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HERALD OF FREE ENTERPRISE DISASTER

Unions query ro ro ferry design safety

The worst British maritime disaster since the war occurred on the evening of Friday 6 March when the Townsend Thoresen car ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* capsized just outside the harbour of the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, barely a quarter of an hour after starting out on the evening Channel crossing to Dover.

97 passengers died or are listed as missing, but over 460 were rescued. Thirty eight of the crew of 84 are dead or unaccounted for - among them a catering boy in only his second week at sea.

Only the fact that the *Herald* came to rest on a sandbank in shallow water prevented the ship from turning over completely. Appalling as the disaster was, had it happened a few minutes later in the deeper waters beyond the harbour, the ship would have keeled right over, no doubt with much greater loss of life. Had the accident occurred in Summer with a full passenger load the casualty toll would have been higher still.

The British government has ordered a formal public inquiry into the disaster later this year. It has also promised that any recommendations arising out of the preliminary inquiry into the disaster which is already underway will be implemented without delay. In Belgium an official judicial inquiry is being conducted by an examining magistrate.

Attention so far has been focusing on the possibility that water entered the vessel through the forward vehicle loading doors. Whatever the direct cause of the accident, however, the speed with which the vessel capsized (less than a minute) has confirmed many of the worst fears of British maritime unions regarding the safety of modern roll on roll off vessels.

Experience has shown that the high sides and lack of internal bulkheads of ro ro ships - design features that provide faster and easier loading for vehicles - render them 'top heavy' and vulnerable to sudden flooding through the bow and stern doors or other openings.

Even a few centimetres of water on deck can raise the centre of gravity of the vessel, rapidly building up a 'free surface' effect, which can lead to a sudden capsize.

The *Herald* was not the first ro ro ferry to capsize suddenly. A similar fate met Townsend Thoresen's *European Gateway* in 1982, the french flag *Mont Louis* and a number of other vessels involved in collisions.

The danger of cargo shifting on roll on roll off vessels has already been highlighted in a report by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) which showed that more of these ships were lost than ships with decks divided by vertical bulkheads.

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...crew members die helping passengers ...

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Other surveys have shown that 60 per cent of ro ro vessels lost after collisions sank or capsized within 10 minutes. The shipping magazine *Fairplay*, summing up the vulnerability of these ships, speaks of the 'intolerance of the design to human error'.

After the *Herald* accident, the British government ordered immediate safety checks on all vehicle ferries using British ports to ensure that their loading door mechanisms were in working order. The Transport Minister also advised owners of the desirability of fitting warning lights on the bridge of the vessels to show the loading doors were properly closed. (The bridge on the *Herald* had no such lights).

The British officers' and ratings' unions NUS and NUMAST, which had many members on board the vessel, have both called for the IMO to undertake a review of ro ro design.

A similar call has come from the the Belgian Transport Workers' Union BTB which is also demanding strict enforcement of regulations on closing of doors and hatches, controls on the carriage of dangerous goods by ferry, and a prohibition on allowing truck drivers access to vehicles during the voyage.

The NUS has appealed for urgent attention to be given by the Department of Transport to the problem of the rapid intake of water into vehicle decks, and the provision of proper ventilation standards for vehicle decks (some reports claim the *Herald*'s doors were left open to clear exhaust fumes).

The NUS is also calling for the provision of equipment such as ladders strategically placed to help those who might be trapped in another similar emergency to reach windows and of implements such as pick axes capable of breaking porthole glass.

The height of ro ro vessels above the water has raised questions of accessibility to the boat decks and to means of escape from decks high above the water line, and an NUS call for assurances that evacuation procedures would be reassessed.

The one single modification which could perhaps have prevented or at least slowed down the capsize would have been the installation of two vertical bulkheads dividing the vehicle decks into three watertight compartments. These bulkheads, centrally controlled from the bridge, and no more than 6 foot high could have been extended from the roof or side of the deck.

The European Parliament has called for improved safety standards for all European ferries and a prohibition on the carriage of dangerous chemicals on passenger ships

Meanwhile, other cross Channel operators have ordered safety checks on their vessels and are tightening up on their operating procedures.

One aspect of the disaster which received little press attention was the much higher death toll amongst the crew than amongst the passengers. One reason for this was clearly the professionalism of crew members, many of whom gave their own lives to help trapped passengers.

"It was the cold water that killed them", said Ken Hollingsbee, an assistant steward in the duty free shop of his dead colleagues.

"They were in the water too long. They died because they stayed behind to help others. If it had not been for those lads there would have been no survivors."

Between them crew members - working to the point of exhaustion - helped scores of passengers to safety during the five hours after the accident.

Bosun Terry Ayling adds:

"By the finish we were so tired that even seven of us could not pull one person up between us. Our heads wanted to, but our bodies just would not react."

Those crew members who survived are still reliving the disaster and will no doubt continue to do so for a long time to come. It is a tribute to their training and professionalism that despite the real life nightmare they had just been through all said they would soon will be back at sea

Sweden bans SA trade

Sweden is to impose a complete ban on trade with South Africa, starting this October.

This unprecedented move, according to the Swedish foreign ministry, has been caused by the "unique circumstances" of the South African situation.

In a statement issued on March 12, the Foreign Ministry said that in no other country was the "systematic violation of a majority people's fundamental rights constitutionally entrenched as in South Africa."

Sweden's strict political neutrality has previously prevented the country from participating in any trade sanctions apart from those decided upon by the UN Security Council. But, following the Security Council sanctions vote on February 23, which, once again, was blocked by the United States' and Great Britain's veto, Sweden's ruling Social Democratic party decided that unilateral action was necessary.

Sweden imported SKr 412 million from South Africa in 1985, but that had already dropped to SKr 127 million in the first eleven months of last year.

The Norwegian Parliament has just approved legislation halting trade with South Africa or South African-occupied Namibia. In light of the fact that Norwegian flag ships have, in the past, shipped oil to South Africa, this represents a significant step.

A loophole in the Norwegian law theoretically allows owners and operators of ships to participate in transshipments to the Apartheid regime, if they claim that they did not know the final destination of their cargo — but a spokesperson for the Norwegian Shipowners' Association has told *Lloyd's List* that no company would dare exploit this technicality.

"In reality, the new legal measures will bring an end to Norwegian vessels shipping oil to the country" he said.

ITF team to probe PRC manning

Deep appreciation for the swift response of Belgian and Dutch rescue teams following the tragic loss of the 'Herald of Free Enterprise' was expressed by the members of the ITF Executive Board which met in London on 10 and 11 March.

China

In a move unprecedented in the international trade union movement, the two day meeting agreed to accept an invitation from the All China Federation of Trade Unions to send an ITF delegation to the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC). A small delegation will visit the country at the beginning of May. Its terms of reference are 'to examine present and future employment of PRC seafarers on foreign flag vessels and the implications of that employment for the ITF'.

Foc's

A motion from US unions calling for a special Seafarers' and Dockers' Conference to review the operation of the Foc campaign was not supported by the Board, which suggested instead that this issue should be a major item on the agenda of the Fair Practices Committee in June. The FPC will decide whether such a conference is necessary.

Docks

Dockers' representatives gave an up to date report on the worsening conditions in many of the world's ports. In Australia employers and state governments were intensifying their attacks on waterfront unions, in Genoa there had been serious industrial unrest amongst Italian dockers over plans for massive cuts in employment levels, and a major restructuring of the Spanish ports was underway. There has also been a series of major strikes in Canadian ports.

Privatisation

A detailed debate took place between Board members on the question of Privatisation and Deregulation, following the report of developments in Japan National Railways and based on a resolution submitted by the ITF's U.S. affiliates. Jack Otero (BRAC) introducing the US motion referred to the large scale deregulation not just of airlines but of trucking and railroads in the USA. The US unions wanted the ITF to formulate new international policies to combat the threat posed by privatisation and deregulation to transport workers and the general public, a view which found general support amongst Board

members. Governments in virtually every part of the world - Labour as well as Conservative - were increasingly looking at privatisation and deregulation in transport.

While the first priority remains to campaign at national level, it was agreed that the ITF could play an important role in coordinating information and policy internationally. A number of ideas, such as a special intersectional conference on Deregulation and Privatisation, were raised and discussed, but it was agreed to leave the precise form of the ITF's response to the General Secretary.

Regions

The Board members from Africa reported on the position of transport workers in the front line (SADCC)

countries whose jobs were under threat as a result of South African government pressure on transport links. More help was needed to develop an independent transport infrastructure, African Representative Ben Udogwu reported, but direct legislative action from the governments themselves to protect jobs was urgently required. Members from Asia/Pacific reported on the continuing disastrous effect of JNR privatisation on Japanese railway employees' jobs and union membership.

In Latin America, a detailed report was given on the current maritime strike in Brazil and proposals for strengthening the ITF's Latin American activities were deferred to the next Board meeting in October.

Sri Lanka protest banned

The fears of the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU) that the draconian powers available to the police under the Sri Lankan state of emergency would be used against its proposed action on 5 March in support of human and trade union rights proved only too well founded.

The Inspector-General of Police banned the union's procession in Colombo, although he did allow a public meeting in the capital to go ahead that afternoon as planned.

Squads of police, with batons drawn, were posted outside the CMU headquarters to disperse by force any members who might assemble there to march in procession to the public meeting.

Three days before the protest, the police had also issued a ban on the distribution of leaflets and the display of posters setting out the union's reasons for its action.

With no way round the procession ban, the CMU's General Council instructed union members in the metropolitan area to assemble in the De Mel Park where a public meeting was held following its work stoppage.

The meeting in the park adopted a resolution saluting all who had struck that day in defence of their rights as citizens and workers and thanking those trade union organisations in Sri Lanka and other countries who had expressed their support for the union's action.

While the mass rally in Colombo formed a focus for the union's action, rank and file protest was by no means limited to the capital.

In the town of Nuwara Eliya, in the heart of the Central Province's tea growing area, 11 union branches had originally intended to mark the day with a procession to the town hall followed by a public meeting. In the event, this proved impossible as the police not only prohibited the procession, but refused to allow union members to assemble in the town hall or any alternative venue.

However, this did not stop hundreds of workers, including women textile workers and employees of the largest brewery in Sri Lanka, from taking to the streets in groups, wearing special badges prepared for the occasion.

News of the CMU protest action was kept from the people of Sri Lanka as the events of March 5 went largely unreported in the local press, even though the union had called a press conference on 3 March at which journalists were informed of the police restrictions on the exercise of the union's democratic rights. One paper was however highly critical of the police ban in an editorial under the headline 'democratic rights' which appeared in its 6 March edition.

CMU General Secretary Bala Tampoe protested strongly to the police over their reaction to the union's planned action. He enclosed with his letter the many messages of support received from ITF-affiliated unions showing the extent of international backing for the CMU's position.

SEAFARERS

ITF Asia/Pacific meeting in Manila

The meeting of the ITF Asia/Pacific Seafarers' Regional Committee held in Manila from 23 to 25 February discussed the exploitative practices of Asian manning agencies, manpower planning in the region and the ITF campaign against sub-standard shipping.

Australia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kirabati and Tuvalu, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Taiwan were all represented at the first post Congress meeting of the Committee.

Assistant General Secretary Åke Selander attended from the ITF Secretariat and ITF Seafarers' Section Chairman K Mols Sørensen was in the chair.

The meeting took two important decisions on questions of *maritime safety*, urging the ITF Seafarers' Section to draft rules on the acceleration of maritime search and rescue procedures for submission to the IMO, and instructing the Secretariat to seek an official interpretation from the IMO of the watchkeeping provisions of the International Convention on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping (STCW) in the light of the current Norwegian experiment allowing ships to navigate without a night lookout, a practice which was roundly condemned.

The committee called for the *simplification of procedures* relating to the scrutiny and approval of ITF acceptable agreements. A resolution calling for a review of the ITF definition of beneficial ownership was referred to the ITF Fair Practices Committee.

Concern was expressed by delegates at the growing number of cases where ships were abandoned leaving seafarers stranded in foreign ports without the basic necessities of life. The meeting adopted resolutions urging governments of all maritime nations to frame their admiralty law and court procedures in such a way as to allow for the speedy disposal of seafarers' wage claims and calling on the ITF to mobilise world maritime opinion to create an

international relief fund for seafarers by means of a tonnage levy. In another resolution the ITF Secretariat was requested to ask certain countries to apply their immigration laws less rigorously so that transiting seafarers might enjoy normal transit facilities.

The meeting continued discussions on a proposed *job quota system* for Foc ships and recommended that an inter-sessional working party be set up to consider the issue.

On the political front, committee members deplored attempts by the government and employers in Sri

Lanka to undermine workers' rights to bargain collectively and expressed their complete solidarity with the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU) in its legitimate struggle for the restoration of democratic, human and trade union rights in Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, delegates gave their unqualified support to the Federation of Korean Seamen's Unions (FKSU) in its demand for changes in the existing Korean trade union law to enable the FKSU to organise all foreign-going seafarers in Korean flag ships into one union.

Land locked Luxembourg flag "is FOC" says ITF

The ITF has told the government of Luxembourg that its proposed new shipping register will be treated as a flag of convenience.

In a frank exchange of views between Luxembourg Foreign Affairs Minister Robert Goebbels and ITF officials at a meeting in London in February, the ITF restated its standing policy that any register open to owners from other countries is an Foc.

This contrasts with public statements by the Luxembourg government, which has stated in the shipping press that should they go ahead with a register it would not be an Foc because of the strict conditions that would be attached to owners registering under their flag. However 'respectable' an open register may be, however, in the ITF's eyes it is still a convenience flag unless there is a *genuine link* between a ship's owner and flag.

Better labour laws urged for Filipino seafarers

When he was in Manila, ITF Assistant General Secretary Åke Selander met Philippines Labour Minister Franklin Drilon for a discussion on maritime labour policy.

Selander stressed the ITF's demand for proper seagoing manpower planning in the Asia/Pacific region based on agreed *manning quotas*.

This should be supplemented by further improvements in the *manning agency* system. He expressed ITF support for a region-wide agreement on manning practices reached as the result of an ILO regional conference.

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He also urged improved legislative protection for Filipino seafarers lodging claims under collective bargaining agreements and explained the ITF's reasons for opposed ratification of the 1986 UN Convention on Conditions for the Registration of Ships.

Finally, he warned the Minister that the excessive use being made in the Philippines of legislation relating to bareboat charters could result in the Philippines being listed by the ITF as a flag of convenience.

Brazilian seafarers strike

Some 40,000 Brazilian officers and ratings in the coastal and deep sea trades as well as the offshore sector went on strike on 28 February, with the support and assistance of the country's maritime unions.

The action is being coordinated by the Brazilian Maritime, River and Aviation Workers' Confederation CNTTMFA, whose president Mauricio Sant'Anna was until recently a member of the ITF Executive Board.

The seafarers' demands are for a long overdue rise in basic salaries in line with steep increases in inflation, better leave arrangements and improved social benefits.

The strike spread to some 200 ships - some in foreign ports - and was soon crippling the country's vital oil and grain supplies. The inclusion of tug crews also meant that foreign vessels not directly involved in the stoppage could only enter Brazilian ports if they dispensed with tug assistance.

In an attempt to gain a grip on the situation, the Brazilian government declared the strike illegal on 6 March. When the striking seamen defied a labour court's back to work order armed troops, supported by tanks, were sent in to the ports in six states.

Strikebound tankers were towed away from unloading berths by navy tugs to allow access to foreign registered tankers and navy personnel took over grain ships in the key port of Santos and began unloading cargo.

According to local reports, armed marines prevented striking seafarers from leaving their vessels and barred those on leave from returning to their ships. Strike leaders were taken to police headquarters for questioning and one ship's captain was held for twelve hours.

The ITF Executive Board, meeting in London on 10-11 March, strongly condemned the use of military force to crush a legitimate strike called in support of justified demands. In a message to President José Sarney and the Ministers of Labour, Transport, Justice, Mines and Energy, the Board said that such armed intervention was 'utterly deplorable and contrary to all notions of human rights in a modern society'. It called on the government to withdraw its forces forthwith and assist a solution to the dispute in Brazilian shipping through peaceful means.

As we went to press, an end to the 20 day old strike seemed at last in sight. According to information received from the CNTTMFA, agreements have now been concluded with 14 offshore and 3 chemical vessel owners as well as with the two state-owned companies Docenave and Petrobras. The union remains optimistic that settlements are possible with the state-owned shipping line Lloyd Brasileiro and the remaining private companies. The agreements reached thus far are understood to include a 120 per cent increase on basic rates, substantial increases in overtime rates, payment

for the days stopped and a 30 days on 30 days off work scheme on offshore supply boats and tug vessels. The union reports that marines are still occupying 10 Brazilian ports and that 540 seafarers have been dismissed, many having received no pay for the month of February.

At the beginning of the strike, ITF seafarer and docker affiliates were alerted to the plight of the Brazilian seafarers and asked to give maximum support. Brazilian seafarers on a strikebound ships were given assistance by the ÖTV in West Germany and the ILA in Houston, Texas.

Dutch government vetoes Smit-Lloyd job cuts plan

In what is being seen as a warning to other shipping companies seeking to flag out, the Dutch government has told leading support vessel company Smit-Lloyd BV that it cannot make 60 Dutch seafarers redundant and replace them with non-nationals.

The downturn in offshore drilling over the past twelve months has led Smit-Lloyd to sell ten ships and place a further seven under the Bahamian flag, hiring some foreign crews. Its application for redundancies for the

surplus Dutch seafarers was rejected by the Labour Office on advice from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

This is the first time that the government has applied to the shipping sector its policy of not allowing cheap foreign labour to be brought in to replace Dutch nationals.

Faced with growing losses, the company is anxious to cut costs, claiming that it can save fls 500,000 (US\$ 241,500) a year for each vessel under a foreign flag operated with a non-Dutch crew.

ITF sponsors meeting between Greeks and Koreans

With ITF assistance a meeting was held on 3 March in the South Korean capital Seoul between the Pan-Hellenic Seamen's Federation (PNO) and the Federation of Korean Seamen's Unions (FKSU) in a bid to resolve certain differences over the manning of Greek-owned Foc ships.

As the result of this meeting both ITF affiliates have now agreed to co-ordinate their action over the interpretation of ITF policy on the manning of Foc ships and to submit if necessary to arbitration by the ITF.

The Korean union has undertaken fully to consult the PNO and the ITF before signing agreements for Greek-owned Foc ships and has also said it will not

supply any crews under the Greek bilateral crewing arrangements announced last year by the Greek government (see December edition of ITF News).

In its turn the PNO is to start discussions with the FKSU on possible joint manning arrangements and has agreed to inform the Korean union immediately of any irregularities it discovers in Korean approaches for manning of Greek-owned Foc vessels.

The present understanding will be reviewed following consideration by the June meeting of the ITF Fair Practices Committee of the findings of the ITF's Korean mission.

ITF affiliate opens hospital for seafarers in the Philippines

Last month saw the opening of a magnificent new seamen's hospital in Manila. The opening ceremony was led by the Filipino Minister of Labour Franklin Drilon who performed the ribbon cutting.

The much needed hospital will be run by the Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP). The ITF Welfare Fund has assisted with grants towards essential equipment and contributions have also been received from contracted shipowners.

Delegates attending the regional ITF seafarers' meeting going on at the time were only too glad to take up the invitation extended by AMOSUP to attend the opening ceremony and view the new facilities.

Addressing the large gathering at the open-air ceremony, ITF Assistant General Secretary Åke Selander described the hospital as "another splendid monument which owes its origin to the hard work and persistent canvassing by yet another ITF affiliate and its dynamic leadership. The hospital constitutes a perfect example of an achievement in which humanitarian arguments have outweighed pecuniary considerations



Pictured at the opening ceremony of the AMOSUP hospital, from left to right, ITF Seafarers' Section Chairman K. Mols Sørensen, AMOSUP President Capt. Greg S. Oca, Filipino Minister of Labour Franklin Drilon, and ITF Assistant General Secretary Åke Selander.

and thus benefited the membership in a tangible way."

The President of the board of the

new seamen's hospital is Capt. Gregorio S Oca, President of AMOSUP.

Special delegation to visit Korea

A seven-strong ITF delegation visited Korea in March to review the progress made in implementing the principles on the recruitment of Korean seafarers for service on foreign flag ships agreed by the ITF Fair Practices Committee in 1983.

The delegation was headed by ITF Assistant General Secretary Åke Selander and included the two Co-Chairmen of the ITF Fair Practices Committee Knud Mols Sørensen (Denmark) and John Connolly (Great Britain).

During their visit, the delegation met officials of the relevant Korean government agencies, including the

Minister of Labour, as well as manning agents and shipowners. They also saw the Dean of the Korean Maritime University and visited the Korean Marine Training Institute and other training establishments in Pusan. The delegation also conferred with trade union representatives from both the Federation of Korean Seamen's Unions and the Korean Special Seafarers' Union.

The delegation expressed strong criticism of the sharp manning practices prevalent in Korea, stressing that the FKSU must be given full negotiating rights with Foc owners where such rights would be afforded

under ITF policy.

It also warned Korean manning agents against continuing to offer crews at prices which fell short of the agreements sanctioned by the ITF and urged the Korean government to join forces with other governments in the region to introduce a coordinated manpower planning system.

The ITF representatives pointed out that Korea had certain obligations as a shipping nation and major crew supplier and should adhere strictly to the principles embodied in IMO and ILO instruments, including those relating to the right of seafarers to repatriation when stranded abroad.

Eastern pays record fine

Eastern Airlines — part of Frank Lorenzo's Texas Air empire — has reluctantly agreed to pay the largest fine in US Civil Aviation history for a vast number of safety violations.

The US\$9.5 million fine was levied by the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) last year after an intensive safety investigation of the airline. According to the FAA, 75,000

violations of Federal safety rules were uncovered.

Eastern, before its takeover by Lorenzo, initially refused to pay the fine, and the FAA handed the case over to the Justice Department for potential criminal liability action.

The FAA and Eastern have now agreed to a staggered repayment of the money, with a US\$1 million payment

up front and the remaining US\$8.5 million by the end of 1989. Eastern stresses that in agreeing to pay the fine they have not, in fact, admitted to any safety violations.

Deregulation continues to reap a harvest of safety violations as US domestic airlines cut corners to maintain their profits. Last August Pan American paid a US\$1.9 million fine and American Airlines paid up US\$1.5 million.

Two more US domestic airlines, Delta and USAir, have also just been inspected by the FAA, the results should be known in the next few months.

While the FAA appears to be taking action against a large number of airlines, trade unionists in the USA have grave doubts about the inspectorate's effectiveness. Reagan's budget cuts have seriously weakened the inspectorate, actually reducing the numbers of inspectors from 1,748 to 1,494 in the first three years of deregulation from 1979 to 1982. This trend has now been reversed, but not by enough. There are now 1,813 inspectors working for the FAA — approximately the same number as in 1979, but charged with inspecting a market that has grown by over a third in the last eight years.

French charter line grounded as 'unsafe'

Citing the danger of a serious accident, the French government has grounded a charter airline for multiple safety violations.

The low cost Point Air's two planes were grounded on February 5 by the government civil aviation authority, the Direction générale de l'aviation civile (DGAC).

According to Daniel Tennenbaum, Director-General of the DGAC, the authority has had been worried about the budget airline for quite some time. Explaining the drastic decision to halt the airline, he said that various safety infractions — particularly to do with the stowage of cargo — could well have led to an accident. Numerous

infringements of crew flying times and the use of "incompetent staff", including a pilot not qualified to fly the particular plane, were also cited.

Stranded passengers in Réunion had to be flown back to France in a specially commissioned LuxAir flight, and the government have now given the airline a month within which to present a plan for the modification and safe running of the airline.

The civil aviation unions — who have repeatedly warned that the government's aviation liberalisation policies are endangering passenger safety with shoestring services like Point Air — have been vindicated by this decision.

British Airways recruits new pilots

British Airways is once again recruiting pilots for the first time for ten years.

The airline estimates that 100 new pilots a year will be needed by the end of the decade to replace pilots reaching retirement age and to cope with an expected upturn in traffic. 'Direct entry' pilots holding a

commercial pilot's licence are already being recruited to fill existing vacancies. What is new is the 'cadet entry' scheme, for training courses due to begin in January 1988. Initial training will take place in Scotland, with successful candidates then transferring to BA's own training centre near Heathrow to qualify as 'line' pilots.

AIDS info request

Aviation affiliates are asked for their help with a request we have received from Vittorio Toso, Secretary for International Relations of the Italian Transport Workers' Federation (FIT). Brother Toso would like to know the attitude of health departments and airlines in other countries towards flight and cabin crew members affected by AIDS. Any information you are able to give should be sent direct to Toso at the following address:

Vittorio Toso
Ufficio Relazioni Internazionali
Settore Trasporto Aereo e Servizi
Aeroportuali
Federazione Italiana Trasporti (FIT/CISL)
Via Dell' Impruneta 15
00146 Rome
Italy

Air Canada to be privatised

Brian Mulroney's Canadian government is studying plans to privatise Air Canada.

Close attention is being paid to the sale of British Airways, and plans for airline privatisation in Japan and elsewhere. Air Canada's chairman Claude Taylor has now publically called for the sale of the state carrier.

Referring to the moves made by Mulroney's government in airline deregulation, Taylor said that privatisation was the next step and had now become "inevitable".

Canadian unions are involved in a wholesale fight against the government's plans for deregulation, privatisation and free trade with the United States. The ITF has been asked by the International Association of Machinists to gather information on behalf of their Canadian members on the situation in Japan and the Netherlands so that the unions can counter government studies.

Mulroney's blend of imported monetarism, imitating both Margaret

Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's policies, is not going down very well with the Canadian people. Opinion polls show his government to be one of the most unpopular in recent Canadian history, enjoying the support of less than a quarter of the

electorate. On the other hand, the trade union supported New Democratic Party — which vigorously opposes the government's economic policies — is well ahead of the government in the polls, riding an unprecedented wave of national popularity.

SAS/Sabena may combine operations

The Scandinavian airline SAS and the Belgian carrier Sabena have recently been discussing the possibility of combining of their international operations.

According to reports in the aviation press, talks held last year between the two airlines on the possible sharing of their transatlantic routes have now been widened to take in European routes and some ancillary services such as catering and hotels. The joint procurement of new aircraft is also understood to have been

included in the discussions.

Sabena's chairman said earlier this year that any agreement with SAS would involve combining medium range and long distance networks in a system based on two hubs in Brussels and Copenhagen. (The Belgian carrier is already involved in a limited joint venture with the independent British Caledonian running a shared Brussels-Gatwick-Atlanta (Georgia) service.)

A further meeting between the two airlines is planned for April at which an agreement is now expected.

US traffic controllers form new union

Five years after Ronald Reagan's savage smashing of the US Air Traffic Controllers' strike, trade unionism has been reborn in the sector.

When the Professional Association of Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) went on strike in August 1981, Ronald Reagan sacked more than 11,000 controllers, and has since refused to rehire any of them.

Now a new union, organised, like PATCO, through the ITF-affiliated Marine Engineers' has gained the support of the remaining

controllers.

The National Air Traffic Controllers' Association (NATCA) has now filed a petition with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for a federal government election to accredit the union as the bargaining agent for the controllers. NATCA provided 5,800 signed cards to show that they have the support of half of the workforce, the percentage they need in the vote to gain recognition.

The controllers now working have plenty of grounds for getting

organised. Despite the growth in air traffic since 1981, there are still many fewer controllers working than before Reagan's sackings.

Of those that are working, many are not fully trained or qualified. Supervisors are required to spend their time controlling, and hence have little time for organisational duties. The length of average working shifts has increased by 50 per cent, and the burn out rate of controllers has increased dramatically.

DOCKERS

New Zealand ports shutdown by strike action

Dockers in New Zealand stopped work for five days this month in protest at the lack of progress in contract negotiations.

The action — which shut down all port activity in New Zealand — began at 07:00 on Wednesday March 18 and continued till 07:00 on Monday 23.

The ITF-affiliated Waterside Workers' Federation is opposing employers' demands for a broad range of rollbacks in working conditions and manning levels. The employers have demanded massive reductions in gang manning, changes to the current bonus system, compulsory

redundancies and other reductions in established working practices.

Earlier, members of the New Zealand Harbours Industrial Union of Workers had staged strike action at a number of ports in separate action called in support of their own contract demands.

Hope for Dutch dock jobs

Industrial action in the general cargo section of Rotterdam docks was suspended on 13 March following a court ruling forbidding the employers from going ahead with 350 planned redundancies before its next sitting on 7 May on the grounds that the stevedoring companies had not properly consulted and informed the employees' councils involved.

However, action is still continuing at the Seaport terminal which is not included in the court ruling.

The dockers' union, the Vervoersbond FNV, says the court decision gives it reason to hope that the total number of jobs lost in the sector will be reduced as court proceedings take place over the next few months.

Meanwhile, the union has won an undertaking from European Container Terminus ECT that no dismissals will take place until the beginning of next

year, thus enabling talks on a new collective agreement and the jobs issue to proceed free of the threat of immediate large-scale redundancies.

The situation at ECT will be further reviewed in the autumn with future employment levels at the container section being decided in the light of the circumstances at the time.

These concessions at ECT followed strike action at the container terminal in mid-February already reported in the last issue of *ITF News*. The strike led major shipping lines to divert their ships to alternative ports in neighbouring countries and to declare a lockout of Rotterdam dockers left without work as a result.

Although the lockout was lifted within hours when the union understanding with ECT was reached the fact that a lockout was declared at all is indicative of the hard line being taken by the employers in Rotterdam.

Elsewhere, negotiations with the grain handling companies are proving difficult and industrial action here cannot be ruled out.

The German ÖTV and Belgian BTB have been informed by the ITF of the suspension of industrial action in the general cargo sector and told that solidarity action is no longer necessary. Through the ITF, the Vervoersbond FNV has conveyed its since thanks to both unions for their assistance and support.

Latest news is that the Vervoersbond FNV has concluded a new two year agreement with EMO, the last employer in the coal and iron ore section of the port of Rotterdam to reach a settlement. But it has turned down an offer from ECT. The general cargo sector employers have also announced that they intend to put the redundancy procedures in train once again in the near future.

PEOPLE

The ITF has sent a message offering warmest congratulations and good wishes to S R Kulkarni, President of the All India Port and Dock Workers' Federation, who will be celebrating his 60th birthday on 25 March.

In his message, General Secretary Harold Lewis remembers 'SR's' very long association with the ITF. "For many people in the ITF", the message says, "he embodies Bombay Dockers in particular and Indian dockers in general: sturdy, independent and courageous. He has lived through some turbulent times, industrially and politically, and no doubt there are more to come. It is a great comfort to everyone, within India and outside it, that he will be around for a long time yet to provide the leadership and set the example as he has done so impressively for years past. We thank him and salute him."

ITF Executive Board member *Dick Smith* has just retired from the presidency of the Canadian division of the Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks.

He has a long history of service to the union and its predecessor, the Canadian Transportation-Communication Employees' Union, of which he was elected Vice President for Canada in 1963 (the union merged with BRAC in 1969). He has also done much to improve the pay and social conditions of railway workers in Canada through the various rail labour organisations in which he has held high executive office.

Smith is succeeded by *Frank Mazur*, who took over as Canadian division President and BRAC International Vice President at the beginning of the year. Since 1975 Mazur has been General Chairman at the Ontario grain port of Thunder Bay and also sits on the Grain Handling and Transportation and the National Health and Safety Committees of the Canadian Labour Congress. In addition, he is a long time Vice President of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

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Lloyd M Martin has retired as Secretary-Treasurer of the International Organisation of Masters, Mates and Pilots and is succeeded by *Captain F Elwood Kyser*. Although mainly active within his union in the United States, Martin attended several meetings of the ITF Seafarers' Section in the 1970s, making a valuable contribution to the work of the Section in those years.

Pay deals

Germany - dockers, 3.1% in shift pay and allowances from 1 April.

Great Britain - 5% increase for *British Caledonian workers* from 1 April followed by 1.5% from 1 November. Wages have been frozen for the past fifteen months within the airline.

Netherlands - 1% pay increase for *road haulage drivers*, plus five extra leave days from 1 July. Early retirement age down from 61 to 59.

INLAND TRANSPORT

Study shows that bus staff cuts directly damage workers health

A recently published survey on bus workers' health in London, England shows that government policies to reduce staff are directly affecting the health of drivers.

At issue is the introduction of One-Person Operation (OPO) of London's double decker buses, replacing the previous crew of conductor and driver. Unlike most major urban centres,

them to introduce greater numbers of single operator services. By 1983, 53 per cent of the fleet was OPO. The socialist controlled London government (the GLC) called a halt to further conversions pending studies, but the Conservative central government have since abolished the GLC and placed London Transport in the hands of unelected appointees

London Transport is close to breaking point

London's high fares, variable charges and lack of transfer tickets make the collection of fares a heavy task.

Combined with the absence of a standard transit card and the large numbers of passengers on each bus, the traditional set up for London's buses was to have a driver and fare-collecting conductor. This began to change in the 1960's, when some OPO services were begun on suburban routes with single decker buses.

Since then the issue has been a politically charged one for passengers and the unions in London. The OPO buses are slower, because passengers have to queue to get on and pay their fares, and they are generally unpopular with the travelling public. For the unions they represent a loss of jobs and a heavy workload increase for those drivers who undertake OPO. Safety is also a major issue — both for the individual driver charged with handling money, and for passengers who are left alone on the top deck without a conductor.

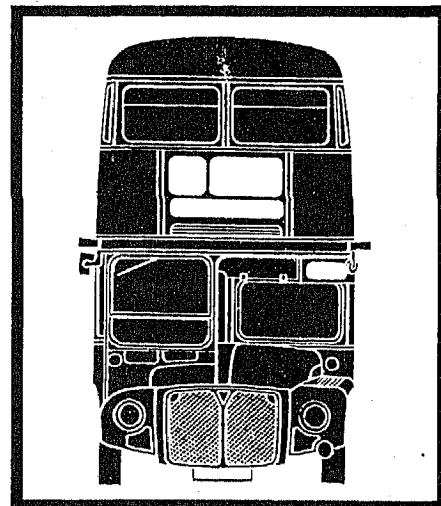
In the late 1970's London Regional Transport introduced a travelcard pass for the buses and subway system, and — faced with cuts in government subsidies — decided that this allowed

from central government.

This new, unaccountable body is now firmly committed to fully shifting the London fleet to OPO by 1992. Every month more routes are switched from two to one person operation.

Public opinion polls have shown that the vast majority of Londoners oppose OPO. The ITF-affiliated Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) — who organise all the bus staff in London — have repeatedly denounced OPO. Coupled, as it is, with increasing privatisation of services, reductions in frequency of routes and fare increases well beyond the rate of inflation, the London Transport system is close to breaking point.

The drastic deterioration of a service millions of people rely on daily for travelling to work on is yet another pressure on the workers on the system. In a city once legendary for the disciplined queuing of its population, peak hours now resemble a battlefield where passengers fight each other for places. Bus workers receive the brunt of their anger and frustration, and OPO drivers, being alone, face twice the pressure.



Doctor Michael Joffe, from London's St. Mary's hospital, was appointed by the London government (before its abolition) to produce a detailed survey of the health of bus workers. He received the full support and co-operation of the TGWU — but the new, unelected Transport Authority refused to assist his study in any way.

The report — *Bus Work and Health* — reinforces what studies in other countries have said about bus workers' health records (such as the Bologna, Italy 1979 comparison of bus and office workers) — that, in general, working on a bus is more stressful and detrimental to health than other equivalent occupations.

With specific reference to the OPO system, the report — which is based on detailed workplace questionnaires filled out by hundreds of London's bus workers — showed clearly that solo drivers consistently reported higher rates of illness than drivers in two person crews.

All categories of bus workers reported high levels of complaints associated with shift work (primarily difficulties in sleeping and gastric problems), and the report also drew a strong link between the deteriorating working conditions and drivers' health.

Japanese National Railways will cease to exist on April 1st

Despite a fierce campaign of opposition by the ITF with the backing of its railway affiliates, Japanese National Railways has now been privatised and split up into eight separate railways companies which are due to start operations on 1 April.

Three are on the main island of Honshu and there is one for each of the three smaller islands, while separate companies will take over freight operations and the Shinkansen bullet train network.

The new companies intend to hire a total of about 205,000 workers, leaving the JNR Liquidation Corporation with the task of finding jobs for some 30,000 displaced rail

workers who have lost their jobs as the direct result of the privatisation of the country's rail network.

The number of rail workers affected would have been far higher but for the fact that about 33,000 sought voluntary retirement, no doubt influenced in their decision by the knowledge that as they were unlikely to have a secure future on the railways they might as well quit the industry sooner than later.

The employment picture post-privatisation is by no means uniform. In some regions (such as Honshu and Shikoku) nearly all those seeking work with the new companies will probably be taken on, whereas in

others (for example Hokkaido and Kyushu) thousands of workers have failed to find placements with the new companies.

The only consolation this last group has is the slim chance of a job with another of the private companies, who have said they will try to recruit those remaining unhired. But they can offer no firm promise of employment as the number of those seeking work so obviously far exceeds the existing vacancies.

The National Railway Workers' Union KOKURO is angry that its members are suffering once again as the union is singled out for punishment for its opposition of the fragmentation and privatisation of the network. There can be little doubt that KOKURO members have been discriminated against in the hiring of employees for the new companies.

The union case is amply supported by the figures: in Hokkaido, 4,380 job applications were turned down, 3,400 from KOKURO members and a mere 29 from the rail union federations which had cooperated with the privatisation process. This represents a recruitment rate for KOKURO of 45 per cent, as against 80 to 90 per cent for the union groupings which had shown themselves more amenable. Again in Kyushu, 2,370 workers were turned down, 1,550 KOKURO members and 494 from the other more flexible rail unions.

KOKURO has now decided to seek redress through the courts, the labour commission and the Diet, in the light of a parliamentary resolution that there should be no discrimination in selecting workers from among JNR's previous workforce.

With justification, KOKURO fears that its members could well be further discriminated against when workers successfully hired by the new companies receive their work assignments. For it has little reason to believe in the impartiality of the process thus far.

Britain: new rules for danger loads

New regulations covering the transport of dangerous goods by road in Great Britain come into effect on 6 April. These latest regulations are the final stage of a comprehensive framework of controls introduced over the past five years.

They apply to manufacturers and suppliers of certain specified substances as well as to both operators and drivers of road tankers and haulage vehicles.

Before setting out, drivers must be given details in writing of the type of substance carried, possible hazards and necessary precautions.

Drivers will be obliged to inform the operator of any fire or uncontrolled release of a dangerous substance. Where the hazardous load exceeds three tonnes or self-reacting substances are being carried, drivers will be required to attend the vehicle at all times and to take particular care over parking.

Obligations falling on the operator include those of ensuring drivers are properly trained and that a suitable vehicle is used, fitted with orange hazchem warning signs as appropriate.

Manufacturers and suppliers must also inform operators - preferably in writing - of all relevant details regarding hazardous substances.

The regulations cover all toxic and flammable gases, organic peroxides as well as other approved substances subject to the earlier regulations. Explosive and radioactive materials are subject to separate controls.

The new regulations will be enforced by the Health and Safety Executive, using the police and traffic examiners as their 'eyes and ears'.

The industry is confident that the new regulations will make a valuable contribution to road safety and give much-needed added protection to truck drivers and the general public.

FISHERIES

ANTARCTIC ALERT ON SOVIET OVERFISHING

A study just published by the United States National Marine Fisheries Service says that Antarctic marine life, including penguins and seals, are being threatened by Soviet overfishing, according to the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

Bruce Manheim, an EDF scientist, said a new study by the agency confirms environmentalists' concern that the Soviet Union is seriously depleting fish and other marine life off Antarctica.

"There is no doubt that the Soviet fishing fleet is competing with penguins and seals for a limited food source," he said.

EDF said in a statement that up to 50 Soviet trawlers and factory ships are currently seeking Antarctic finfish and krill and that a Soviet commercial sealing operation is also under way in the area.

He said the study supports scientists' concern that Soviet overfishing has reduced some fish

populations to "far below their capacity for rapid recovery."

This also affects marine life that feeds on such fish, he said, raising the possibility that overfishing of squid may have caused the deaths of thousands of penguins near the Islas Malvinas/Falkland Islands last year.

The study, Manheim said, indicates that Soviet trawlers are taking large numbers of krill, a tiny shrimp-like crustacean, that forms the basis of the Antarctic food chain.

Hard talking wins tasty contract for Canadian scallop fishermen

Successful bargaining won the day for 225 Canadian scallop fishermen, who turned round a series of demands for concessions into a model contract with substantial improvements in conditions and benefits.

The scallop fishermen, working in the small Atlantic coast town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, are members of the ITF-affiliated Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers (CBRT&GW) local 611.

The two local companies employing the men began by demanding a series of concessions ranging from a reduction in nights ashore between trips, Saturday sailings, reduced vacation benefits and a change in the division of stock on shore.

But effective negotiations turned the situation upside down, and the CBRT&GW have achieved a contract with many improvements for the men.

Vacation credits have been doubled for sailing on statutory holidays, the number of days required to work for vacation benefit has been reduced, clothing allowances have been increased, sick benefits have been increased from CAN\$150 to CAN\$250 a week, sea trial and shore based wages have been hiked by six per cent and the amount of scallops each individual is allowed to take home has increased.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

12-17 April	Latin American Dockers Conference	Tampico, Mexico
11-15 May	Latin American Inland Navigation Conference	Santa Fe, Argentina
18-19 May	Seafarer members ILO Joint Maritime Commission	Geneva
8 June	Dockers' Meeting	London
9-10 June	Fair Practices Committee	London
15-16 June	Standing Cte. on Maritime Mobile Offshore Units	Rio de J. Brazil
16-18 June	Urban Transport Committee	Helsinki
3-5 December	Asian/Pacific Regional Conference	Tokyo

BMW CENTENARY

Warm congratulations go to the US Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees which marks its centenary this year.

The union was founded in the spring of 1887 by a small group of railroad section foremen in Alabama. Other groups sprang up before long throughout the States and Canada and gradually merged to form the present Brotherhood with its proud tradition of one hundred years of service.