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NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE ITF

POLAND

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Polish strikers win historic concessions on union rights

The wave of strikes that has swept Poland in the last two months has compelled the Polish government to undertake far-reaching political, economic and social reforms that are without parallel in any other Communist state. The strikes, the longest since the Communists took power, were triggered off by the announcement of meat price increases but grew to embrace demands for trade union and other human rights. The strikers showed remarkable restraint and self-discipline and such determination to hold out in key sectors of the economy - including the transport industry - that their demands could not be ignored. The Baltic port city of Gdansk - the focal point of previous protests against food price increases - again led the way and the workers' shipyard sit-in and the associated 21-point list of demands drawn up by the unified strike committee has set the pace for reforms that will inevitably have to be extended to include all Polish workers. Indeed, mine workers in the country's industrial heartland of Silesia have already reached agreement on a formula for a return to work along similar lines to the historic Gdansk accord.

The Baltic strikers won their cardinal demand for the establishment of new independent self-governing trade unions based on implementation of ILO Conventions No. 87 and 98, and also the right to strike and to strike pay, as well as promises of non-victimization of strikers and their helpers. They have also won a relaxation of censorship, except in matters of security, and promises of a free press and freedom of speech, and access to the mass media for all religious denominations. The government further undertook to make full information on the economic and social situation of the country available to enable all groups in society to participate in discussions on a national reform programme designed to get the country out of the present crisis. Other points conceded by the government relate to strictly local issues, such as the reinstatement of the workers dismissed after previous food price strikes, and improvements in the pay and conditions of the shipyard workers.

The Polish workers were strengthened in their resolve by the news conveyed to them by journalists covering the strikes of the various measures taken by the free trade unions in the West in solidarity with their cause. The US labour movement and many trade unions in Western Europe made cash contributions to a central strike fund, while ITs and unions worldwide launched vigorous protests against the arrest of Polish dissidents aiding the strike movement and pledged their support for the workers' call for the establishment of independent trade unions. ITF affiliates, at the request of

General Secretary Harold Lewis, were prominent among those urging the Polish government to concede this latter demand. The ILO also said that it would put itself at the disposal of the Polish authorities and give any help it could in helping them to frame legislation assuring the free exercise of trade union rights.

SOUTH AFRICA

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Cape Town union official are released

Further to our recent item on the freeing of Diana Cooper^x, the ITF is pleased to be able to report that the Secretary of the Western Province General Workers' Union, David Lewis, and three other union officials arrested shortly after him for their part in the strike against a large meat cold storage company in Cape Town have now been released. The detainees were never brought before a court and their release is thought to be unconditional, although this is as yet unconfirmed. There can be no doubt that the prompt response of affiliates to the ITF request for strong protests against the arrests to be lodged with the South African government played a considerable part in the detainees' release. On their behalf, the General Secretary has already extended the ITF's gratitude to affiliates.

^xsee ITF Newsletter No. 8, 1980, page 72

TRANSPORT

EUROPE

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EEC gets tough on sub-standard ships

The European Commission has decided on tough port state enforcement proposals for all shipping using Community ports. If approved, the measures could come into effect on 1 January 1982 and would apply to the three future members of the Community - Greece, Portugal and Spain. The tight deadline for implementation of the proposals could cause difficulties for the large Greek merchant fleet, which has many old ships on its register as well as considerable Greek-owned flag-of convenience tonnage.

The proposals would have the effect of transforming the observance of a number of international conventions and protocols from an option into an obligation for member-States. Information on sub-standard ships would be stored in a "blacklist" computer to which all EEC countries would have access. Deficiencies discovered would also be recorded and vessels would be issued with a certificate stating the work needed to be done and the conditions under which a substandard vessel would be allowed to sail. This information would be forwarded to all other member-States the vessel was expected to visit. Some of the strictest measures would apply to tankers and there would also be rules governing open registry vessels.

The Commission has been authorized to open negotiations with non-member States in Europe with a view to their adopting similar procedures to monitor ship safety.

FRANCE
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Government tightens up ship safety

The French Transport Minister has signed orders making the national port authority solely responsible for safety on French merchant vessels. This move was prompted by the explosion on board the French tanker Betelgeuse in Bantry Bay in January 1979, which killed 50 people. The Irish investigators into the disaster concluded that poor maintenance had caused structural faults in the tanker that led to the break-up and explosion of the vessel. Previously, responsibility for shipboard safety had been divided between a number of different authorities.

NETHERLANDS
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Dutch court jails tanker officers

Four-month gaol sentences have been imposed on the master and first officer of the Hong Kong owned Li tanker ENERGY CONCENTRATION which broke its back last month while discharging oil at the Mobil Oil terminal in Rotterdam's Europoort. The 215,000 dwt tanker buckled under the weight of crude oil in its fore and aft tanks because the first officer - who had been on duty for 41 hours without a break - had failed to follow up the captain's order to pump oil in the empty tanks amidships following an unscheduled stop at Le Havre to discharge part of its cargo of oil. The near-disaster - a massive explosion and fire had been feared - has renewed anxieties about the safety of large tankers and prompted a call for stricter controls over the unloading of tankers at Dutch ports.

TRADE UNIONS

BOLIVIA

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Bolivian military rulers suspend trade unions

The military junta which took over power in Bolivia on 17 July has issued a decree suspending the country's trade unions. Among the unions affected is the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB) whose leader has been under arrest since the coup.

CHILE

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Chilean junta outlaws strikes in "strategic" industries

The Chilean junta has issued a list of thirty enterprises whose employees are forbidden for "strategic" reasons to go on strike. Included in the list are the national railways, as well as the mines, the national telephone company and the state bank.

GUATEMALA

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Coca Cola agrees to trade union rights for its bottling plant workers in Guatemala

After finally agreeing to enter into negotiations with the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Association (IUF) in Geneva, the multinational soft drinks company Coca Cola has given a written undertaking that it will institute measures to put an end to the dispute, that has resulted in the systematic repression over recent months of workers and their trade union representative at its bottling plant in Guatemala.

The campaign of terror against the Coca Cola workers began when they started to press for trade union rights earlier this year. Its ferocity led the IUF to institute a highly successful boycott of Coca Cola products and to call for a tourist boycott of Guatemala in protest at the government's connivance with the local franchise holders. The boycotts were joined by other ITSS and special interest groups - principally church and youth organizations - sympathetic to the workers' cause. An emergency resolution on the situation in Guatemala calling on ITF affiliates to show their solidarity with the Coca Cola workers was also adopted at the ITF's recent Congress.^x

The strength of world opinion against the company no doubt helped persuade it to come to the bargaining table where it agreed to finance an international consortium, in which it would itself buy 35% of the shares, to take over the running of the plant and to appoint new directors to take over from the present franchise-

holders who had been working hand in glove with the local secret police, it being further agreed that Coca Cola would supervise the actions of the new management for a period of five years. Coca Cola has also undertaken to provide a written guarantee that its workers in Guatemala will enjoy full trade union rights, including the right to enter into collective agreements. Further commitments entered into by Coca Cola include the reinstatement of 21 dismissed workers and the payment of compensation to the families of those Coca Cola workers who were murdered during the terror campaign. The company has announced that it will be building a new bottling plant in Guatemala next year but has said that it will be keeping on the 500 workers employed at its present plant. The UIF has also obtained a promise from Coca Cola that when it enters into franchise agreements for other countries it will insist on workers being granted basic trade union freedoms.

In view of the time that it will take for Coca Cola to put its promises into effect. IUF member organizations have been instructed to suspend their action against the company for the time being.

X see Resolution No. 7 sent out under cover of ITF Circular No. 79/A.13 of 4 August 1980.

UNITED STATES
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Railway and Airway Supervisors merge with BRAC

The American Railway and Airway Supervisors' Association formally merged last month with the ITF-affiliated Brotherhood of Railway Airline and Steamship Clerks. The Association's 8,000 transport industry members will form a separate BRAC division headed by Association President Frank Ferlin Jr.

SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL NEWS

AUSTRALIA
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Sydney waterfront workers on strike; Newcastle rolling strikes called off

Dockers in the port of Sydney - members of the ITF-affiliated Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia - began an indefinite strike on 18 August following the breakdown of talks with the employers' federation on the introduction of a common port roster designed to give the union's members in the port a uniform wage. Sydney-bound cargoes at other Australian ports will not be handled for the duration of the stoppage.

In Newcastle, New South Wales, members of the cranes branch of the WWF have taken part in a series of rolling strikes by maritime and other unions which have disrupted coal loading in recent weeks. The unions, which are pressing for state ownership of a third coal loader due to be constructed at the port, agreed to resume normal working after receiving an undertaking from the state government that the workers would be consulted before any firm decision was taken on the ownership of the new port facility.

FRANCE

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CFDT reaches draft agreement on settlement of French fishing dispute

Following talks with the owners in Paris, the ITF-affiliated Transport Workers' Federation (CFDT) negotiated a draft agreement on 3 September to end the fishermen's dispute which led to the much-publicized blockades of French ports in recent weeks. At the time of writing, the draft was being put to fishermen in the ports. Although full details are not yet available, it is understood that the agreement provides inter alia for the maintenance of existing manning levels on trawlers pending the opening of new negotiations on the question by 1 October.

It was attempts by the owners to impose reduced manning and basic pay on grounds of higher fuel costs which sparked off the port blockades, which proved highly effective. The country's employed fishermen were also joined by self-employed fishermen calling for increased government fuel subsidies to the industry. The action centred at first on the port of Boulogne, France's largest fishing port, where a general strike was called x), and rapidly escalated until most ports on the Channel, Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts were affected. During the last few days, most blockades had been lifted in order to facilitate peace talks.

x) see STOP PRESS item on page 81 of last issue of Newsletter for details.

GREAT BRITAIN

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Belfast dockers' strike continues

The strike by Belfast dockers^{x)} continues. Fellow-workers in other ports both in the North and in the Irish Republic are refusing to handle cargoes diverted from the port's strike-hit deep-sea section. Pickets have also been established on cross-border roads to prevent such goods as have been imported into the Republic from reaching the North by road.

x) see ITF Newsletter No. 8, 1980, page 74 for details of dispute

North Sea oil supply boat ratings accept revised pay offer

Ratings working on North Sea oil supply boats have agreed in a membership ballot to accept a revised pay offer of about 27 per cent, which will bring an AB's weekly rate to £120, backdated to 2 July. An earlier offer of 24 per cent was rejected in a ballot in July.

Almost 1,000 members of the ITF-affiliated National Union of Seamen working for 7 offshore companies are covered by the new pay agreement.

Rail unions seek pay increase in return for cooperation with BR's productivity proposals

The three British rail unions (the NUR, ASLEF and the TSSA -all ITF affiliated) are demanding pay increases of up to twenty per cent in return for their acceptance of the changes in work patterns currently being sought by British Rail. The proposed changes would enable BR to increase productivity, use manpower more efficiently and effect cash savings.

NORWAY
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Mobile test rig workers agree to voluntary arbitration on pay award

The five-week-old strike by North Sea oil mobile test rig workers organized in the ITF-affiliated Norwegian Seamen's Union^{x)} was called off on 14 August after both parties to the dispute agreed to the establishment of a voluntary arbitration panel of seven men (two owners' and two workers' representatives, plus three neutral members) which will determine the exact level of the catch-up pay award. Prior to the commencement of its deliberations, both owners and union authorized the panel to sanction an increase in the range of 23 to 30 per cent, with a minimum of 20 per cent backdated to 1 May 1980. This is considerably in excess of the offer made by the owners during the strike. A decision is expected in the first half of September and the panel's findings will be binding on both parties.

Also involved in the dispute were two other ITF affiliates with members on the mobile rigs, the Norwegian Ships' Engineers' Union and the Navigating Officers' Association.

x) see ITF Newsletter No. 8, 1980, page 75 for earlier details

UNITED STATES

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Rail unions act to boost ailing pension funds

The Railway Labor Executives' Association, which groups 21 unions with members employed on US railroads, is urging the Federal government to take prompt measures to provide emergency funding for the Railroad Retirement System which is currently faced with an acute cash crisis threatening the pensions of retired railwaymen and the future pensions of serving staff. Congress is being pressed to take immediate steps to enact legislation designed to ensure that the fund will not run out of cash by the mid-1980s and that the annual cost-of-living adjustments due to end on 1 January next are continued for a further five years. The additional money needed to meet pension payments will be wholly employer-paid, under a commitment made in 1974 when the fund was introduced.

New contract for American Airlines ground service employees

The ITF-affiliated Transport Workers' Union of America has negotiated a new 30-month contract for 12,000 American Airlines ground service employees. The contract, which is backdated to 1 March 1980, provides for the following economic benefits: cost-of-living adjustment of 18 cents per hour on 1 September, followed by a further 22 cents per hour in September 1981 and 1982; an additional 65 cents per hour for employees with at least two operating licences; 15 cents per hour long-service bonus after 15 years; and the doubling of the differential for line crews from 5 to 10 cents. American Airlines has also agreed to refund with interest all contributions paid by its workers into the pension fund plan prior to its conversion into an employer-paid plan in 1976. The agreement is subject to ratification by the rank and file in a membership ballot.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Flight service officers (who radio weather and other information to flight crews) throughout Australia staged a 24-hour strike on 25 July in protest at new duty plans proposed by the Department of Transport. According to the ITF-affiliated Professional Radio and Electronics' Institute of Australasia, which organizes the officers, the plans would involve the transfer of some of its members' responsibilities to air traffic controllers.

Draft legislation which would permit the suspension of commercial air services to and from countries failing to take action against hijackers was introduced recently in the Canadian Senate. If adopted, the new law would also prevent aircraft from countries that harbour hijackers flying across Canadian territory.

Colombia: Cartagena dockers went on strike for two weeks last month in support of demands for the reinstatement of 144 sacked colleagues. The ITF-affiliated National Federation of Port Workers (FEDEPUERTOS) suspended and later cancelled a series of nationwide sympathy strikes when the labour troubles at the port were satisfactorily resolved following talks with officials of the national ports authority.

The Swedish State Employees' Union (SF) celebrated its 10th anniversary this summer. The ITF extends its heartiest congratulations and best wishes for the future.

OBITUARIES

Professor emeritus Folke Schmidt has died at the age of 71. A well-known and respected Swedish lawyer and academic, whose specialities were civil and labour law, Professor Schmidt was the author of a number of legal textbooks and papers, including one entitled "Ships Flying Flags of Convenience" which made references to the beginnings of the ITF campaign and urged countries not to invoke their legal machinery to interfere with peaceful boycotts serving a general public interest.

Svend Bache Vognberg, President of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD since 1973, died unexpectedly on 21 August, aged 58. His death occurred during a meeting of the executive of the Nordic Council of Trade Unions which was being held in Sweden. Brother Vognberg had been a Secretary of the Danish Trade Union Confederation (LO) for close on twenty years and had also participated actively in the work of the ICFTU, the ETUC and the ILO.

PERSONALIA

Michael Mullen, General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, has been appointed a director of Aer Rianta, the Irish airports authority.

Hannes Nydegger, Secretary of the Swiss Railwaymen's Union, celebrated his 60th birthday on 17 August. Brother Nydegger serves on the Transport Policy Sub-Committee of the ITF Railwaymen's Section and is the first chairman of its Sub-Committee on Working Conditions of Railway Staff.

John Whitworth has been elected the new Director General of the International Shipping Federation (ISF). He succeeds Jim Rice-Oxley, who retired in August.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

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Asian Seafarers' regional Committee	-	Singapore	17-19 September '80
Executive Board	-	London	21-22 October 1980
Meeting on Rhine Manning Questions	-	Utrecht	24-26 November 1980

STOP PRESS ITEM (1)

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We have just been informed that, following a complete breakdown in negotiations with the shipowners, the Turkish Seafarers' Federation has called its members out on strike. The owners have replied with a lockout. At the ITF Congress in Miami delegates heard how the Federation has been offered a derisory wage increase which represented only a fraction of the present inflation rate, and pledged their support for the Turkish seafarers in their present struggle. The ITF Secretariat has already informed seafarers' and dockers' affiliates of the new situation and requested that messages of support should be sent to the Seafarers' Federation.

STOP PRESS ITEM (2)

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As this issue was being printed, it was learned that fishermen in the port of Boulogne had voted in favour of continuing their strike (see p. 88).

AFFILIATED UNIONS REQUIRING FURTHER
INFORMATION ON ANY ITEM IN THIS
NEWSLETTER MAY OBTAIN IT ON REQUEST
FROM THE SECRETARIAT OF THE I.T.F.

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