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OMER BECU - an appreciation

*The ITF has lost one of its most revered former leaders with the death in Antwerp, Belgium, on 9 October of Omer Becu. We publish below an appreciation of a man to whom the international trade union movement owes a great debt of gratitude and who will long be remembered with great affection.*

Omer Becu, former ITF President and General Secretary of the ITF from 1950 to 1960 (the only man in the Federation's history to have successively held both posts) was, like his great predecessor and mentor, Edo Fimmen, a legend in his own time.

He was also the man who, during his General Secretaryship, realized Fimmen's dream by creating an ITF which was truly representative of all the world's continents, and no longer the basically European organisation which it had been throughout the greater part of its existence until then. ITF activity in Latin America, Asia and Africa all had their real beginnings during the ten years that he was General Secretary.

Many of the post-war affiliations by transport workers' unions from North America also owed a great deal to Omer Becu's earlier activity in the New York office which the ITF opened during the Second World War, and where he worked for some time after escaping from Nazi-occupied Europe, only leaving to help in re-creating democratic unions once the first areas of Europe became free again.

His own personality had much to do with the expansion of the ITF's membership during the years immediately following the war. He was above all able to infect others with his own passionate enthusiasm for international trade union work and his belief in international solidarity, not simply by words - although he was a brilliant and moving orator - but by his own example.

He lived for his ideal of trade union brotherhood and practised it in every situation. A man of great physical courage - often needed in his early days as a maritime union organizer, when a ship's captain was just as likely to try to knock you down as listen to you, or during his later clandestine activity against Hitler, Mussolini and Franco - he believed that if a fellow-unionist or one of his affiliates was in trouble, then he should be there on the spot to give them support and help, his own and that of the ITF. He was always prepared to take risks in opposing oppression and dictatorship of any kind.

He had enormous personal gifts, all of which were unstintingly at the service of the trade union movement he loved. He was a born leader and man of action, a charismatic and persuasive speaker in several languages, but at the same time a man of great friendliness, personal charm and consideration.

Those who worked with him in the ITF - whether as members or

officers of the ITF's affiliates or as members of the ITF Secretariat - will remember him as someone who always had a friendly word, sympathy for the problems of others (his own were seldom mentioned), and who treated them all as colleagues and friends in the struggle to which he himself was so devoted. He will be sadly missed as the great trade unionist that he was, and as a friend who commanded loyalty, affection and respect.

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NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE ITF

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INTERNATIONAL

Flight safety and licensing standards main themes of ITF licensed aircraft engineers meeting

Representatives of licensed aircraft engineers from unions in nineteen countries attending a two-day international meeting organised by the ITF in Lisbon last month expressed their concern at the growing threat to flight safety from the cost-cutting exercises of many airlines and the relaxation of standards by national regulatory authorities. A resolution was adopted alerting the general public to the dangers inherent in airlines seeking to save money by regularly using persons other than properly qualified maintenance engineers to undertake technical ground checks on sophisticated aircraft and calling on the regulatory authorities to protect safety standards by maintaining and improving the level of training required of ground technicians for the repair and maintenance of civil aircraft. Moves in the United States to take deregulation a step further by transferring responsibility for safety from the official government agency to the individual airlines were roundly condemned in another resolution which sought to bring to public notice the fact that licensed aircraft mechanics were not prepared to share the responsibility for any measures taken by airlines for purely commercial reasons that adversely affected passenger safety.

The meeting was of the view that all national governments should issue licences to aircraft maintenance engineers to an international standard acceptable to the ITF and subject to ITF review. It was recommended that the ITF establish a working group of experts on licensing and training to perform the task and the Section Secretary has already contacted ground staff affiliates seeking nominations to an eleven-man committee, which would include as ex-officio members the Chairman (John Collier; TGWU, UK) and Vice-Chairman (John Kerrigan; TWUA, USA) of the ITF Ground Staff Technical Committee.

POLAND

ITF calls 24-hour worldwide boycott of Polish aircraft and shipping

A vote in the Sejm (Polish parliament) on 8 October in favour of dissolving the 10-million strong independent Solidarity trade unions and their replacement by factory-based unions has put an end to the Polish workers' brave experiment with democratic trade unions. The banning of their organisation has led to protest strikes in the Baltic ports where Solidarity was born, as well as in other industrial centres, and calls for a boycott of the new worker organisations.

The Polish government has reacted to the widespread protests by once again using the riot police backed up by armoured cars and water cannon to break up demonstrations. It has also militarized the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk, the focal point of discontent, forcing the strikers back to work on pain of court martial. Some workers have already been sacked for taking part in protest actions and tragically at least one worker has been killed in the disturbances.

The ITF Executive Board, at its meeting later in the month, denounced the decision of the Polish military régime to abolish the free trade union Solidarity and to impose on Polish transport workers, indeed all Polish workers, a labour relations system which in all essential respects was identical to those adopted in other military dictatorships. Aware that Solidarity was looking to the international free trade union movement for support at this critical time, the Board also decided to call a 24-hour worldwide boycott of Polish ships, aircraft and cargoes on 10 November, the second anniversary of the legal recognition of Solidarity and the day chosen by its leadership as a special day of protest.

All affiliated organisations of the ITF were also asked to take what further measures they could to register their total rejection of the Polish régimes' anti-trade union policies and action.

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TRANSPORT

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EUROPE

Railwaymen's leaders hold joint meeting in Berne

Following a joint meeting in Berne, the leaders of ITF railwaymen's affiliates in Switzerland, Germany and Austria have pledged themselves to concerted action to improve the overall situation of the railways and to safeguard the jobs of workers in the industry.

In a press statement issued at the end of their deliberations, they urged the abandonment of plans for the privatization of the railways, sought service improvements that would attract more passengers and especially more goods traffic back to the rails and called for the adoption of national transport policies promoting the railways as a safe, energy-efficient and non-polluting transport mode. Railway managements were also urged to ensure that the importance of an efficient rail network to the national economy was more widely understood by the general public, with rail boards being asked to make greater efforts to explain the reasons for railway deficits which almost invariably arose from the inescapable social obligations placed on the railways. As far as their members were concerned, the railwaymen's leaders said that rationalization measures must not lead to further job losses and the placing of intolerable burdens on workers in the industry.

#### GERMANY

##### OeTV advocates public ownership of urban transport services

After detailed study of three German cities where urban passenger transport services are operated by both municipally - and privately - owned undertakings, the ITF-affiliated German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union (OeTV) has come out clearly in favour of the public ownership of urban transport services as being in the best interests of city dwellers and has called on politicians to pursue policies that would assure the future of existing municipally-owned transport undertakings and enable more cities to form companies to run their own local services.

The union's investigations show that private undertakings turn out to be more expensive in that they have to be given massive long-term subsidies by the cities they serve, paid for out of personal taxes, to enable them to continue to offer an acceptable level of service (the only alternative being unacceptably high and ever rising fares levels) and that they can only compete with municipally-owned undertakings by cutting the number of their employees, demanding long hours of their staff, offering an unattractive pay and benefits package and by using older buses and trams and reducing the frequency of services - to the disadvantage of both those they employ and the travelling public.

The union argument is supported by evidence of the case of Delmenhorst, in Lower Saxony where four years ago the Bremen Strassenbahn AG bought out a private company. Since that time, services have been improved and timetables and routes geared to the needs of the local inhabitants. More jobs have been created, the workers now enjoy shorter hours, higher pay and better working and social conditions, and the fleet has been augmented. This go-ahead local authority has been able to reverse the general trend of falling ridership and can now point to an increase in the number of passengers carried, who are attracted no doubt by the greatly improved services it now offers to transport users.

ITALY

Danish TIR drivers fear attacks from Italian bandits

The road haulage drivers' union in Denmark - the Danish Transport and General Workers' Union (SiD), an ITF affiliate - has reported an alarming increase in the number of attacks in recent months on drivers of Danish heavy goods vehicles from highly-organised armed gangs operating in Italy. The situation has become so bad that many Danish drivers are refusing to take loads to Italy and some have been fired as a result. The attacks usually take place at night, in overnight lorry parks and lay-bys near the Italian border. The driver is bound and gagged, threatened with a gun and his lorry driven off and emptied. The vehicle eventually turns up miles away from the scene of the crime. Drivers who offer resistance meet with physical violence and some have been shot. SiD is deeply concerned at the apparent inability of the Italian authorities to take effective action and has contacted the Danish foreign ministry urging it to put full diplomatic pressure on the Italians through the EEC to stamp out this evil. The union is also asking for police guards on Italian overnight lorry parks.

The Scandinavian Transport Workers' Federation has already set up a committee to examine the problem and the ITF-affiliated Norwegian Transport Workers' Union, some of whose driver members have also suffered attacks but on a smaller scale, has said it would respond positively to any request from the Danes for concerted action at a Scandinavian level.

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SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL NEWS

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BELGIUM

Higher pay for Belgian inland navigation workers

New rates of pay come into effect on 1 October for inland navigation workers organised in the ITF-affiliated Belgian Transport Workers' Union (BTB), following application of a cost-of-living increase. Skippers' rates of pay now range from 32,613 to 47,315 B frs, depending on size of vessel and type of navigation; all certificated mates receive 35,255 B frs, regardless of vessel size, and uncertificated mates have a uniform rate of 34,105 B frs.

Able seamen now have a salary range of 29,725 to 32,613 B frs, depending on size of vessel and length of service, and ships' boys with more than one year's service get from 22,625 to 29,084 B frs.

CANADA

Pay policy will hit incomes of Brotherhood members

Some 15,000 members of the ITF-affiliated Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers employed on the railways and the St. Lawrence Seaway will find their incomes cut next year as a result of the pay restraint legislation adopted by the Canadian parliament this summer. The government's pay policy limits workers to increases of 6% for 1983 and 5% for 1984, although they may choose to take lower increases in these two years in return for longer annual leave. While the new legislation will not affect payment of a lump sum to railwaymen early next year in implementation of the 1982 cost-of-living clause in their agreement, it will mean that the nine per cent pay increase already agreed for 1983 will be cut back to six per cent and that the 1983 cost-of-living clause will be suspended. The existing contract will be extended to cover 1984, with pay allowed to rise by only five per cent.

The collective agreement of Brotherhood members on the St. Lawrence Seaway will be subject to the provisions of the new legislation when it expires at the end of this year.

FRANCE

New work scheme for French cabin crews

An agreement signed on 28 July by the ITF-affiliated French Cabin Crew Union (SNPNC) and the three French airlines (Air France, Air Inter and UTA) gives members of the union the right to participate in what the SNPNC believes is a unique scheme permitting them to alternate periods of paid service for an airline employer with periods of unpaid leave. The scheme, known as temps alterné (alternating time), has the dual attraction of benefiting those already in airline employment who would prefer to work less than full-time and of helping to create new job opportunities. It will be introduced on 1 November and there will be an experimental phase of twelve months during which time it is hoped that any difficulties arising from its implementation can be ironed out in joint union/management talks.

To qualify for inclusion, cabin staff must have at least one year's service with the airline and have a contract of indefinite length, and must not be in the probationary period for the grade they occupy. Employees of all three companies will have the opportunity to opt to work for either 6 or 9 months of the year (i.e. 50%: 1 month on followed by 1 month off on medium-haul and 2 months on followed by 2 months off on long-haul; or 75% 3 months on followed by 1 month off). Additionally, UTA staff will be allowed a third option of 8 months' work per annum (66%: 2 months on followed by 1 month off). Employees wishing to take advantage of the scheme will have to apply before 30 April of the year in question and the airline will either grant or

withhold permission in September, depending on the number of applications for the available places.

Access to temps alterné will be restricted to 5% of employees in each grade at Air Inter and UTA and 3% at Air France, with priority being given to those with the longest service. However, these quotas may be increased should this be warranted by the number of applications received by 1 October in respect of the year of introduction of the scheme. Cabin staff over 50 will be excluded from these quotas, and once having altered their work pattern they will not normally be allowed to return to full-time working as they will be in receipt of pension payments during the months they are not working and the scheme is viewed as giving them a chance to ease themselves into retirement. Younger employees wishing to revert to full-time work will have to submit an application to this effect before 30 April for consideration for the year beginning 1 November, although any sudden change in family circumstances (death of spouse, redundancy of spouse etc.) gives all employees (including those over 50) the right to resume full-time working with immediate effect.

#### GREAT BRITAIN

##### Air India staff seek assistance in settling dispute

Air India's London-based employees picketed the Indian High Commission in London earlier this month in an attempt to persuade the Indian government to intervene in their four-month-old dispute with the airline.<sup>x</sup> Moss Evans, General Secretary of the British Transport and General Workers' Union, which includes the Air India staff among its membership, has also written to the Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi protesting at the manner in which company officials in London have handled the strike. Mrs Gandhi has come under pressure too from British trade unionists and Labour politicians who have called on her to take the matter to arbitration. Air India's London management has consistently refused to allow the dispute to be referred to the independent conciliation service, ACAS.

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<sup>x</sup>see also ITF Newsletter No. 8, 1982, page 89 and No. 9, 1982, page 101

##### Radio officers oppose attempts to weaken SOLAS

The ITF-affiliated Radio and Electronic Officers' Union has won overwhelming support for blacking action against vessels allowed to sail without a radio officer or wireless telegraphy. The Department of Trade is known to be considering applications from a number of companies for exemptions from the radio requirements



of SOLAS, and the REOU had wanted to establish the views of its membership in advance of a key meeting of the DOT's maritime radio advisory committee at which it will argue that the granting of such exemptions would seriously endanger maritime safety and lead to fewer jobs and training opportunities for radio officers. Action contemplated by our affiliate includes a refusal to carry out radio repairs or give other assistance (except in an emergency) to vessels obtaining a dispensation.

## ISRAEL

### ITF Executive Board condemns lock-out of EL AL workers and plans to close airline

Relations between the ITF-affiliated Transport Workers' Division of Histadrut (the Israeli national centre) and the Israeli airline El Al have steadily worsened over the past two months as a result of a series of arbitrary decisions taken by the airline. The union's difficulties began when eleven pursers and stewards involved in a pay dispute concerning the sale of duty-free goods were dismissed by El Al in contravention of the jointly agreed procedures for dealing with alleged disciplinary offences. Despite a labour court decision in the union's favour, El Al then decided to close down the company's operations and to furlough its 5,000 employees. The El Al Board of Directors further instructed the airline management to bring about a reorganisation of the company's structure and operations and warned that if no progress was made on this within thirty days it would recommend dissolution of the company to share-holders.

Notwithstanding subsequent conciliatory moves from Histadrut and its declared willingness to enter into negotiations without preconditions provided El Al resumed normal operations, the airline's entire fleet remained grounded and plans for the dissolution of the company were put in train. Histadrut had no other choice than to call a warning strike on 13 October at Israeli airports and ports and in selected industries in support of the El Al workers to add weight to its request for bona fide negotiations between it and the El Al management in order to achieve a settlement.

ITF General Secretary Harold Lewis had already telexed Histadrut some days earlier to express ITF solidarity with the El Al workers and to assure them that ITF affiliates would not cooperate with any new company established to replace El Al or in attempts to operate services through foreign airlines. The General Secretary's actions were endorsed at the meeting later in the month of the ITF Executive Board, which unanimously condemned the lock-out of El Al workers and the management's plans to close the airline and sell it off to private interests. The Board also called on the El Al management to accept a fair settlement of all outstanding issues by negotiation and declared that the ITF would regard the closure and subsequent sale of the airline as a direct attack on the trade union rights and working conditions of El Al workers.

## NETHERLANDS

### Shorter work week for taxi drivers

The ITF-affiliated Dutch Transport Workers' Union (FNV) has succeeded in negotiating a new three-year national agreement for 10,000 taxi cab drivers - the first time for over a decade that this group of workers has had the protection of other than a handful of purely local agreements. Under the new contract, which comes into force on 1 January next, weekly hours (currently 48) will be reduced by one hour per year, but only from 1 January 1984, to give a work week of 45 hours by the beginning of 1986, and negotiations will take place with the employers during the currency of the agreement on further cuts in hours to be introduced in the next contract, with the eventual aim of a 40-hour week. Other key provisions include: an annual leave provision of between 21 and 24 days according to age and length of service and a premium of 120% of guaranteed minimum pay for overtime work performed on Public Holidays. Talks will also be held with the employers on the question of unsocial hour payments for taxi drivers.

## SPAIN

### Union seeks reinstatement of dismissed Spantax flight personnel

Flight crew personnel belonging to the Flying Staff Section of the ITF-affiliated UGT Transport Workers' Federation are currently staging a series of protest actions against the Spanish charter airline Spantax SA which are aimed at securing the immediate reinstatement with full back pay of twenty-two pilots and flight engineers (including one woman pilot) dismissed by the company in October of last year. Following representations made by the UGT concerning the legality of the employer's action, the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Security issued a decision in May 1982 stating that the dismissed Spantax staff should be reinstated. However, the airline has sought to delay or avoid re-employing and paying these workers the back pay due to them by appealing against the Ministry's decision - a tactic which could well lead to long-drawn-out court proceedings.

At the request of our affiliate, the ITF has already telexed the Spantax head office in Madrid calling on the company to reinstate the dismissed workers without delay and with full back pay from the date of their dismissal. ITF aviation affiliates have also been contacted in accordance with the UGT's wishes and asked to address similar protests to Spantax in Spain, as well as to make representations to local Spantax managements where appropriate.

## UNITED STATES

### USAir strike narrowly averted

The ITF-affiliated International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers has reached tentative agreement with USAir on

the terms of a new contract for 2,000 mechanics and related workers only minutes before a strike deadline. Mediation was invoked in March because the company was proposing a worsening of conditions in the area of pensions and job protection. Details of the contract are being withheld pending ratification.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

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The Austrian Railwaymen's Union celebrated its 90th anniversary at a ceremony in Vienna on 1 October. ITF Assistant General Secretary Johann Hauf, himself an Austrian, attended on our behalf and conveyed the ITF's heartiest congratulations to an old and valued affiliate, whose President Fritz Prechtel has served so outstandingly as the Federation's own President for the past eleven years.

Belgian railway workers staged a one-day national strike on 30 September in protest at government plans to cut subsidies to the railways by five per cent over five years. The rail unions fear that this will lead to fewer job opportunities for railwaymen.

The ITF extends sincere congratulations to the Danish Ship's Catering Personnel Association, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this month. Our affiliate represents ships' cooks, messmen and stewardesses on Danish ships.

The ITF-affiliated German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union (OeTV) has recently negotiated new annual leave provisions for employees of the Italian airline Alitalia based in the German Federal Republic. These are as follows: under 30 years of age: 28 days (1983), 29 days (1984), 30 days (1985); over 30 but under 40: 29 days (1983), 30 days (1984 and 1985); over 40 years: 30 days.

Germany: employees of Lufthansa, Lufthansa Service and Condor are to receive a 100 DM bonus for 1982.

More than two thousand UK merchant navy officers and cadets were declared redundant in the first eight months of 1982 - a figure described as alarmingly high by the ITF-affiliated British Merchant Navy and Airline Officers' Association.

Great Britain: ratings on North Sea oil supply vessels, angered at the use of foreign-flag vessels with cheap crews to undercut

UK-registered vessels in North Sea charter operations, took protest action earlier this month. The crews are members of the ITF-affiliated National Union of Seamen.

Great Britain: the air traffic control branch of the Institute of Professional Civil Servants has set up a committee to look at the hours worked by air traffic controllers on North Sea oil rigs and at Highlands and Islands air traffic control centres following reports that some controllers are working more than 60 hours a week and taking on regular night duties. Fears have been expressed that pressure on controllers to put in long hours is endangering helicopter safety in the North Sea.

Our warmest congratulations go to the Swedish Ships' Officers' Association - now an independent union within the Swedish Supervisors' Union - which celebrates its 75th anniversary this month.

The American airline World Airways has been reported as having put 150 pilots and cabin attendants from Britain and the United States through a two-week training course and is said to be retaining them on call for use as potential strike-breakers should contract negotiations with the Teamsters' Union (not an ITF affiliate), now in mediation fail, and a strike be called.

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OBITUARIES

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Hans Gottfurcht, Assistant General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions from 1952 to 1960, died in Switzerland on 18 September, aged 86. Forced to flee his native Germany shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Gottfurcht spent the war years in Britain and was one of the first to re-establish the link between the British and German trade unions once the hostilities ended. After playing a leading rôle in the creation of a free trade union International, he became head of the ICFTU Education Department in 1949.

Ejler Sønner, President for five years of the Danish Transport and General Workers' Union (SiD) until ill-health forced him into early retirement in 1977, died on 10 September, aged 68. Sønner worked for SiD for thirty-eight years and was made an honorary member of the union shortly after he retired.

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PERSONALIA

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We extend sincere congratulations to Jean Duniau of the French Federation of Public Service and Port, Maritime and Transport Workers, FO, who has been created a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honour in recognition of his services to the French trade union movement. Brother Duniau is a member of the Committee of the ITF Inland Navigation Section.

Sam McCluskie, Assistant General Secretary and Treasurer of the British National Union of Seamen, is this year's Chairman of the British Labour Party.

Dr. Monika Wulf-Mathies was elected by last month's extraordinary union Congress as the first woman President of the German Transport and Public Service Workers' Union (OeTV). Dr. Wulf-Mathies, who is 40, has been a member of the union executive since 1976. Tributes were paid to the union's former President Heinz Kluncker whose resignation for health reasons earlier in the year led to the current elections.

Anton Benya, President of the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), celebrated his 70th birthday on 8 October.

Lennart Bodström, President since 1970 of the Swedish Central Organisation of Salaried Employees (TCO), has been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Socialist government of Olof Palme. Bodström is also President of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD.

Roine Carlsson, President of the Swedish Paper Industry Workers' Union, has been appointed Deputy Industry Minister with special responsibility for nationalized undertakings.

Parelius Mentsen, President of the Norwegian Trade Union Federation (LO) from 1965 until his retirement in 1969, celebrated his 80th birthday on 1 October.

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

SOUTH AFRICA: Executive Board Statement on  
General Workers' Union (GWU) dispute with  
South African Transport Services (SATS)

(See also Supplement to ITF Newsletters of January, March, May, June, August and September)

At its meeting in Bremen on 19 and 20 October 1982 the Executive Board of the ITF unanimously endorsed the actions taken by the General Secretary to support the GWU in its dispute with SATS over the trade union representation of SATS dockworkers.

The Board sees in that dispute a question of principle, namely whether the SATS dockworkers are to be granted the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining. It deplores the persistent refusal of the SATS management to deal with the union in any meaningful way.

The Board could understand why in those circumstances the Port Elizabeth dockworkers felt themselves driven to take limited industrial action. The management's response, in dismissing hundreds of dockworkers, has served to fortify the workers in their stand and the prompt reinstatement of those dismissed is essential if industrial peace is to be secured.

The Board noted that both the GWU and ITF had made written representations to the committee which is presently considering SATS' industrial relations structure. It endorses their request that both be invited also to give oral evidence.

Finally, the Board instructed the General Secretary to take whatever measures he felt appropriate to enlist the aid of the ITF's affiliates in support of the GWU.