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IN THIS ISSUE

Page

News and Views from the ITF

| | |
|---|----|
| Dockers' international support for British miners | 21 |
| ILO aid sought in protecting European workers' jobs and pay | 21 |
| Chilean working people suffer repression | 22 |
| ITF protests at North Korean attack on fishermen | 22 |
| Forced labour system in Rhodesia violates human rights | 22 |

Trade Unions

| | |
|---|----|
| Canadian union wins representation case | 23 |
|---|----|

Social and Industrial News

| | |
|--|----|
| Claims for Belgian dock workers agreed | 23 |
| Improvements for Belgian public service busmen | 24 |
| Strike brings improved offer for railway and public service workers in Germany | 24 |
| Mediation in German seafarers' dispute; pilots vote for strike | 24 |
| Pay talks for German Pan Am ground staff break down | 25 |
| New agreement for German dockers | 25 |
| Conditions of service for Ghana Black Star Line officers | 25 |
| British locmen suspend work to rule; annual pay claim submitted | 26 |
| British Airways staff pay agreements | 26 |
| Japanese seamen begin wage negotiations for foreign trades | 27 |
| Japanese public service workers plan spring offensive | 27 |
| Fishermen's dispute in Nagasaki settled | 27 |
| Netherlands dockers get 2% cost-of-living increase | 28 |
| Wages of Hong Kong seafarers under Dutch agreement | 28 |
| New Zealand agreements for masters, deck and radio officers | 28 |
| Pay agreement for Singapore bus workers | 29 |
| National pattern agreement for Sweden | 29 |
| Deadlock in negotiations over job security for Swedish dockers | 30 |
| US machinists' strike against Air France continues | 30 |

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| <u>News in Brief</u> | 31 |
|----------------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| <u>Personalia</u> | 32 |
|-------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| <u>Forthcoming Meetings</u> | 33 |
|-----------------------------|----|

Supplement : Automatic Couplings

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE ITF

INTERNATIONAL
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Dockers' unions discuss support for British miners

An informal meeting of dockers' union representatives from France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany was held at ITF headquarters on 19 February to consider the request made by the Miners' International Federation that the ITF's affiliates should do all they could to support the British National Union of Mineworkers in their dispute and, in particular, that they should try to prevent the export of coal to Britain during the miners' strike.

The dockers' representatives, having considered a detailed report on the dispute and the issues involved, unanimously declared their support for the British miners and agreed to give urgent and sympathetic consideration to the appeal made by the Miners' International Federation and endorsed by the ITF.

EUROPE
=====

ILO aid sought in protecting European workers' jobs and pay

Delegates from 28 countries ended the 2nd European Regional Conference of the International Labour Organization with a call for measures to protect the jobs and incomes of European workers threatened by changes in technology, by inflation and by the energy crisis.

They asked the ILO to help Europe's governments, employers and trade unions to promote full employment policies, training and adaptation measures and equality of treatment for underprivileged groups such as women and migrant workers.

The ILO was also asked to stimulate all-European cooperation between governments, employers and workers in the fields of labour and social policy, including the protection of the environment.

Delegates underlined the right of employers and workers to form and join organizations of their own choosing without government interference.

CHILE

=====

Working people suffer repression

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour have recently reported on new evidence that the continuing repression in Chile is being aimed in particular at working people and trade union members and officials. Trade union rights are totally ignored and not only does the right to strike not exist but the military junta has made participation in a strike during the last five years a ground for dismissal even though strikes used to be perfectly legal. This policy has led to an explosion of vengeance and persecution against the workers even when those concerned may never have taken part in any form of political activity. This itself is indication enough that, quite apart from questions of political and ideological differences, Chile today is the scene of a terrifying and methodical oppression of the now defenceless workers by the ruling class.

Thus the military junta is carrying through a policy exclusively serving the interests of the national oligarchy and of the great multinational corporations which will be able to make enormous profits and to recuperate the economic and political power which they had lost. There is therefore nothing surprising about the dissolution of the Chilean trade union centre nor about the junta's plans to establish a new pseudo trade union centre entirely subjected to the government in the interest of national and foreign big business.

The international labour movement once again, therefore, denounces the brutal persecution being carried out against the Chilean people and insists upon the need for full, permanent and effective solidarity with the workers and people of Chile.

NORTH KOREA

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ITF protests at attack on fishermen

Following news that South Korean fishing vessels had been attacked, the ITF sent a strongly worded cable of protest to the North Korean government calling for the immediate release of fishermen detained after the attack and deploring the death and suffering caused by the government's actions.

RHODESIA

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Forced labour system violates basic human rights

In a joint statement the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour have expressed their shock at the news that the illegal regime in Rhodesia has introduced a system of forced labour in addition to the other measures already in force in the country in total

violation of basic human and trade union rights. In a protest to the United Nations, the two Confederations state: "Forced labour is a blatant violation of internationally recognized labour standards". This news is further proof of the Rhodesian regime's total disdain for world opinion and of its determination to deny the African majority the most elementary rights.

TRADE UNIONS

CANADA

=====

Union wins representation case

The ITF-affiliated Canadian Seafarers' International Union has won a court decision in favour of its claim to represent Canadian crew members on board British flag supply ships working in and out of Canadian waters. The shipowners' case was that the Canadian Labour Relations Board, which had given the union the right to act as bargaining agent for the men, had no jurisdiction as the seamen were not employees in Canada and were therefore not subject to Canadian law. However, the court ruled that the Board had the authority to certify the union since the true employer was a Canadian company and the employees involved are Canadian residents, signed on in a Canadian port by a Canadian company.

SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL NEWS

BELGIUM

=====

Claims for dockworkers agreed

Members of the ITF-affiliated Belgian Transport Workers' Union have recently voted to adopt their national claims for improvements in the 1974 contract. These are: a one-year contract term, i.e. from 1.5.74 to 30.4.75; an additional pay rise outside the terms of the contract of 135 Fr. with effect from 1.5.74; an improved formula linking wages to the cost-of-living index, giving 2% pay increase for each 1.68 points rise in the index; and an improved formula for calculating the end-of-year bonus. In addition, other claims varying from port to port have been agreed covering shift pay, bonuses, etc.

Improvements agreed for public service bus workers

Following an agreement concluded between the employers and the ITF-affiliated busmen's section of the Belgian Public Service Workers' Union, bus drivers in the public service receive, with effect from 1 January 1974, average hourly increases of 8.70 Fr., consisting partially of a levelling-up exercise to bring them into line with other public transport employees and partially of real and cost-of-living percentage increases. A further cost-of-living increase of 2% is applied with effect from 1 February 1974, giving hourly rates ranging from 88.90 to 105.41 Fr. depending on length of service; Sunday pay rates go from 177.80 to 210.82 Fr. and rates for work between 2100 hours and 0600 hours from 97.79 to 115.95 Fr. A further 2% increase is to come into effect on 1 July 1974.

Various other improvements include increased bonuses, improved annual leave and holiday pay, and a higher end-of-year bonus.

GERMANY

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Strike brings improved offer for railwaymen and public service workers

Following the breakdown of pay negotiations between the ITF-affiliated German Railwaymen's Union and the railway employers, and between the ITF-affiliated German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union and national, regional and local government authorities, strike action was taken by members of both unions on 11 and 12 February, bringing the nation's transport and other services to a standstill. This quickly resulted in improved offers from the employers, giving an 11% wage increase, subject to a minimum increase of 170 DM per month. This settlement has been accepted in ballots of the unions' memberships.

Mediation in seafarers' negotiations; pilots vote for strike

Following the breakdown of talks between the ITF-affiliated German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union and the shipowners on a new pay agreement, talks have proceeded under the chairmanship of a mediator. Two sessions were held, on 9 and 15 February, and a proposed settlement is now being put to the parties.

Meanwhile union members in the pilotage service have voted by a large majority to take strike action in support of their claims, negotiations on which broke down on 4 February.

Pay talks for Pan Am ground staff break down

Negotiations for about 1,500 ground employees of Pan American World Airways represented by the ITF-affiliated German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union broke down on 11 February. The union's demands for an increase of 6% and 90 DM had been met by an offer of 5½% and 50 DM together with a one-time payment of 150 DM, which was considered quite insufficient by the union negotiating team. The company had also failed to make a satisfactory offer on claims for Sunday and night work bonuses.

The ITF has warned selected affiliates that strike action may result if mediation fails, and has requested non-cooperation in the provision of replacement ground staff should this be attempted by the company.

New agreement for dockers concluded

The ITF-affiliated German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union reports the conclusion of a new pay agreement for more than 25,000 dockworkers. The basic hourly rate for the first shift is raised from 7.30 DM to 8.25 DM, and the agreement runs for 12 months from 1 January 1974. The night work bonus for the second shift goes up from 6.40 DM to 7.00 DM and for the third shift from 1.60 DM per hour worked to 1.75 DM; the Sunday and Holiday bonus for the first and second shifts is increased from 13.64 DM to 15.00 DM and for the third and fourth shifts from 21.67 DM to 24 DM. The agreement represents an overall improvement of approximately 13%.

GHANA

=====

Conditions of service for Black Star Line Officers

The following is a brief outline of conditions of service applying to officers employed by the Ghana Black Star Line, members of the ITF-affiliated Ghana Merchant Navy Officers' Association (applicable from 1 August 1973).

Annual Leave : 11 days' leave for each calendar month served; an officer going on annual leave is paid 20 Cedis leave allowance towards his travelling expenses.

Casual Leave may be granted on request and will not be deducted from annual leave unless it exceeds 48 hours.

Sick Leave: expenses for any injury or illness not attributable to the Officer's own fault, plus the expenses of his maintenance until recovery, are paid by the company, which also undertakes to pay the burial expenses of any officer who dies abroad as a result of illness or injury while on duty. Sick pay: full pay for up to 60 days, half pay thereafter for up to 60 days; then six months' sick leave without pay.

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Study Leave is granted at the company's discretion and, if on the company's sponsorship, the Officer enters into a bond to serve the company for a specified period of time or pay a prescribed sum of money in lieu of service. Such period of time shall not be less than three years and the sum of money shall equal the gross amount spent by the company in training the officer plus 10% interest.

Insurance : Officers are covered for injury resulting in death or disablement as follows: Masters and Chief Engineers: 24,000 Cedis (death or disablement); others earning over 3,600 Cedis: 20,000 Cedis; those earning from 2,881 to 3,600 Cedis: 14,000 Cedis; those earning from 1,920 to 2,880 Cedis: 10,000 Cedis; Cadets: 8,000 Cedis.

Foreign currency: 60% of an Officer's basic salary is to be paid to him in foreign currency.

GREAT BRITAIN
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Locomen's work-to-rule suspended; annual pay claim submitted

The ITF-affiliated Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen agreed to suspend its national work-to-rule and ban on rest-day work during the period of the general election. Following that decision, British Rail decided to submit the dispute over the restructuring of the railways' pay system to arbitration by the industry's own tribunal.

Meanwhile, the three railway unions - ASLEF and the ITF-affiliated National Union of Railwaymen and Transport Salaried Staffs' Association - have presented their claims for an annual pay increase to take effect on 1 May, negotiations on which are proceeding separately from talks on the restructuring exercise, and which will be subject to the restrictions of Phase Three of the government's pay policy.

Negotiations are also taking place on a pay claim on behalf of railway workshop employees.

British Airways pay agreements

Agreement has been reached on pay increases within the terms of the government's Phase Three pay policy for nearly all British Airways employees. The agreements give a 7% increase to engineering and maintenance men, ground service employees, and cabin crews together with improved holiday pay and shift pay and a cost-of-living guarantee. Only cabin attendants in the overseas division (former BOAC) have still to approve the settlement.

JAPAN

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Seamen begin wage negotiations for foreign trades

The ITF-affiliated All-Japan Seamen's Union has begun negotiations with two foreign trade shipowners' associations on its claim for an average rise of 41% or 50.744 yen per month. The claim includes provision for a revision of the current pay structure in favour of older seafarers, since the union contends that their pay is lower than that of comparable shore workers and that the basic rate for workers aged 46 should be three times the starting rate.

Other claims include the reduction of the working week from 44 to 40 hours; one day per week completely free of all duties; improvements in compensatory leave for Saturdays, Sundays and other holidays spent at sea and in port.

The present seamen's contract expires at the end of March 1974 and if negotiations do not produce a satisfactory settlement the union plans to commence strike action in April.

Public service workers plan spring offensive

Unions in Japan's public services, including transport workers, have adopted a programme of claims for their "spring offensive" which include: improved pensions (minimum 60,000 yen per month); general wage increases averaging 30% (30,000 yen per month); and restoration of the right to strike. With particular regard to the transport sector, the unions are to urge governmental action to ensure stable operation of public transport during the fuel crisis; a ban on fare increases; and measures to improve safety of operation.

The unions have drawn up a timetable of industrial action in support of their claims, beginning with short-term selective strikes during February and March and ending with more general and longer strikes in late March and April if their demands are not met. The first of these actions, a 24-hour strike by the railwaymen, took place on 28 February.

Fishermen's dispute in Nagasaki settled

Following the breakdown of negotiations between the ITF-affiliated All-Japan Seamen's Union and four fishing companies in Nagasaki, on claims for a thorough-going revision of the outdated piece-rate contract, the union called a strike on 10 November 1973. Three of the owners accepted the union's demands by 18 November and agreed to adopt a monthly wage system. The fourth company, Yamada Fishing Co., maintained its refusal to accept the proposals. After about a month, the union agreed, with some reluctance, to accept mediation proposals despite the fact that these did not give as good a settlement as had been negotiated with the first three owners. However, Yamada Fishing Co. rejected the mediation proposals outright and so the union had no alternative but to continue its strike action. This went

on for 104 days, until agreement was finally reached on 21 February on a compromise formula combining monthly wages with some element of the piece-rate system.

NETHERLANDS
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Dockers get 2% cost-of-living increase

Dockworkers in the ports of Amsterdam and Rotterdam have been granted a cost-of-living increase of 2% for the first quarter of 1974. This is seen as an advance against a settlement to be reached later covering price rise compensation for the whole of 1974.

Wages of Hong Kong seafarers increased

With effect from 1 November 1973 the pay of Dutch officers and Hong Kong crew members under the agreement between the ITF-affiliated Seafarers' Federation and Royal Interocean Lines has been increased in line with rises in the cost of living. This gives the following rates (in Hong Kong dollars) for selected crew members:

Deck Department: 1,074 for boatswain (10 years' service);
1,059 for carpenter (10 years' service);
876 for AB; 780 for ordinary seaman;

Engineroom Department: No. 1 fireman (10 years' service):
1,074; Fitter (10 years' service):
1,179; senior electrician (10 years'
service):
1,308;

Catering Department : (Cargo vessels): Chief Steward: 1,254;
Chief Cook: 1,101; Leading Steward: 819;
Assistant Crew Cook: 684; Senior Steward:
759; with somewhat higher rates in certain
grades for catering crew on passenger
vessels.

NEW ZEALAND
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New agreements for masters, deck and radio officers

New agreements were reached towards the end of last year for masters, deck and radio officers employed by the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand, represented by the ITF-affiliated New Zealand Merchant Service Guild. These agreements form the pattern for other sea-going contracts.

Salient features of the agreements are as follows:

Masters

Salaries (with effect from 1.4.74) range from \$1,003.30 per month in the first and second years to \$1,189.60 per month after 19 years' service. Additional monthly payments are also made for service aboard certain vessels, and a master is entitled to receive a further 20% of his own salary for any time when his ship is without a Chief, Second or Third Officer.

Leave is 20 weeks for each 12 months' continuous service, rising to 22 weeks after 1 April 1974.

Deck Officers

Salaries (with effect from 1.4.74) range from \$473.10 per month for Fourth and Fifth Officers to \$746.20 for Chief Officers. Additional supplements are payable for service aboard cargo vessels in Pacific Island trade; roll-on roll-off cargo vessels; steamer express inter-island passenger vessels; and cargo vessels engaged in West Coast to Portland coal trade. Increments for continuous service with the company are also paid, together with certificate allowances where applicable.

Leave is 20 weeks for each 12 months' continuous service, rising to 22 weeks after 1 April 1974.

Radio Officers

Salaries (with effect from 1.4.74) range from \$529.20 per month in the first year of service to \$642.70 after 10 years' service. These rates are subject to special allowances for certificates, etc.

Leave is 20 weeks for each 12 months' continuous service, rising to 22 weeks after 1 April 1974.

SINGAPORE

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Pay agreement for bus workers

Agreement has been reached between the ITF-affiliated Singapore Industrial Labour Organization and the newly-formed Singapore Bus Company for a wage increase for all bus employees. Bus conductors and drivers receive an 80 cents increase with effect from 1 November 1973, while monthly paid employees receive \$20 per month. Of the above 80 cents increase, 20 cents will be set aside for a special fund to be jointly administered by the Union and the Trade Union Registrar, for the benefit of the members.

SWEDEN

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National pattern agreement reached in record time

For the first time since the 1950s, Sweden's national trade union centre LO and the employers' confederation SAF have reached agreement on a national pattern settlement for wages and conditions

for the forthcoming year without requiring the assistance of a mediator. The first meeting was held on 27 November 1973 and agreement was reached on 26 January 1974.

Pay: general increase on hourly rates of 55 øre; lower-paid groups earning less than 16.30 Kr. per hour get an extra increase of 50 øre per hour.

Hours of work : recommended reduction in the working week from 40 to 36 hours for underground and continuous shift workers. Three-shift workers who do not work Saturdays and Sundays should get a reduction to 38 hours a week. This reduction in working hours should be commenced by 1975 at the latest and should be fully implemented by the beginning of 1977.

Security of employment : a joint LO/SAF working group is to study legislation on this subject and investigate how it works with respect to notice, re-engagement, etc.

Part-time work: part time workers should have a fair deal with regard to working hours and pay; they should be able to work at least 18 hours a week and thus obtain entitlement to social insurance, severance pay, etc.

Insurance : group life insurance is to be altered so that from 1 April it can apply from age 16 instead of only from age 18 as at present. The parties also agreed on insurance which would give entitlement to compensation in case of accident for self-employed persons and also when travelling to and from work, irrespective of who is responsible.

Deadlock in negotiations over job security for dockworkers

Negotiations between the port employers and the ITF-affiliated Swedish Transport Workers' Union have broken down on the question of a national agreement giving all dock workers full pay irrespective of whether the port in question is on full-time working or not. A mediator has been called in to try to solve the deadlock, but he has been taken ill and the dispute has now to await the appointment of a second mediator.

Additional contract claims being made by the union include shorter shifts and substantially increased wages.

UNITED STATES

IAM strike against Air France continues

The dispute between the ITF-affiliated International Association of Machinists and Air France, which led to strike action commencing on 9 January, is no nearer solution. (For background see Newsletter No. 2, 1974, page 17.) Further negotiations were conducted on 21 and 22 January but, due to the continued obstinacy of the company, no progress was realized; discussions have once more been broken off and the strike continues. ITF affiliates are being requested to maintain solidarity action in support of the US machinists' action.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Negotiations are in progress between the Australian Waterside Workers' Federation and the employers of dock labour on the union's 1974 contract claims.

Shipping unions in Australia and New Zealand have agreed between themselves that future shipping trade between the two countries will have to be carried only in Australian or New Zealand ships.

Members of the Canadian Seafarers' International Union have voted for strike action on 1 April if agreement is not reached on contract demands. Negotiations broke down when the shipowners refused to discuss monetary claims.

The two unions representing British merchant navy seamen and officers have both submitted claims for substantial pay increases and improvements in annual leave.

Dockers in the British port of Liverpool have agreed to accept a 7% pay offer, under the terms of the government's Phase Three wages restriction policy.

A general strike in Iceland, which began on 23 February, ended three days later when agreement was reached through the trade union centre on pay increases of up to 25% over a two-year period, together with other benefits.

Strike action by Israeli merchant navy officers ended on 20 February after agreement was reached with the trade union federation to consider their demands for pay increases.

Trade unionists in Italy, including public transport workers, participated in general stoppages on 27 February in support of demands that the government introduce a wide range of social and industrial reforms

Discussions between representatives of dockers and the government in Mauritius have resulted in a compromise under which the dockers agree to resume extra duties in return for legislation enabling their union to be recognized. The agreement ends a work-to-rule campaign by the dockers.

Mexican railwaymen have been granted a 20% pay increase with effect from 16 September 1973. In addition, railway pensioners receive an increase of 300 pesos per month.

Regulations are to be introduced in the Netherlands this year requiring the installation of tachographs on lorries transporting dangerous goods, heavy lorries and combination vehicles with two drivers and weighing over 20 tons.

The Netherlands government has decided to raise the national minimum wage by 2½% with effect from 1 April; in addition, the holiday bonus for minimum wage earners is to be raised from 6% to 7%.

The Norwegian Transport Workers' Union has decided, in response to an international appeal backed by the ITF, to refuse to unload American grapes not bearing the eagle label of the United Farm Workers' Union. The boycott came into effect on 1 February.

The Norwegian Transport Workers' Union has lodged a general pay claim averaging 10.8% together with higher claims for its lower-paid groups, i.e. an additional hourly increase of 1.40 kr. in the port sector and 1.60 kr. in the road transport sector.

The governments of Tanzania and the Sultanate of Oman have joined the Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization, becoming the 85th and 86th Members respectively.

PERSONALIA

Max Arnold, General Secretary of the Swiss Public Service Workers' Union, has announced his intention to retire during the course of his current term of office. Dr. Walter Renschler has been appointed to succeed him.

Percy Coldrick, former General Secretary of the British Transport Salaried Staffs' Association, has been awarded the OBE (Order of the British Empire).

Joseph Di Giorgio has been elected to the position of Secretary-Treasurer of the Seafarers' International Union of North America in succession to the late Al Kerr.

Richard Freund, Honorary President of the Austrian Railwaymen's Union, died on 28 January at the age of 82. An active trade unionist from his early youth, Freund was elected as Chairman of the Free Railwaymen's Union in 1934, and was almost immediately forced into illegal underground activity alongside his friend Andreas Thaler. This continued during the Nazi era until his arrest and imprisonment in a concentration camp. After the war he again took over the leadership of the Railwaymen's Union and pursued his pre-war connexions with the ITF, becoming Chairman of the Federation's Railwaymen's Section. He retired in 1962 and was then unanimously appointed Honorary President of his Union.

Hans Imhof, former General Secretary of the ITF, celebrates his 60th birthday on 7th April 1974. His private address is: Chemin de Saule 79, CH 1233 BERNEX, Switzerland.

Keld Jensen has been elected Chairman of the Danish Railwaymen's Association in succession to Olaf H. Jensen on the latter's appointment to a post outside the railway industry.

John George March has been elected President of the Rhodesian Railway Workers' Union in succession to J. Kinley. George Williams becomes Vice-President, and Dan Mitchell has been elected General Secretary.

Fritz Prechtl, President of the Austrian Railwaymen's Union and ITF President, celebrated his 50th birthday on 27 December.

Jim Slater has been elected General Secretary of the British National Union of Seamen in succession to the late Bill Hogarth.

Ernst Ulbrich, General Secretary of the Austrian Railwaymen's Union, has been elected Chairman of the Austrian Railways' Central Staff Council.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

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| ITF Railwaymen's Section Conference | - Basle, 19-21 March 1974 |
| Inland Navigation Conference | - Basle, 7-9 May 1974 |
| 31st ITF Congress | - Stockholm, 7-15 August 1974 |

AFFILIATED UNIONS REQUIRING FURTHER
INFORMATION ON ANY ITEM IN THIS
NEWSLETTER MAY OBTAIN IT ON REQUEST
FROM THE SECRETARIAT ON THE ITF

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AUTOMATIC COUPLINGS

by J. Hauf
Railwaymen's Section
Secretary

The situation regarding the introduction of automatic couplings in Europe is becoming increasingly confused. The European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT), at its meeting in The Hague on 15 and 16 June 1973, adopted the following resolution:

"The Council of Ministers of Transport emphatically reaffirms its decision in favour of the introduction of automatic coupling, as set out in its resolution adopted at Florence on 11 June, 1970. It invites the governments of Member countries to strive to eliminate, without prejudice to their transport policies, the obstacles that the railway administrations might encounter in proceeding with this venture in order that automatic coupling might be introduced for international traffic in April 1981."

Thus the ECMT accepted the timetable of the joint OSJD/UIC group, according to which automatic couplings would be introduced in April 1981 and the entire change-over operation would be completed in 1985.

A few days later, the Management Committee of the UIC, at its meeting on 19 and 20 June 1973, formally resolved that automatic couplings be introduced by its member undertakings. The UIC also declared that a number of these undertakings considered it essential that the introduction of automatic couplings should be the subject of inter-governmental agreement. However, the transitional period (beginning 1981, completion 1985) envisaged by the joint UIC/OSJD group for the introduction of automatic couplings was impracticable. The UIC therefore requested the governments concerned to postpone the commencement of the introduction until 1985.

The UIC decision becomes incomprehensible when one retraces a little the history of the introduction of automatic couplings. The introduction date was originally scheduled for 1976. The 1976 target was postponed as it could not be met by the organization of Eastern bloc railway undertakings (OSJD). After the UIC had repeatedly suggested that the ECMT and the International Union of Railways (UIC) must insist on a timetable for the change-over beginning in 1979 and ending in 1981, the joint UIC/OSJD group eventually reached a compromise solution at a special meeting in May 1972.

The special meeting agreed:

"that stock used for international traffic should be fitted with automatic couplers as from April 1981, side buffers being kept on a provisional basis, and that by the end of 1985 at the latest, it would no longer be permissible to use stock fitted with side buffers for international traffic."

The UIC and the OSJD also allowed themselves the possibility of bringing forward this last dateline by joint agreement.

The ECMT subsequently endorsed this agreement between the UIC and the OSJD in order to retain the vital unity of action with the Eastern bloc states on the question of the introduction of automatic couplings.

A few days after the transport ministers' decision came the unexpected UIC volte-face. It pleaded financial difficulties as the reason why the target date, fixed by the UIC itself, could not be met. It is clear that the introduction of automatic coupling will be expensive, but the abrupt change in the UIC attitude is annoying. One should have been able to take for granted that when the UIC pressed for the introduction of automatic couplings it was aware of the financial difficulties involved. Moreover, one can not reasonably expect that a further postponement will decrease costs. The money already spent by UIC management in the area of developing a suitable coupling amounts to several hundred million DM, but given the present situation it is difficult to look upon this expenditure as a meaningful investment.

Automatic couplings have many advantages. From the outset, railway unions have vigorously advocated the introduction of automatic couplings. The wagon shunter's job is both arduous and dangerous. When coupling and uncoupling by hand he must stand between wagons. The coupling of moving wagons is particularly dangerous and causes most accidents. According to UIC statistics, the frequency of accidents per 100,000 employees is 4 fatal accidents and 150 accidents involving injury.

In the German Federal Republic alone there were 15 fatal accidents and 140 accidents involving injury last year. This means that 5 per cent of railway employees who carry out coupling operations were involved in accidents. This figure may seem insignificant when compared with the number of road casualties. But should not the railways precisely because they are a safe mode of transport also have safe working conditions?

In the USA and Japan, the number of accidents is 75% below that in UIC countries. Yet the types of automatic coupling used in these two countries involve some manual operations, whereas the central buffer coupling,

which will automatically couple air brake hoses and electrical connections, envisaged for Europe offers shunting personnel maximum protection. Only the uncoupling process is done by hand, i.e. by activating the uncoupling mechanism on the side of the wagon. However, this is in no way dangerous for the shunter.

The advantages of automatic coupling will admittedly only become noticeable when the entire stock has been converted. Shunting personnel will be exposed to increased danger during the change-over period as with mixed couplings there will be even less space between wagons. This is why railway unions, when advocating the introduction of automatic couplings, have always asked for a short change-over period. For example, the International Railwaymen's Conference of the ITF, which met in Stockholm in May 1964, adopted a resolution demanding that the increased accident risk during the transitional period, where there is joint use of both screw and automatic couplings, be met by a corresponding improvement in accident insurance provisions. The resolution also urged that shunting staff should be properly prepared for the extra demands that would be made of them during this period.

The advantages for the railway undertakings themselves are obvious. Automatic couplings will bring about a general increase in train loads (which might reach 6,000 tons as compared with 2,500 to 3,000 tons today). It will thus be possible to make up very heavy freight trains to match the power of modern locomotives. Turn-round time will also be shortened, thus saving wagon and engine hours. The introduction of automatic couplings will enable the railways to improve their efficiency of operation within a relatively short time. They will be able to pass the benefits on to railway employees -- one of the unions' foremost concerns -- and to ease the growing pressure of work on shunting personnel.

The introduction of automatic couplings will facilitate a more efficient use of railway infrastructure and stock, thus making it possible to achieve an improved distribution of labour in the transport sector. By helping to create a more efficient railway system, it will also make a significant contribution to the welfare of society.

Professor Oeftering, President of the German Federal Railways (DB), has said: "High as the price of introduction may be: it amounts to a mere fraction of the total potential benefit of automatic couplings once they are introduced." (International Railway Journal, October 1971) But, it all depends what one means by a 'high price'. In 1971, the German Federal Government presented for Bundestag approval a road-building (road improvement) programme costing 150,000 million DM for the years 1971 - 1985. The introduction of automatic couplings in Germany, based on 1972 estimates, would cost 3,600 million DM. This figure is the highest of all the ECMT member states. Italy with 2,000 million and France with 1,500 million DM come second and third.

The other member states will have to pay far less. The total cost for all the ECMT member states involved amounts to approximately 10,000 million DM. When one considers other expenditure planned for the transport sector this figure is relatively low.

The railways have an important part to play in overall transport policy programmes and in solving environmental and energy problems. It is recognised that the railways require less space and cause less pollution than any other means of transport. It is also a fact that rail transport has the lowest energy requirements.

The European railways have been considering the introduction of automatic couplings since the early 20s. Nothing has happened yet. For reasons best known to themselves, they have kept putting off a decision on this truly European problem with all its social, environmental and economic benefits. It is now time that they cease to discuss and begin to introduce automatic couplings.

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- ECMT European Conference of Ministers of Transport
Member countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France,
Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg,
Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden,
Switzerland, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia.
- OSJD Organization for Railway Collaboration
Member states: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia,
German Democratic Republic (DDR), Hungary, Poland,
Romania, Russia.
- UIC International Union of Railways
All European countries, with the exception of
Russia, are member countries of the UIC.