on Serbian territory without Serbian integration into the EU. Moving to secure that position, Serbia is developing its links with Russia.

Hungary and Austria thwarted

The privatisation of its main state-owned energy company NIS, which was expected to be handed on a plate to either Hungarian or Austrian energy companies, is now likely to result in its sale to Gazprom, the giant Russian state-owned energy company. Serbia wants Russian oil and gas pipelines from the Black Sea to pass through its country before they continue to EU countries. This has resulted in EU screams of “unfair competition” and “foul”, as if Russia would take any notice.

Why should we be worried about these developments? Because this continual move eastwards by the EU is what is making Russia take steps to defend itself. Once the EU has its own army plus US Star Wars missiles, how do you think Russia would feel and how long would it be before the outbreak of hostilities?

The EU/NATO has shown that it is prepared to bomb countries before absorbing them and the real prize may be Russia itself. After all, the US and the EU thought they had Russia in their hands when Yeltsin was its President. It seems to have somehow slipped through their fingers.

Tony Blair has been touting himself around EU capitals as a future unelected President of the EU if the constitutional treaty is implemented. If this should happen, and given his recent conversion, perhaps he will rename the EU as the Holy Roman Empire.

Over-running engineering works, chaos on the tracks, buses instead of trains – and a lot more... opponents said it would – and a lot more...

Railways: struggle ahead on the line as bus

THE FAILINGS of the nation's fragmented and privatised railway were highlighted over the Christmas period as major engineering works overran, and huge fare increases were announced. Network Rail, brought in to overcome the chaotic and dangerous situation on the tracks after privatisation, has failed to deliver thanks to its continuing reliance on the contracting system condemned after the Hatfield and Potters Bar crashes.

Network Rail closed the West Coast Main Line for 8 days as new track, signalling, and overhead electric wires were installed at Rugby. The work was originally scheduled over 4 days, with this vital route to the Midlands, the North West and Scotland reopening on New Year's Eve, a particularly busy day as people travel to relatives and friends for New Year celebrations.

Just 24 days before, having taken huge numbers of bookings for their trains, Virgin were told that Network Rail would need another day, and the route would remain closed. Passengers would be put on buses around the closure, adding up to 2 hours on their journeys. Virgin made a complaint to the Office of Rail Regulation. At 3pm on 31 December, Network Rail announced that the work wouldn't be finished on time, and it was not until 3 January that any indication was given of when the line would reopen.

Network Rail does not employ engineering workers for such operations. Instead, nine contractors were involved, and all nine reportedly were intending to use the same few casuals and agency staff to do the work! In desperation, Network Rail then rushed in its own maintenance staff to get the job finished.

Fiascos

Meanwhile, London's Liverpool Street station was also closed for an extra day, with workers attempting to get back to their Central London jobs on 2 January finding that the trains weren't running. The same problem, a lack of staff, was blamed, and no wonder – some staff had been redeployed to Rugby!

Network Rail has been telling



Platform 1, King's Cross, London. The train is owned by one company, the track by another, and

everyone who will listen that they want to be a "world-class railway". Industry insiders have instead called the problems over Christmas as a "world-class cock up". These fiascos followed the announcement a few days earlier that Network Rail's chairman, Ian McAllister, had been knighted "for services to the transport industry" – and that passengers were going to have to pay up to 10 per cent more on fares.

Network Rail has already been fined £2.4 million for the failure to complete on time a major resignalling scheme at Portsmouth over the previous Christmas, and it is expected that the Office for Rail

Regulation will levy a much greater fine this time. Train companies like Virgin will also be seeking large sums in compensation, although only some of this will find its way to passengers inconvenienced by the line closures.

Contractor culture

The unions have condemned the contractor culture that Network Rail continues to perpetuate. Network Rail has seen the clear advantages of having taken maintenance off contractors four years ago, running it themselves. Senior managers are now making noises (belatedly) about ditching contractors and

Instead of trains: privatisation is delivering everything its

Angling employers look for more profit



Photo: Workers

...d the station by yet another company...

doing the track renewals “in house”. However, even if the company does act, it will still be using contractors for other work, including signalling renewals.

Whatever Network Rail does, it cannot escape responsibility for the overruns. There has clearly been an issue with planning both major renewal projects and maintenance over many years, and it seems that this was at the root of the problems. It doesn't help that significant numbers of skilled staff whose roles were related to planning and project management were got rid of over the last few years.

Indeed, Network Rail's management of

maintenance over recent times has been woeful. The derailment of a Virgin train in Cumbria last year revealed major problems of management, so much so that safety watchdog HMRI has served an improvement notice on the company instructing it to get things sorted out.

Staff working in Network Rail are under enormous pressure to produce results, partly driven by a universally hated performance-related pay system, and partly by a bonus system which rewards directors with huge six-figure sums, while the workers' meagre bonuses are withheld by the company at the slightest excuse.

An attempt to withhold bonuses in Scotland from signallers who had the temerity to take strike action when the company failed to honour agreements was firmly rebuffed by RMT. The staff working on maintenance in the Cumbria area also had bonuses withdrawn after the derailment there, but the directors, who have ultimate responsibility for what took place, were quite happy to pay themselves their mega bonuses, and some held back only after union pressure.

Safety culture

Network Rail's staff are often forced into making a decision between safety and keeping the trains running. They are under enormous pressure to keep the job going, but if things go wrong, the company immediately looks for scapegoats at the lowest level, as a means of deflecting blame from senior managers.

The passenger train operators had a change around at the beginning of November. Bus firms National Express, Go-Ahead, Arriva and Stagecoach all gained new franchises. There seems to be an endless merry-go-round where bus companies lose here and gain there, while the same old faces are recycled around the senior positions. This is throwing balls in the air for them to come down in a different configuration to no particular good, and at great cost to the taxpayer.

Highlighting this madness, unions have called for all trains to be painted the

same colour so that we can all at least save on the expensive paint jobs that inevitably follow refranchising when trains change hands!

Foreign owners

Two new firms have entered the fray. MTR, which runs the Hong Kong metro, owns 50 per cent of the private company now running local services in London, now dubbed London Overground and under the control of Mayor Livingstone.

The other is DB (German National Railways), itself subject to privatisation as a result of EU diktat. DB has already purchased EWS, the biggest freight train operator, and is rumoured to be the hot favourite to buy Chiltern Trains and Laing Rail's interests in London Overground. So London will have its local trains run by the Chinese and the Germans.

The government continues to shy away from tackling the fundamentals of a fragmented private rail network that continues to fail the nation's transport needs, partly because it insists on slavish adherence to EU rules that require so-called “liberalisation” and privatisation of railways across Europe.

Challenges

The forthcoming year will doubtless see the railways as an industrial battleground. The future of the industry pension scheme, the insistence by government that public sector workers should accept paltry pay rises, and the attempt by many companies including Network Rail to introduce worse pay and conditions packages for many rail staff will be big challenges.

But the rail unions are strong, and well able to defend themselves. The RMT has a good class-based understanding of the relationship between the EU and the problems experienced in the rail industry. It has been consistent in calling for a referendum on the EU constitution.

With the roads filling up, and the railways seeing huge increases in use by both passengers and freight, the scene is set for an interesting year of struggle ahead.

Union organisation is strengthening in the North Sea. And not be turn to cheap and unprotected foreign migrants working on slave

North Sea oilfields: workers flex their muscles

WORKERS IN the offshore oil and gas industry are getting better organised and flexing their muscles on pay, conditions and safety. On 13 February the result will be announced of the 2 January ballot on the merging of the RMT and the Aberdeen-based Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC). Following their October conference which voted overwhelmingly to ballot on the proposal – with the vision of the OILC as the “offshore energy branch of the RMT” – OILC’s Jake Molloy summed up the situation:

“Exciting times lie ahead for OILC and RMT whether merged or working together. We are ‘upping’ our game on all fronts to improve the lot of the offshore worker. You’ve read about our fight for paid holiday; we have launched a campaign of ‘name and shame’ to counter the dreaded NRB (Not Required Back); we will resist the threat to jobs and conditions through the exploitation of foreign workers, and believe us, this is a looming threat (we don’t have a problem with foreign workers coming here, but they must not be exploited to undermine your conditions); we will provide the best range of benefits available anywhere in the trade union movement.”

Joint activity

Recent joint activity has proven the efficacy of this move, such as the settlement with the Offshore Contractors Association covering all their workers including ad hoc staff. Those workers have now made a joint call to Amicus (Unite) to “see the light and realise that it makes sense to work together for the benefit of all offshore workers”. Amicus represents those in the crews employed by the other major employers’ grouping, the UK Drilling Contractors Association, who have rejected the type of holiday deal achieved by OILC/RMT and wanted by their workforce. Amicus members have rejected a recent UKDCA pay offer.

In the areas of work associated with the Caterers Offshore Trade Association both holidays and pay are up for argument – this time with the RMT and T&G representing workers. Here it is the big



North Sea oil rig, 2007

before time, as companies keen to squeeze the last drop of profit
 e labour conditions...

cles in the industrial battleground

companies, like Shell, that refuse extended
 leave cycles, proven to be essential for
 workers in this difficult arena.

Undercutting

OILC has for years been highly critical of
 “partnership agreements” between
 companies in this industry and trade
 unions that fail in their duties. Their
 investigation into migrant workers on sub-
 standard wages and conditions found that
 “to listen to their experiences is like
 reading from the darkest chapters of a
 Dickens novel”. This undermining and
 exploitation of British workers has
 continued apace since the 2005 study
 pointed out:

“From the southern gas fields to the
 West of Shetland, the biggest import of
 late into the UK oil and gas industry has
 been cheap and unprotected foreign
 labour. Maltese, Portuguese, Lithuanian,
 Polish and Filipino workers are increasingly
 a common sight on rigs owned by
 companies, which all too often are heard
 preaching from the moral high ground.
 Farcically, those very rigs where this is
 taking place are those which we supposed
 to be protected by “partnership agree-
 ments” with TUC-affiliated trade unions.”

An example from the Maltese workers
 was £4.46 per hour for three weeks
 offshore with nothing for time off. British
 offshore workers have described all this as

**‘From the southern gas
 fields to the West of
 Shetland, the biggest
 import of late into the oil
 and gas industry has been
 cheap and unprotected
 foreign labour...’**

“slave labour, right here, right now”.

These workers are also highly critical of
 the systematic failures that have set the
 scene for the accidents and deaths that
 have plagued the industry. Shell, for
 example, admitted to health and safety
 legislation breaches between July and
 September 2003, yet proposals to cut
 maintenance were approved. Weeks later
 two workers were killed by a gas escape
 when valves failed.

Piper Alpha disaster

In the aftermath of the industry’s greatest
 disaster (20 years ago 167 died as
 Occidental’s Piper Alpha production
 platform suffered fire and explosion), many
 lessons were learned. But with companies
 tempted by short cuts and short memories,
 vigilance will always be essential.

Following a 3-year investigation of
 nearly 100 offshore installations, a report
 by the Health and Safety Executive was
 issued just over two months ago. In what
 has been described as a “damning report”,
 more than half of the platforms were
 categorised as “poor” with corrosion of
 carbon steel firefighting “deluge” pipe-
 work a critical factor.

Just a week after the report came out,
 only prompt action by rescue services and
 correct and speedy evacuation procedures
 ensured all 169 workers on the Thistle
 Alpha platform escaped a serious fire.

For many years, which saw other
 disasters such as the Sea Gem collapse in
 1965 and the Sea Quest accident in 1971,
 50 fatalities per year was a norm for what
 was a relatively small workforce. All the
 more reason for workers therein to
 reinforce their strengths. Very necessary
 when companies start to threaten
 thousands of jobs, as Shell did last month
 in a massive outsourcing plan. This time it
 is around 3,600 IT staff who are at risk.
 Graham Tran of Unite accused the
 company of “no longer being committed to
 Britain”.

Effective union organisation is literally
 the key to survival in this industry – of the
 workers themselves and of their jobs.

• **For further information: www.rmt.org.uk
 and www.oilc.org. Next month: The future
 for British oil and gas.**

BADGE OFFER – Referendum now. No to the EU superstate!

**DESPITE ALL THE promises, Labour is
 trying to take us into a European
 superstate without giving the people of
 Britain a chance to say what they think.**

**The so-called Constitutional Treaty is just
 the despised Constitution in another form,
 as even Giscard d’Estaing, author of the
 first attempt, has admitted. In
 backtracking on the referendum promise
 Gordon Brown is trying to wipe out a
 thousand years of independence and
 sovereignty using his tame party in
 Parliament.**

**The will of the British people has been
 clearly expressed in opinion poll after
 opinion poll. Now it is time for a poll of a
 different kind, a referendum. The TUC is
 already trying to renege on its September
 vote for a referendum. Don’t let power
 slide over to Brussels.**

**FIGHT BACK with a Referendum Now
 badge (actual size, 25mm), available from
 Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue,
 London N17 8EB, price 50p each, or £4 for
 10. Please make cheques payable to
 “WORKERS”.**



The government boasts about improvements. But the figures tell a different story. The rate may actually be climbing...

Midwifery in 21st-century Britain: death rate

BACK IN 2003 Jacqui Smith Minister of State for Health stood in front of the Royal College of Midwives and said: "We have seen tremendous improvements in the care women and their babies have received in the last decade but I know that midwives are not the complacent type and that you continue to strive to develop care and services."

Yet in 2007 four Royal Colleges – the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Anaesthetists and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health – have produced a report, "Minimum Standards for the Organisation and Delivery of Care in Labour", that tells a different story.

In the introduction they state that Britain can only achieve the minimum standards for safety of women and babies "if there is considerable expansion of numbers of both midwifery and medical staff concerned with the care of women in labour".

Government ministers speak of "tremendous improvements" while the health professionals talk about our country failing to meet the minimum standards for safety in childbirth. So what is going on?

A worrying trend

Firstly, when the government minister spoke to the midwives conference in 2003 she was wrong to say that there had been "tremendous improvements" in maternity care in the past decade. The earlier part of the decade had seen improvements but these had not been sustained.

Although the data had not been compiled into a formal national report at the time the minister addressed the midwives, the Department of Health would have been aware of a number of concerns about maternity care. Britain produces a report every three years that examines the causes of maternal deaths – deaths of women in childbirth or shortly after.

When the retrospective report called "Why mothers die 2000–2002" was published it showed a maternal death rate of 13.1 per 100,000 maternities. This was a rise from 11.4 in the previous three-year



period and a higher rate than for the whole preceding decade.

Deaths are classified as "direct", usually relating directly to the labour or other aspect of obstetric care, or "indirect", usually relating to how pregnancy may have exacerbated an existing illness. The most common indirect cause of maternal deaths in 2002 was psychiatric illness, followed by cardiac disease.

Risk factors for maternal deaths for the years 2000 to 2002 included:

Unemployment: Women living in families where both partners were unemployed were up to 20 times as likely to die as other women.

Area: The death rate of women living in the most deprived areas of England was 45 per cent higher than women living in better-off areas.

Suboptimal Clinical Care: 67 per cent of those who died were considered to have had some form of "suboptimal care".

The publication of this report confirmed to clinicians that their version of reality was the correct one and confirmed their view that government ministers had an Alice in Wonderland view of the world. In particular clinicians focused on "suboptimal clinical care" as a risk factor which they could directly influence.

Now the report for 2003–2005 has been released. It shows a slight worsening since 2002, with a maternal mortality rate

of 13.95 per 100,000 maternities. The authors are careful to point out that the increase is not statistically significant but that it "highlights the necessity for further vigilance".

The same social patterns of death continue just as starkly in the latest report and the concern about "suboptimal clinical care" has grown in a very worrying way.

The recent report noted that the "assessors were struck by the number of health care professionals who appeared to fail to identify and manage common medical conditions or potential emergencies outside their immediate area of expertise. Resuscitation skills were also considered poor in an unacceptably high number of cases." It was notable that most national press reports entirely ignored this aspect and focused on maternal obesity as the "new" factor in maternal death.

No wonder the Royal Colleges have decided that they have to revisit the question of standards and the resources required to meet them.

Rapidly changing times

It is eminently possible to tackle a diagnosed problem if circumstances remain relatively stable. But addressing "suboptimal clinical care" has been very difficult because of a range of other factors. In particular the birthrate is

...their own story. Staffing is falling, and the maternal death

...ates on the rise

rising – a rise that is unpredictable and not following projection forecasts.

The official increase in the birthrate is 12.5 per cent since 2001. It has been difficult for Heads of Midwifery to plan their service because the birth projections provided by their local planners and by central government have been underestimates.

They are perplexed that their own data on the number of births in their service area appear to be higher than actual births counted in statistics for their local area. The Office for National Statistics recently admitted that its traditional methods of counting population are inadequate. Heads of Midwifery point out that their information reflects an actual head count and may be more reliable than many other sources of data.

The rising birth rate is primarily driven by migration into Britain, and this in turn adds another layer of complexity. In the period 2000 to 2002 black African women, for example, had a mortality rate seven times as high as white women; and in the latest report the rate is still six times as high.

The recent report points out that many migrant women “have poorer obstetric histories, have more complicated pregnancies or serious underlying medical conditions and may be in poorer general health” – all of which would require an increase in staffing levels to meet the complex needs.

One recommendation from the Minimum Standards report is for the availability of 24-hour interpreting services, as communication problems have been a feature of some critical incidents. But the provision of such a service is extremely costly and would divert funds from other services.

In addition, births are becoming more complex for a range of reasons. The Royal College of Midwives recently expressed concern at the rising caesarian section rate, up fivefold since 1970. In some areas 25 to 30 per cent of all births are now by caesarian section, heightening demands on both staff and budget.

Another complicating factor is that more mothers are delaying having children

‘Midwife numbers as a ratio of whole time equivalents to births are lower now than thirty years ago...’

until they are older because of housing costs and other financial reasons. And older mothers tend to have more complications, again increasing demands on staffing.

The numbers game

Listen carefully the next time you hear a politician talking about staffing numbers in any occupation. It is easy to mislead unless the interviewer is astute.

Look carefully at figures. Although raw numbers employed have gone up, many of these are part time, and a close look at the Register, Nursing and Midwifery Council from August 2005 shows that total midwifery hours have actually decreased by more than 13 per cent at a time when the birth rate is rising and births are becoming more complex.

But the changing ratio of part-time to full-time staff and a focus on numbers of staff rather than hours worked can obscure the actual trend and give scope for politicians to make their misleading statements. The Royal Colleges now point out that midwife numbers expressed as a ratio of whole-time equivalents to births are actually slightly lower now than 30 years ago.

Thousands more needed

The government’s own policy and targets for maternity services, set out in a document called “Maternity Matters” in 2006, call for every woman in labour to have one-to-one care. That would require nearly 5,000 more midwives by 2012.

But all the Royal Colleges and trade unions know recently qualified midwives who cannot find jobs, as NHS trusts are not advertising vacancies, looking to accrue “vacancy savings” to stem deficits.

Nationwide, midwifery training places have been cut as trusts that commission training places have diverted training money to reduce the deficits in order to meet government financial requirements for Foundation status by 2008. Oxford Brookes University and Anglia University – both in areas where the birth rate is rising quickest – axed teaching staff in their nursing and midwifery establishments this year.

A significant number of midwives are not currently practising. Yet there is no government funding for Return to Practice programmes and most universities who offer this programme have suspended the it for lack of uptake. When there was funding, the uptake was good. The few remaining programmes are taking self-funding students, but not many returning midwives can afford this option.

So here are some immediate demands for Safer Childbirth:

- Unfreeze job vacancies and employ newly qualified midwives.
- Reinstate the funding for Return to Practice programmes.
- Reinstate training places recently cut (any further expansion of training places must be carefully controlled as there must be sufficiently qualified midwives in place to supervise trainees).
- Increase the number of midwifery teachers to replace the significant number who will retire in the next five years.

Bring out your badges

Do you have any old labour movement and political badges in odd containers and drawers? Put them to good use and send them to the CPBML – we’ll sell them at labour movement events during the year to raise money for the Party. Please send them to:

Badges
78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB

In the second of a series of articles to mark the 40th anniversary looking at the past four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and THE WORKER, we look at the planned, but not executed, engineers

1969: Focus on the engineers, and on Britain



AMID WORLD turmoil and struggle, our party was formed in April 1968. Our founding chairman, Reg Birch, had issued a call to all interested persons in the labour movement and beyond to join our founding congress, which thus went on to create the only revolutionary communist party that Britain has ever known.

In those distant times the world was cluttered with so-called “Marxist-Leninists” who wore huge Mao badges and prattled on about every struggle in the world bar our own. But our fledgling party soon moved to the production of a newspaper. From the off, we were determined to establish our credentials and focus on the problems in Britain.

In October 1968 an issue called OCTOBER appeared. OCTOBER revealed from the outset that our party had a perspective firmly rooted in our own country, illustrated by the lead article reporting a forthcoming strike against the engineering employers, who were supporting the then Labour government’s incomes policy. On the back page the paper included the thoughtful and rooted “Jottings of an Engineer”, extracts of which we reproduce.

“WHAT IS the strike about? Ostensibly, the claim is for a minimum wage increase for all workers, a new wages structure, three weeks’ holiday now and equal pay – and so it is – but the question goes much deeper. First, it is essential to remember that, for the past decade, engineering workers in particular and all other workers, have been steadfastly indoctrinated that they must

work harder, produce much more, must not be avaricious, not work for improvement in wages and working conditions, that they can be faced with alleged technical developments and expected to throw overboard traditions related to craft and skill.

“It has been said that workers of all kinds must be prepared, in the course of a life-time of working to learn two, or even more, skills to keep pace with technical developments. The whole canvas has been that unless we produce more, the economics of this country must founder.

“The fact of the matter is that wages have never been related to production in terms of cost...

“We must say that there shall be no attempt nationally to interfere with the right of free collective bargaining at the point of production, that we must end the past history of procrastination and downright cheating by the employers. They must be taught that organised labour has come of age and their day is passing.”

A couple of months later, in January 1969, a regular monthly paper, THE WORKER, was launched. In the first issue we returned to analyse the engineering strike that had

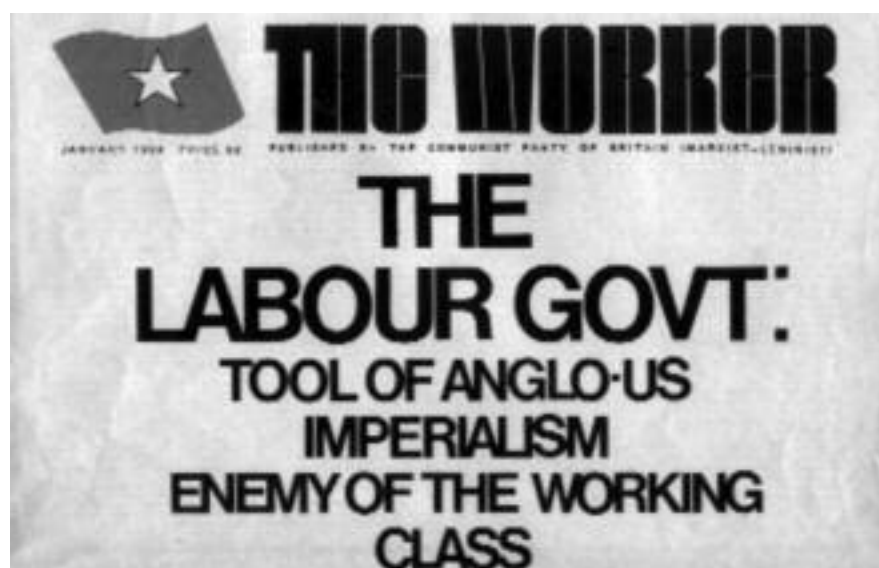
not happened. Here is part of the article:

“FOLLOWING THEIR failure to do battle with the Government and the employers there have come even more open declarations of war; legislation against the unions, ‘cooling off periods’, strengthening of the Donovan Report and so forth. If there is to be built a disciplined political movement of revolutionary character, then workers must accept the necessity of opposing the enemy in a political way.

“On October 19th the Executive of the [Amalgamated Engineering Federation] unanimously called upon its National Committee to endorse the call for strike action of members on October 21st. This was rejected by 27-25. Why was this?

“In all the hot house atmosphere of negotiations with the Engineering Employers, and not least of all with the First Secretary of State, over engineering wages and working conditions, nothing could change the general direction of the Government’s drive to fetter the unions and assist the employing class except a frontal attack on both the Employers and their spokesmen, the Labour Government.

“When after hours and hours of negotiations, the breakdown came about in



Issue number one of THE WORKER, January 1969.

...y of the CPBML by
...nd its predecessor,
...s' strike of 1968...

...in

regard to women's wages, this was the time not only to call for but to demand battle by the engineering workers against their oppressors, to accept the unanimous decision of the Executive Council which said simply: 'In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the Employers' offer our members must be on strike from October 21st unless a satisfactory settlement is reached.' This would have placed the economic battle in a true political perspective.

"This [refusal to fight] comes about from incessant propaganda over many years, from the pressure of the Labour Government, from the Prices and Incomes Board, from all the hectoring that has gone on for a decade now about restrictive practices, about efficiency, mobility and flexibility, work measurement, modernisation, rationalisation and all the other jargon of bourgeois economists and industrial consultants hired by the bosses.

"This has bitten deep into the trade union and labour movement and has produced passive acceptance of wage freezes. From time to time artificial battles are fought on whether there should be an improvement in the economy of 2.5% or 3.5%; but the real issues have gone by default.

"This same acceptance of the enemy's case has entered industry, on the factory floor...In many factories now workers have entered into these dubious bargains for immediate gains. They have sold tea-breaks, washing time, have dispensed with mates, etc.

"The leadership in particular is permeated with this doctrine and has come to accept that workers have had as much as they can expect on present labour and must work harder, produce more, speed up, extend their versatility, increase overall output to get a little more back. It is the soup bowl of Marx all over again and we have forgotten his excellent advice – it is the size of the spoon we hold that matters!

"...Until such time as the workers force the leadership of the trade unions to give up their support of the Labour Government and its Incomes Policy there can be no change."

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.

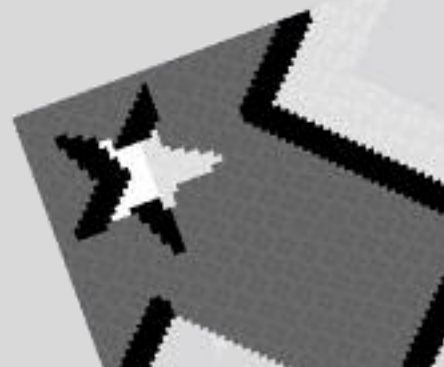
How to get in touch

- 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 – Feet of clay

‘Banks keep the important money flowing upwards, even when homeowners and other borrowers suffer...’

THE SO-CALLED giants of Wall Street are tottering. Simply in order to survive, they are drawing in huge funds from abroad, selling off stakes in themselves and mortgaging their own futures. And these are the companies that thought they ruled the world.

That’s capitalism for you. They convinced themselves – and many workers, too – they could make money without actually producing anything.

What they have produced is a recession. The US housing and property markets are in freefall. Even bankers Goldman Sachs now admit it.

The world’s biggest bank, Citigroup, had its worst loss in its 196-year history, \$9.83 billion in 2007’s last quarter. It has written off over \$35 billion in bad investments, sacked 4,200 workers, and threatens to cut some of its 11,500 jobs in London. US investment firm Merrill Lynch is writing down \$23 billion – and that’s just for the latest accounting period.

The list goes on – name the bank, and look for the billions lost. Overall write-downs total around \$100 billion. Worse will come. One trillion (a thousand billion) dollars are invested in sub-prime mortgages. Losses could wipe out half of that.

Now a new generation of finance capitalists is trying its luck in this global swindling casino. China Investment Corp, a “sovereign wealth fund”, the investment arm of the Chinese government, is bailing out Morgan Stanley, loaning \$5 billion at high rates in return for 10 per cent of the company.

Others are also propping up Wall Street’s and Europe’s mauled banks. Kuwait, Singapore, Abu Dhabi and a Saudi Arabian prince have invested \$20 billion in Citigroup. Merrill Lynch has had \$12.8 billion from Singapore, Kuwait and Japan.

Banks keep the important money flowing upwards, even when homeowners and other borrowers suffer. Merrill Lynch is giving its CEO a \$160 million payoff, while sacking 1,600 workers – £100,000 per sacked worker. Morgan Stanley gave its partners bonuses of \$16.6 billion for 2006, up 18 per cent on 2005. The bigger the loss, the bigger the bonus?

In December, central banks – the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England – offered to lend \$110 billion to banks. On 18 December, the European Central Bank put a further £250 billion into the market. Money down the drain.

The government now admits it is bailing out Northern Rock to the tune of £60 billion in loans and guarantees. This shows its panic about the banking system, the foundation of capitalist economics. The bidder Virgin does not even have a banking licence. We should nationalise Northern Rock, then when it is sold on, the taxpayer benefits, not the shareholders or corporate financiers.

Brown has mortgaged the government’s current and capital accounts to balance the books, and has sold forward contracts to private firms to supply services through his PFIs and PPPs. The government borrows dear now: workers pay dearer later.

Thus Brown shifted investment in public institutions “off the books”, hidden from the public borrowing total, a technique he copied from his banker friend Gavyn Davies of Goldman Sachs. The gross off-balance-sheet public debt was £110 billion by 2003. The result for the NHS, for example, is shown in hospital budgets, whereas a fifth already goes to service bank loans, far outweighing any promised “efficiency gains” from the PFIs.

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.