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THE BREAKDOWN OF THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE W.F.T.U. AND THE I.T.S.

By J. H. OLDENBROEK

AN important chapter in the history of the international trade union movement was closed when, at a meeting held in Paris on 16 September last, the protracted negotiations between the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Trade Secretariats came to an end.

Seldom if ever have less satisfactory consultations taken place in the International Trade Union Movement than those on the plan to incorporate the I.T.S. in the W.F.T.U. The issue was the degree of autonomy which the future Trade Departments of the W.F.T.U. were to enjoy. The I.T.S. broke off the negotiations because no agreement could be reached on any of the vital points, and thus ended a period of uncertainty and indecision which had disastrously affected the general resumption of international trade union activities. Most of the I.T.S. had been condemned to inactivity by the war, and though it was generally recognized that they should recommence after the war, the uncertainty about their future created an atmosphere which, in most cases, rendered effective work and propaganda impossible.

At its meeting held in Paris in November last the Executive Committee of the I.T.F. unanimously approved the stand which, in virtue of the declaration of the Oslo Congress, had been taken by the I.T.F. representatives in the negotiations with the W.F.T.U. *Thereby the I.T.F. decided to continue its existence as an independent organization freed from any engagements implied by the decision of the Zürich Congress on the Trade Departments issue.*

It is not our intention to dwell on the reasons for the failure of the negotiations, except to say that besides the disagreement about the degree of autonomy to be allowed to the Trade Departments, developments within the W.F.T.U. had caused serious doubts about the wisdom of continuing negotiations with a prospective parent body at a time when its own house was divided from top to bottom.

Quite apart from the recent developments within the W.F.T.U., the I.T.S. had actually all the time been invited to chase the shadow for the substance. If trade union organizations, whether in the national or the international sphere, are to discuss such important matters as amalgamation or incorporation, some essential conditions must be satisfied : (1) There must be, at least in the case of free and democratic trade unions, discussion on a voluntary basis ; (2) There must be mutual confidence in one another's intentions ; (3) There must be general agreement about the objects, at least for some considerable time ahead, of the new organization and about the methods to be employed to achieve them ; (4) There must be certainty that the new organization will function at least as well, if not better, than the ones to be superseded. It is therefore appropriate, with an eye to the future, to consider to what extent

these conditions were satisfied and to recall the circumstances which preceded the abortive negotiations between the I.T.S. and the W.F.T.U.

The first and only congress of the W.F.T.U., held in Paris in the autumn of 1945, decided not only to establish an International Federation of National Trade Union Centres, but at the same time to set up Trade Departments which were to perform, under the control of the W.F.T.U., the same functions as those hitherto exercised by the I.T.S. This decision, which meant in effect that the W.F.T.U. was to take over simultaneously the functions of the old I.F.T.U. and those of the I.T.S., was come to without a thorough understanding on the part of many of the delegates to the Paris Congress and without proper consultation of the I.T.S., which were virtually invited to liquidate themselves. It is true that the I.T.S. were allowed one representative on the Administrative Committee which drafted a Constitution for the new World Federation. But it is also true that this representative opposed to the last the inclusion of Paragraph 13 of the Constitution dealing with the establishment of Trade Departments. *It has never been sufficiently emphasized that the National Centres were misinformed when they were told that the draft Constitution was adopted unanimously—a peculiar error which was not corrected as soon as discovered but only communicated to the delegates at the Paris Congress itself.*

There is no doubt that many of the National Centre delegates were under the impression that the I.T.S. spokesman had concurred unconditionally in the absorption of the I.T.S. by the W.F.T.U. In these circumstances, even if they had their own doubts about the judiciousness of setting up Trade Departments, or of doing so right away, they remained silent. Another important fact not to be overlooked was that several small countries which had gained great experience of international work and had made heavy sacrifices on its behalf, were relegated to obscurity at the Paris Congress, which was largely dominated by the delegates from the major victorious nations.

In one respect the I.T.S., supported by the British T.U.C. and other National Centres, escaped the steamroller, by securing the adoption of a decision that the W.F.T.U. before setting up Trade Departments was to negotiate with the I.T.S. the terms of the special regulations applicable to the Trade Departments and the conditions on which the I.T.S. were to be integrated. Though this decision prevented one-sided and hasty action on the part of the W.F.T.U., the first step taken by the W.F.T.U. was not to prepare the ground thoroughly for the negotiations, by enquiring what the unions of the different countries and industries had in common, but to draw up forthwith a set of rules laying down the relations between the W.F.T.U. and the Trade Departments and to embark on consultations with some of the I.T.S., namely those which seemed ready to be incorporated without too many formalities.

Yet it was evident that the W.F.T.U. embraced National Trade Union Centres differing very widely as regards their conceptions, functions and methods,

and that consequently the same differences would be manifest in the individual trade unions which were to constitute the Trade Departments. Before embarking on the essentially practical work of the Trade Departments, it would have been necessary to survey the whole field and to ascertain whether there existed a sufficient measure of agreement with respect to the aims to be pursued and the methods to be adopted and sufficient willingness to make the sacrifices necessary for the performance of the work to be undertaken.

That of those who championed the World Federation quite a number were moved as much by the negative aim of abolishing the old I.F.T.U. and the independent I.T.S. as by the positive aim of creating an all-inclusive world organization, became abundantly clear when the I.T.S. resumed their existence after the war. It is deplorable to have to record that, apart from a few exceptions, it was those who had taken no part in the I.T.S., or had never met their obligations towards them, who belittled the work of the I.T.S. and did all they could to hamper the reconstruction of these bodies. This attitude did not fail to create suspicion within the I.T.S., and the obvious conclusion to be drawn was that co-operation with such elements would be very difficult, if not impossible, if it came to the creation of Trade Departments.

Looking back we may be disposed to think that the late Sidney Hillman of the American C.I.O., one of the strongest sponsors of the World Federation, had perhaps the right idea. This was to constitute a world labour force capable of playing a decisive rôle in the Peace Settlements. It was his aspiration to prevent a repetition of war by building an international labour force speaking with one voice and telling the governments, *all* the governments, what Labour desired. Though by no means a new one, it was undoubtedly a great idea, but, as time has already shown, not a realistic idea, because a world-wide independent labour force presupposes the world-wide existence of free trade unions capable of expressing their views freely, and prepared, if necessary, to criticize and oppose the policies of their own governments.

After this brief review of the circumstances which preceded the W.F.T.U.-I.T.S. negotiations and the atmosphere in which they were conducted, let us now draw the conclusions for the future. The I.T.S. should be conscious that they are not self-sufficient bodies, but form integral parts of the international labour movement. At the same time the I.T.S. are independent bodies and cannot recognize other international trade union bodies as superior to themselves or entitled to lay down the law for them. The I.T.S. have no desire, and should have no desire, to assume the functions or tasks properly belonging to other bodies, and they will *not hesitate to observe a proper delimitation of functions*, but all arrangements in this respect must be arrived at not by unilateral dictates but by adequate consultations. The labour movement will never prosper if it curbs the freedom of expression and action of its constituent

ONCE MORE THE SEATTLE CONVENTIONS

By J. H. OLDENBROEK

General Secretary of the I.T.F.

In the January–February issue of this Journal we published an article dealing with the efforts made through the International Labour Organization to lay down international minimum standards for the mercantile marine. *These efforts, begun in 1919, when the I.L.O. came into existence, had, to say the least, not been particularly successful.* We related how at the Copenhagen and Seattle Conferences, held in 1945 and 1946, the seafarers had made considerable progress, and at these conferences many of the principles for which they had fought had been embodied in a series of nine Conventions and four Recommendations. *Surely a major accomplishment in the field of international labour legislation.*

It cannot be said that these Conventions and Recommendations came up to the demands put forward by the seafarers, but they did represent an honourable compromise from the seafarers' point of view. They did not mean very much for the seafarers of the most advanced countries, but then this could not be expected and it was well realized by the seafarers' delegates from all countries that when framing international labour legislation, which must in effect mean the acceptance of minimum standards, it is necessary to strike a happy medium, and they felt that this object had been achieved.

Now the Seattle Conference was held in June, 1946, and its decisions were soon afterwards communicated to the governments which in virtue of the constitution of the I.L.O., have undertaken to submit Conventions to the body or bodies responsible for passing of the requisite legislation or taking other action necessary, and to do so within a period of one year from the closing of the session of the conference, or if that is impossible in no case later than eighteen months from the closing of the conference.

We will not discuss here whether there were any special circumstances which justified the governments to avail themselves of the opportunity to take eighteen months instead of twelve for submitting the Conventions to the competent authority or authorities indicated above. The Seafarers' Group of the Joint Maritime Commission, seeing that the ratifications were not materializing as fast as they had hoped and expected, requested the I.L.O. to convene a meeting of the Joint Maritime Commission towards the end of 1947, with a view to discussing the situation. This seafarers' proposal was acted upon, and in December, 1947, the Joint Maritime Commission requested the Governing Body of

the I.L.O. to convene a tripartite conference consisting of the seafarers' and shipowners' members of the Joint Maritime Commission, together with government representatives from all maritime nations of any consequence. In the meantime governments were to be invited to report to the I.L.O. what they had done to implement the Conventions and to state what difficulties or objections, if any, presented obstacles to ratification, so that the tripartite conference might discuss these and devise measures which would ensure speedy ratification.

Originally the tripartite conference was fixed for September, 1948, but as insufficient replies had been received from the governments, and others had come too late for inclusion in the I.L.O. report, it had to be postponed until the beginning of December, when it duly took place.

This tripartite meeting has been successful from the seafarers' and, we may assume, also from the governments' point of view. The governments' difficulties were discussed at length. Some of these, it was found, were due to wrong interpretations; in other cases, neither the majority of the governments nor the seafarers felt that modification of the accepted text was called for. As a result there was only a limited number of points on which, in the interests of speedy ratification, the seafarers thought fit to agree to revision of the Conventions, either in a spirit of reasonable compromise or to make them more practicable.

We have said little so far about the line taken by the shipowners. Their aim was to play for time—to delay the ratification of the most important Conventions until Doomsday, and generally to water the Conventions down to such an extent that they would become meaningless. In this they have not succeeded. Their last move was to call for another International Maritime Labour Conference, preceded by another Preparatory Conference, where governments, shipowners and seafarers could move any amendment they thought fit. The adoption of such a procedure would have made a farce of the Seattle Conference and of the work of the I.L.O. as a whole. It was clear that neither the governments nor the seafarers were going to fall for these tactics, and in the end a proposal, put forward on behalf of all the governments, was adopted against shipowners' votes.

This proposal asked the Governing Body to place the question of the revision of the Conventions on Accommodation and Wages, Hours and Manning on the agenda of the next International Labour Conference, which will be held in June, 1949. The Governing Body, meeting immediately after the Joint Maritime Commission, complied with this request, and the seafarers thus have reason to be satisfied. It does, of course, mean further delay, but on the other hand it has to be taken

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parts, but only if it devises the proper channels for a co-ordination of effort.

The first immediate aim should now be to bring about close co-operation between the International Trade Secretariats, which must go full speed ahead. This task is already being undertaken and promises the most fruitful results.

into account that no progress would have been made anyway in face of the existing difficulties and objections. We may now expect that as soon as a few minor adjustments, which will in no way lessen the importance of the Conventions concerned, have been made, the ratification of the Seattle Conventions will quickly follow and indeed set an example for other than maritime conventions.

This does not mean that the seafarers' organizations can sit back and wait patiently for governments to act. They must continue to bring all possible pressure to bear. This is true of all Conventions which require legislative action, and is particularly the case with Conventions which can be ratified on the basis of existing collective agreements.

In countries where such a procedure is contemplated, the task of the unions is to bring their agreements in every respect up to the minimum requirements laid down in the Conventions. It is not good enough to criticize governments for not having ratified unless unions can claim that they have done everything possible and have taken all the necessary steps which their industrial strength allows them to take in order to pave the way for ratification on the basis of a collective agreement. *Two and a half years have elapsed since Seattle and the unions concerned should have had ample time to force the shipowners' hands.*

There is still a lot to be done.

AUTOMATIC COUPLING ON EUROPEAN RAILWAYS. A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By P. TOFAHRN

Assistant General Secretary of the I.T.F.

If ever the time comes when European railway wagons are equipped with automatic coupling, three dates will stand out in the history of the developments leading up to it—1905, 1923 and 1948. In 1905 an I.T.F. Congress in Milan adopted a resolution calling for such equipment on the European railways; in 1923 the International Labour Conference adopted another asking I.L.O. to undertake an enquiry for the purpose of determining whether it was desirable, in the interests of the workers concerned, to take steps to secure international agreement on the general introduction of automatic coupling; and in October, 1948, the Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe, one of the agencies of the United Nations, decided to take a first step towards preparations for its installation on the European railways.

Transition from the screw coupling to automatic coupling raises problems of both a technical and financial character, and it is further necessary to secure the agreement of managers and engineers as to the type of automatic coupling to be adopted. At the present moment there is also the economic problem arising out of the scarcity of steel.

As a result of the trade union pressure exerted through the I.L.O., practically all the technical problems have been solved: it is known exactly how the object aimed at can be achieved. The methods involving a short transitional period are more costly than those which call for a relatively longer one, for instance one approximately equal to the life of a wagon, or say forty to fifty years. The shorter the period, also, the smaller the number of years over which the cost can be spread.

Between the two wars relatively short transitional periods were envisaged, and during the war, when the matter was discussed by the Technical Advisory Committee for Inland Transport (established in London by the Allied Powers) it was considered that the heavy destruction of rolling-stock would help to shorten the period still further if all new wagons ordered for use in Europe during and after the war should be built with a centre beam frame capable of being fitted later with an automatic coupler. This idea was taken up by the Inland Transport Committee of the I.L.O. at a meeting held in London in December 1945, when a resolution was adopted unanimously—by government, workers' and employers' delegates—asking that steps should be taken "with a view to providing that in future all new equipment should be so constructed as to make possible the substitution of automatic coupling for screw coupling at any given time." The idea is that in forty or fifty years after these steps have been taken throughout Europe, there shall be no wagons left that cannot be equipped with automatic coupling by the simple process of removing the side buffers and screw coupling and substituting the new coupling. Should it be decided to introduce automatic coupling generally after twenty years it would only be necessary to alter the structure of about half the wagons then existing.

The Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe, while leaving open the question of the duration of the transitional period, was prepared, in response to representations made jointly by the I.L.O. and the I.T.F., to come to an immediate decision on the principle involved. At its session of 25–30 October,

1948, it asked the International Railway Union (the international organization of the railway administrations and companies) to specify the conditions which wagon frames should fulfil so that they can later be equipped with automatic coupling without structural alterations. The International Railway Union has stated that it will need six or seven months to prepare the specifications. The Committee even seemed disposed to decide that wagons ordered under 1949/50 or 1950/51 programmes should be built in this way; but the decision will have to wait until it is acquainted with the economic and financial aspects of the question, into which the I.R.U. has also been asked to enquire.

The results of this enquiry may have an important bearing on the date by which a start can be made. Not only may a wagon with the necessary centre beam frame be more costly, but it may be heavier and call for larger quantities of steel, which may not be available for some time to come. Belgium and Holland have already built wagons of this type and should be able to furnish useful data.

Then there is still the question of the choice of the particular type of automatic coupling to be adopted. Inventors have already designed several types, each

of which has its advantages, but none of them are capable of being used in conjunction with the other types. Decision on this point is not urgent, but there is not much reason to believe that it will be easier in twenty years' time than now, and there is a good deal to be said for coming to it soon. At any time an economic crisis might lead to unemployment, and the manufacture and storage of automatic couplings ready for use when the day comes for changing over might be a useful way of providing work.

But sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. For the moment, only the technical problems can be usefully tackled, and the Inland Transport Committee, in making a start in this direction, has taken the first step towards achieving what the European railway workers so earnestly desire. If others are to follow it, other obstacles will have to be surmounted, some of which have already been tackled by Belgium and Holland in 1945, and it is up to the rest of continental Europe to follow the example without overmuch delay. Even at the best we shall not be far off the year 2000 by the time the European marshalling yards are at the same stage of progress, in so far as safety conditions are concerned, as those in the United States, Cuba, Japan and some other parts of Asia reached very many years ago.

I.T.F. STALWARTS' REUNION AT OSLO



Visitors to the I.T.F.'s 1921 Oslo Congress welcomed at its 1948 Oslo Congress; from left to right: T. Gómez (Spain), J. Brautigam (Holland), K. Weigl (Austria), J. Döring (Germany), A. Birkeland, H. Fladeby and O. Nilsen (Norway), and Mrs. L. Krier who joined the group of veterans. Ch. Lindley (Sweden), only surviving co-founder of the I.T.F. in 1896, who also re-visited Oslo, could not unfortunately be included in the group.

THE STRIKES OF FRENCH SEAMEN AND DOCKERS IN NOVEMBER, 1948

By *PIERRE FERRI-PISANI*

General Secretary, French Seamen's Federation

It is now common knowledge that the strike wave which engulfed France in October and November, 1948, was engineered by the Communist Party for political reasons. Nevertheless, the Communists were skilful enough to give the battle many of the outward appearances of a strike for the redress of economic and social grievances, thus misleading many of the actors in and spectators of this drama.

To this end they possessed a valuable asset in the control of trade unions, although as regards the shipping and dock industries, this control was no longer undisputed during October and November, 1948, "Force Ouvrière" organizations having sprung up towards the end of 1947 and developed throughout 1948. This development was possible, because of the fact that Force Ouvrière had returned to the traditions of pre-war French trade-unionism.

Traditionally, French seafarers' and dockers' unions had always been the honest expression of the will and aspirations of the members themselves. The ideas current among seafarers and dockers may not always have been the most rational, but in the forty years before the 1939-45 war the trade unions loyally reflected the convictions of the men. The social progress achieved under pressure from the whole trade union movement and the special advances made in the maritime industries at the insistence of seamen's and dockers' unions were not exclusively due to numerical strength but also to the influence which they exercised on public opinion and the country's political leaders. That can be cited as proof of the prestige enjoyed by the unions in the past. The action taken to ensure such progress and the success thereof secured cohesion among the membership and adherence to common conceptions, common ideals and a universally-accepted discipline.

In the case of seafarers' trade unions, executive committees and officials must of necessity be granted a considerable amount of authority. When action has to be taken at relatively short notice, the committees and the union officials must make decisions on their own initiative. In the past the authority of the committees and of the union officials was derived from the expression of continued confidence in the leadership by the rank and file, the personality of the official being a factor of considerable importance.

Following the Liberation, however, a break was made with this tradition. Communists appeared on the committees and also as union officials. They had different conceptions as well as a different outlook as to the function of trade unions but that was not at once apparent. The members continued to behave towards the new leadership in exactly the same way as in the past,

and for this they cannot be blamed since nearly all Frenchmen, from the most cultured to the most illiterate, mistakenly believed that the Communists were after all fellow-countrymen, with whom it must be possible to reach an understanding in order to work together. The consequence of this mistake was that the Communists were enabled to profit thereby and at a well-calculated, but rapid, pace removed non-Communists from all key positions in the trade unions and even managed to establish complete control over the labour supply in the shipping and dock industries.

The methods employed in "purging" the trade unions of such elements are familiar the world over and as such will not be discussed here. For the industry itself, however, the Communists had at their disposal other and more specialized means. At the end of the war there were far more seamen, officers and dockers seeking work than could be employed on available shipping. As a result of this, "tripartite committees" were formed, composed of representatives of the unions, shipowners and the government, charged with the equitable distribution of available work. However, the two latter parties were not in a position to dispute the views and proposals of the union representatives in every one of the thousands of cases with which they had to deal and as a result the Communists soon became the sole distributors of work. Wherever possible, party members were placed to the exclusion of all others, and in this way control was secured over a good number of key positions in the industry. Of course, the Communists did not have sufficient party members at their disposal to fill all the jobs, but non-Communists were impressed by Communist threats which could, if necessary, be made effective.

Towards the end of 1947, however, these tripartite committees were replaced by hiring offices, in which the Communist share of control was smaller.

In the docks the Communists' power was still greater. The dockers' registration offices not only shared out work among the available dockers twice a day, but also issued the card giving admission to the industry. The Communist trade union representatives had succeeded in securing so firm a control over the registration offices that for all practical purposes they were able to hire and fire as they chose.

As time went on, the Communist union officials showed themselves to be of a different type from that of the traditional trade union official. The leader's person and morality no longer counted. Communists were interchangeable and were actually changed as necessary by Communist Party dictates.

Trade union activity was no longer determined by

ascertaining the aspirations or grievances of the rank and file or by the objective possibilities of the industry itself. Instead, the will of the membership was replaced by dictates from the Party's tacticians, who showed themselves to be past masters in the art of putting forward demagogic claims that were obviously incapable of realization, although of course this only occurred when there were no Communists actually in the government. The trumpeting of these claims was always accompanied by irrelevant and vociferous propaganda, by lies, calumny and insidious threats against those seafarers and dockers who, in trade union meetings or elsewhere, showed hesitation in joining the Communist chorus.

Apart from these tactics, Communist union leaders propagated an absurd philosophy with regard to strikes. Sympathetic action was considered to be imperative in each and every case approved by union leader, committee or ship's delegate. For instance, a small group of men on board ship or in a port would strike for some definite local reason. This would automatically call for unconditional sympathetic action by some other group and thus by leaps and bounds a general stoppage of work would be brought about, with only the original half a dozen strikers having discussed the matter and knowing what the strike was about. To make matters worse the Communists already had quite a series of successful strikes of this kind to their credit, thus giving some substance to the ridiculous belief that it is possible to strike at will and without risk, in order to achieve one's aims. The Communists' control over the workers' livelihood also did much to underline the idea that it would be dangerous to resist such strike orders.

Thus, the fear of Communist retaliation became the driving force in trade union activity, as seen in France, from 1945 until just recently. As time went on, however, members of seamen's and dockers' unions came to realize the fundamental change which their organizations had undergone. Nevertheless, time was still needed to make them realize the evils and danger inherent in the change. The activity of "Force Ouvrière" prior to the break in the C.G.T. of December, 1947, was, in the main, directed towards making the workers conscious of these dangers. Having achieved that, new unions of seamen, dockers and ships' officers were created which drew their inspiration from French trade union traditions and, during 1948, made enough headway to become a serious obstacle to Communist plans for involving a large part of the merchant navy and the dock industry in the political strikes of November 1948.

The weakening of Communist domination and the growth of influence by "Force Ouvrière" unions became really apparent in September and October of 1948. On 17 September the *Sagittaire* returned to Marseilles from New Caledonia, and was at once laid up by the owners in order that prosecution of the crew for disobedience in a port of call could be proceeded with; the crew having stopped work for eight days in Nouméa in order to obtain a bonus making good their alleged losses on currency exchange. Ever since then the Communists had endeavoured to induce

the crews of other ships to come out in sympathy with the crew of the *Sagittaire*. In this they had been unsuccessful, ship after ship having weighed anchor after ballots had been taken on board. On 26 October, the Communists' luck changed, for the crew of the *Eridan's* decided by 72 votes to 57 to down tools. The Communists seized this opportunity with both hands and on 30 October convened a "seamen's" meeting in Marseilles, attended mainly by engineering and other workers, at which it was decided to call a general strike of Marseilles seamen. Ostensibly, the strike was to be held in support of the *Eridan's* crew, and in addition, claims were put forward for an unemployment allowance equal to three-quarters of seagoing wages, together with a special allowance of 2,500 francs per month for seamen not yet on the permanent merchant navy staff. Unfortunately for the Communists' plans, two-thirds of the *Eridan's* crew went back on board ship the following day, thus removing the alleged cause of the strike.

However, the shipowners reacted violently to the proclamation of a general strike in their industry, by laying up all their ships and dispersing their crews. Had they instead allowed a ballot to take place on board every ship, it is almost certain that there would have been substantial majorities against the strike registered on most of them.

On 3 November, the Ministry of Shipping took a ballot of their own among the seamen on shore. This failed for purely local reasons, namely, that in Marseilles there are 100,000 Communist voters whilst the Communist Party itself claims some 20,000 members. The Communist Party can thus at a few hours' notice bring thousands of demonstrators on to the streets, and that is what actually happened in this case. During the first hour of voting at the seamen's hiring hall, 450 men went in to cast their votes. After that it was impossible to get in at all, the building being surrounded the whole day by thousands of Communist pickets drawn from all branches of industry.

Meanwhile nothing had happened in Bordeaux and Le Havre. The Communist union offices in these two big ports as well as in some of the smaller ones had issued unanimously adopted resolutions of support for the strike, but the officers and men who had voted for these resolutions were still at work. The "strike" therefore remained confined to Marseilles itself.

Then, on 8 November, the Ministry of Shipping used its compulsory powers, which under French law enable it to issue working orders to seafarers, which cannot be disobeyed without entailing prosecution and subsequent imprisonment. On the very same day the *Canada* sailed, with 85 per cent of its old crew. On 12 November more ships weighed anchor under the same conditions, namely the *Ville d'Amiens*, *Koutoubia*, *Les Glières*, *Bangkok*, *Cap Tourane*, and *Mecea*. On 13 November, the *Sidi Mabrouck* also sailed. Altogether less than ten per cent of the men called up had refused to work and it was a pitiful sight to see men in "trade union" meetings not daring to oppose strike resolutions, but

waiting impatiently for a compulsory order to join up in order to earn their daily bread. All ships receiving such orders sailed, in the order and at the time fixed by the shipowners and the authorities.

Meanwhile, two "trade union" secretaries had been arrested for interfering with the freedom to work. In the days of traditional trade-unionism such arrests would have caused a considerable uproar, but this time the seamen took no notice of the event. The meeting called in protest against the arrests was again attended by engineering workers, but not by the seamen.

When the "strike" was obviously going to be lost, the Communist union tried to place trouble-makers among the requisitioned crews, but the results achieved by this policy were limited to some half a dozen brawls.

On 9 December the Communist union called off the strike, after having previously offered to return to work on condition that the union's spokesman be received by officials of the Ministry of Shipping or failing that "at least by the shipowners". Their offer was treated with scorn, however, and when the strike ended they had before them a declaration by the shipowners that they would receive no deputation of strikers, nor would they consider any claim or grievance so long as there was still one ship in port, and furthermore, that they would not dismiss a single man then working.

On 10 December, *L'Humanité*, the chief Parisian daily paper of the Communist Party, reported that "at the close of their meeting the seamen wished to march in procession in honour of the end of their strike but were brutally dispersed by the police, their flag being trampled on and four men injured". The decision to call off the strike was not however revoked, in spite of this.

The Marseilles seamen, who had followed the Communists through thick and thin, including court prosecutions, were given an edifying example of Communist bad faith on 9 December. A Communist secretary told them that "before deciding to strike one must weigh the possible consequences!" Thus the Communist trade union leaders inferred that they were innocent of the débâcle, and that the striking seamen had voluntarily brought the ordeal of defeat upon themselves by reason of their own short-sightedness.

In the docks the Communist trade unions did not fare any better. Strike orders were issued to dock union officials at a time when one already felt that the miners' strike was doomed to defeat. Public opinion was behind the Government, which had resorted to military action to restore order in the mines. In their heart of hearts most Communist leaders of local dockers' unions did not want to join in the strike movement but dared not say so for fear of the reprisals which the Communist Party would take against them. They therefore screened themselves behind the decisions of the dockers themselves, a method which borders on Party insubordination and which was in any case totally forbidden in this particular instance. As a result, the dockers everywhere, with the exception of Dunkirk, voted big majorities against the strike. Even

Dunkirk was a disappointment; it failed to supply martyrs, and the fact remains, unpleasant enough for the Communists, that nowhere did the dockers hold up supplies of coal delivered by sea nor even E.R.P. shipments.

The net result of the strike has been that the Communists have succeeded only in discrediting trade-unionism in the eyes of workers, shipowners, and of public opinion in general. Too many of the officers, ratings and dockers have, however, disowned the Communist trade unions in a rather shamefaced manner, and a hard task of education awaits those wishing to make them act *and speak* as free men again, if, and when they decide to join "Force Ouvrière" unions. The employers have, without doubt, gained a victory and might be tempted to abuse the power thus gained in their dealings with genuine trade unions. Public opinion has been influenced in a manner that will make all future strikes suspect, even when they result from genuine industrial disputes. Furthermore, future enactment of laws designed to protect the community against such onslaughts as the Communists have just made, will undoubtedly be influenced by recent experiences and this might lead to obstacles being laid in the path of organization by genuine trade unions which did not exist before.

The setback is a serious one. It is true that one advantage gained is that more workers than ever now know that the Communists are unfit to govern and administer trade unions or to lead the workers in the struggle for the improvement of their living and working conditions. But this does not mean that the task of the free "Force Ouvrière" trade unions in re-enrolling the vast majority of seafarers and dockers will be an easy one.

It will not be easy because the core of Communist strength remains intact, and does not diminish or grow with the winning or losing of elections and strikes. Theory and slogans, voters and trade union members are variable factors, tools to be used with varying degrees of skill and success. The real organization is immune against such fluctuations, is world-wide and backed by one of the most powerful states in the world. For French Communists France is only the country in which they live, whilst the U.S.S.R. is their spiritual fatherland. The organization's coherence and discipline are absolute. Comic secretaries, incapable union committees are merely minor defects in a world machine, and reverses at various times in this or that country are no more than skirmishes in relation to the world-wide Communist struggle for power. In any case, so runs their argument, time will provide opportunity to remedy these defects and repair any damage caused by past mistakes.

We are, therefore, not deluded into believing that the failure of the November strikes means the end of Communist agitation among French seafarers and dockers. The Force Ouvrière unions of seamen, officers and dockers have now joined battle with the Communists but are not yet out of the wood.

THE CASE FOR A 40-HOUR WEEK ON U.S. RAILWAYS

Sixteen "non-operating" railwaymen's unions in the United States had their claim for a 40-hour week, made under the provisions of the Railway Labor Act, submitted to a three-man fact-finding Presidential Emergency Board which began its sittings at the end of October last. "The adjustment in the working week for non-operating railway employees"—as the claim was described on behalf of the unions concerned, was based on ethical, social and economic grounds, since in nearly all other American industries a 40-hour week was worked.

The claim itself amounted to a straight time 40-hour working week—eight hours daily, Monday to Friday inclusive—without reduction in the wage paid for the present 48-hour week; together with time and a half rates for Saturday work and double time for Sundays and holidays. These latter stipulations would apply primarily to those employees whose assignment did not conform to the established work week. A minimum of 8 hours should be paid for on such days.

On 17 December the Presidential Fact-Finding Board recommended the establishment of a 40-hour week for non-operating employees on the American railways with effect from 1 September, 1949. The main points of the Board's report dealing with the 40-hour week are summarized below.

The Board found that "40 basic hours per week, with time and a half for overtime, constitutes the prevailing practice in American industry. To a large degree, the 40-hour week is also an established condition in many transportation industries, including air lines, pipe lines, passenger and freight road transport services. Communications and public utility industries have it. It is in effect in innumerable continuous-production industries. Many industries which employ craftsmen, included in the non-operating railway groups almost uniformly have the 40-hour week. Frequently these employees live and work in the same community and are members of the same unions. This pattern is extremely impressive in itself as a sound basis for including the railroad industry within its scope."

"Other special reasons" were also cited by the Board as grounds for establishing the shorter week, including the fact that 1,352,000 railway employees in 1947 handled far more traffic than did 2,000,000 in 1920.

The Board added that "contrary to the general industrial trend, railway employment has continued to decrease in every month (until August) of 1948 as compared with 1947. Since the end of World War II employment in general has risen by 8,000,000 but railroad employment has been declining each year."

The Board found that figures indicating "improvements in productivity" showed an increase in revenue traffic units per employee from 252,000 in 1921 to 586,200 in 1947.

It was also observed that "there is merit in the view that one of the ways in which workers share in the

benefits of increasing efficiency is by having shorter working hours.

"Apart from the social and physical values, this helps to spread and maintain employment as against the erosion caused by the efforts and skill of the workers themselves. This approach is plainly applicable to the railway industry where employment has steadily fallen and is continuing to do so, as the productivity of the workers in the industry continues to rise."

The Board also declared that the proportion of railway employees in the "non-operating" classes has dropped from 76.7 per cent in 1921 to 71.5 per cent in 1947. That, it said, "indicates that improvements in equipment and methods have had their greatest effect on the 'non-operating' employees."

As to the practical considerations involved in applying the 40-hour week, the Board explained why it recommended that the change-over be deferred until September 1, 1949. Among the more important reasons it listed possible shortage of labour, the continuous-operating nature of the railways, the time required for transition to a shorter work week, and the competitive and cost problems presented.

With regard to the alleged shortage of workers, the Board termed "extravagant" the railway companies' estimate that 20 per cent more workers (or 200,000 to 300,000 men) would be needed to make up the lost man-hours.

In this connection it recalled the Inter-state Commerce Commission's 1932 enquiry into the feasibility of a 36-hour week, pointing out that the railways then stated that they would have to make up 25.8 per cent of the 33.3 per cent loss in man-hours; and that the Interstate Commerce Commission found that only 22.2 per cent would have to be made up.

The Board stated further that "there are about 100,000 clerks in certain offices, who are now working only 5½ days. If they go on a five-day week, obviously only about 10 per cent of the hours will have to be replaced, not 20 per cent. The same is true of other workers who work only part-time on Saturdays, or who alternate or rotate with others on Saturdays. It is hard to believe that most of the work now done by the clerks on the Saturday half-days cannot be absorbed within the five-day week proposed, without supplementary employees. There is a certain amount of latitude as to when work must be done in the-shop and maintenance-of-way classifications.

"Indefinite deferment of repairs and replacements is not suggested, but within reasonable limits re-arrangements of work may be made. If the estimate of the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1932 is proportionately applicable to-day, and no convincing reason was given against this view, then somewhat less than 14 per cent instead of the full 20 per cent would be sufficient."

The Board stated further that the trade unions'

opinion that only 5.4 per cent of the hours would have to be supplemented was probably an understatement. It added, however, that it was nevertheless a fact that the current intensive modernization programme of the railways would accelerate the trend towards further efficiency and labour saving, which in its turn would exert an increasing influence on the actual percentage that would have to be supplemented. This acceleration probably made the present more favourable for a work-week adjustment than was 1932. Since at that time the estimate of the Interstate Commerce Commission on a reduction from 48 to 36 hours was that only 22 per cent of the man-hours would have to be made up, it followed that in a change from 48 to 40 hours only 14 per cent would be required.

With respect to the availability of labour, the Board found that the shortage since the war had not been a real handicap to the railways. The up-grading of staff during the war and the subsequent demotions have left "a reservoir of employees experienced in higher skills who could be moved up again if necessary".

In justification of the eight months' period to adjust operations to a 40-hour week, the Board claimed that other industries got down to the 40-hour week in steps and that the Fair Labour Standards Act of 1938 allowed a period of 27 months before all covered industries were required to go on the 40-hour week. According to the Board the eight months' delay will also reduce the cost of the change-over.

The Board refused the claim of the trade unions for the granting of time and a half pay for Saturdays

and double time for Sundays, as such. The unions had contended that premium pay was justified for those days, even when they formed part of the regular five-day work week, on at least two major grounds:

- (1) that it would prod the railways to bring Saturday and Sunday work down to rock-bottom, and
- (2) that employees separated from their families on those days deserved extra compensation.

The Board asserted, however, that this was "non-realistic" since the railways must "operate continuously". It declared that other "continuous process" industries did not pay premium rates for Saturday and Sunday except where they constituted overtime days.

The Board urged that the railways adopted "staggered" work schedules, but that they should make Saturdays and Sundays "off" days for the employees so far as practicable. In the case of crews necessary for those days, there should be rotating schedules so that they would have the week-ends off as frequently as possible.

The Board estimated that the cost of the 40-hour week proposed in 1949, when it would be effective during the four closing months, would amount to about \$150,000,000. This would indicate a full year cost of about \$450,000,000.

The Board expressed the opinion that "in keeping with the experience of many years of increasing productivity and declining employment, the railway industry will find the initial cost burden diminishing as time goes on, and that it will not endanger the railways financially nor put them competitively out of line with other transportation services."

TRANSPORT CO-ORDINATION IN DENMARK

By J. K. F. JENSEN

Secretary of the Danish Railwaymen's Union

Before the second world war there was keen competition between the railways and road transport. The latter tended to select the more profitable traffic, leaving the transport of empties and other less lucrative business to the railways, which as a state undertaking was not in a position to make distinctions.

A campaign by the railway unions for some co-ordination of the means of transport, stressing particularly the need for regulations which would facilitate the establishment of definite routes for lorry traffic and also assure regulation of hours and wages for lorry drivers, resulted in the setting up of a state commission in 1936. This had as its task the drafting of directives concerning rail, road and sea traffic and included representatives of both the railway and transport unions.

In August, 1939, the commission put forward proposals recommending the establishment of state and municipal bodies with power to grant concessions for the transportation by road of goods and passengers. It further recommended the payment of regulation wages and the introduction of the eight-hour day, proposing at the same time a series of policy rules designed to ensure profitable operation of the country's railways. The

implementation of these proposals was, however, prevented by the outbreak of war, and the consequent shortage of tyres and petrol caused by wartime conditions so reduced the number of lorries in operation, that the anticipated keen competition did not develop and the whole problem ceased to exist.

During the German occupation, and before lorry competition could make itself felt again, the railway unions tried to get regulations adopted which would allot traffic on a rational basis to the different branches of the transport industry. The attempt did not succeed, however, because government support for it was not forthcoming, mainly owing to the fact that the liberal parties in the Rigsdag would not agree to such measures. The ostensible reason for this was their support for the ideals of free competition, but they were in reality afraid of losing votes among the haulage contractors. In spite of this setback, the Minister of Communications did finally appoint a committee, consisting, however, only of politicians and with no representation from either the transport industry or the unions.

After some years of discussions this committee has

not yet succeeded in putting forward any concrete proposals. The resultant chaos which has been allowed to develop in the transport industry has dealt a severe financial blow at the railways, which were not in a position to stand up to competition from transport undertakings which were not bound to regulation of hours and wages by collective agreements.

The latest development in the situation is that the Danish railways themselves have now taken the initiative in a radical reorganization of their goods transportation methods. Beginning in May, 1949, they intend to carry goods from the country to the city and vice versa in railway-owned lorries, whilst fully loaded freight wagons containing bulk goods as well as sundries will be hauled to rural stations by small locomotives or tractors. In this way it is hoped to avoid stops by heavy goods trains at minor stations in order to pick up or detach single wagons.

It has been provisionally decided to carry out the experiment on lines covering approximately 230 miles and for this purpose 18 lorries with trailers attached will be purchased. If the results justify expectations

in railway circles, the scheme will be extended to other lines.

This attempt at traffic rationalization has been followed with the keenest interest in Danish transport circles, where such initiative has been welcomed. Road transport interests, on the other hand, have, not unnaturally, looked askance at the proposals, owing to the fear of possible competition, and there are even signs of a realization by haulage contractors that it might perhaps be wise to support some co-ordination of transport. As a consequence of this attitude, certain government circles are now showing more interest in the subject than was previously the case.

This independent action by the railway administration has, however, met with warm support from the railway unions, and was actually preceded by joint consultations between the two parties, in the course of which agreement was reached on the decisions to be taken. Transport employees in general have shown themselves to be no less interested in the ending of purposeless competition and irrational utilization of the means of transport.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SHIPS' OFFICERS IN FRANCE

By Capt. *ANDRÉ FRANÇAIS*

General Secretary of the Mercantile Marine Officers' Union of Le Havre

Remembering the enthusiasm which in 1944 and 1945 marked the founding of the French National Federation of Officers of the Mercantile Marine, affiliated to the C.G.T., it may be asked how it is that after only three years, before it has even been properly run in, the organization which aroused so many hopes should already be showing signs of wear and tear which its leaders, for all their cunning, are hard put to it to hide.

This, of course, is only one more result of the crisis which has overtaken French trade-unionism as a whole since the Communists laid hand upon it. The National Federation of Officers of the Mercantile Marine has not escaped the intruders. Ever since it was founded its members have included, in addition to the men who belonged to the pre-war trade unions, those who came from politics to trade-unionism, and who claimed to bring with them new and—so they said—more effective methods. But all the time their aim was to capture the organization and make of it an instrument of their political party.

The first part of their plan was very successful. On the pretext of avoiding personal questions which might be a hindrance to unity, the pre-war leaders were, with few exceptions, removed to make way for the new-comers. The controls once in their hands, the latter had only to consolidate their position and show the effectiveness of the new methods. This was easy enough in a semi-revolutionary period when the general upset led many people to yearn for change. The new leaders had all

the advantages of a turn-over of public opinion and circumstances that greatly facilitated their task.

But the members of the organization were not long in becoming aware of the too flagrant contradiction between their wishes and the actions of their representatives. When a strike seemed to be the only way to settle a dispute about wages that was dragging on, their leaders did not favour it, but when, on the other hand, it looked as though time would resolve the question, the same leaders made every effort to carry matters to a strike.

But our comrades are by no means so simple as their leaders supposed, and in November 1947 they turned down their Federation's urgent call to strike, in which political aims were cleverly intermingled with trade-union pretxts. Confidence was beginning to break down, and under the influence of events it could only lead to a crisis which would threaten the very existence of our unions.

For, in their trade union activities, the action of the Communists is always perfectly consistent with their doctrines and with the aims they are pursuing, and when the Bureau of the C.G.T. sent its congratulations to the Communist C.G.T. of Czechoslovakia on the decisive part it had played in ensuring the success of the *coup-d'état* last spring, it was clear enough that it was only awaiting the opportunity to act in a similar manner in France.

When the same body ostentatiously congratulated

the Soviet delegate to the U.N.O. at the very moment when they were violently attacking France, anybody who was not a Communist had every right to think that such action was inopportune at the very least.

And when the Congress of the C.G.T. is asked to condemn the plan for the recovery of France, on the pretext that it is inspired by American imperialism, we are inclined to prefer the judgment on such important matters of people who are better qualified and better informed, and who, above all, are not under suspicion of acting on behalf of another imperialism.

And when, finally, the same Congress calls for a more democratic Government—by which they mean a Government which includes the Communists—all the world understands what is meant.

But how many of the officers of the merchant marine,

who are still in the C.G.T., were in agreement with these things? Yet, whether they like it or not, they were done in their name.

To escape these political bonds many of them took refuge in resignation, or in abstention from voting. The more understanding of them reorganized as soon as possible in independent unions, with the intention of joining one of the other big trade union centres. Contacts were established and a Federation of the Mercantile Marine is now in process of formation under the auspices of Force Ouvrière. Here, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and comradeship and free from all ulterior motives, we propose to continue with the work proper to trade-unionism and to defend our trade interests by a policy which will not be dictated or influenced from outside.

A VICTIM OF NAZISM

The chapter of the I.T.F.'s history that deals with the courageous stand made against Nazism by a group of German seamen has still to be written. We print, as told to us by one of the group's survivors, the story of the fate of one of them.

Werner Lehmann was born in Bochum on 20th May 1904, the son of the carpenter Gustav Lehmann. He was killed in 1941, at the head office of the Security Police, as a member of the underground seamen's movement directed by Edo Fimmen.

He joined his union in 1919. When the brown scum came into power he was sailing on the s.s. *Gerolstein*, where he became a member of the group of seamen who engaged in underground activities. His last German ship was the s.s. *Havenstein*, which he left in London when he heard that the Gestapo were waiting for him in Hamburg.

And so it happened that Werner lived as a refugee in London, Antwerp and Marseilles, sailing from time to time, and as opportunity presented itself, on a foreign ship. But if it was difficult enough for a German anti-Fascist seaman to find a ship, it was harder still to find asylum. He found it at last in Spain where he went to fight on the side of the Republican Government until defeat deprived him again of a foothold. He went to sea again but his plan to become an American sailor misfired. The U.S.A. authorities were taking no more risks with Germans.

In July 1939 he came back in his ship to Antwerp, but when he went ashore to visit his comrades he was arrested and pushed over the French border. The Belgian authorities were putting a stop to anti-Nazi activities of refugees in order to placate Hitler. The French authorities, too, made him feel that he was not welcome and when the war broke out Werner was interned in Dunkirk. After the subjugation of France by the brown hordes he landed in Sozzoni Camp in North Africa. By 1st July, 1941, the Gestapo had traced him to the camp in Berrouaghia, and France's Vichy people were more willing to obey the Gestapo than a German shepherd dog its master, so four inspectors

of the Sureté from Algiers took him and sent him with irons on his hands and feet to Marseilles. After lying there in the filthiest of prisons for two days four officials of the Commissariat Special came and took him to the Demarcation Line at Châlon-sur-Saône and handed him over to the Gestapo. After spending some time here in a cell in the company of several divisions of fleas and lice, the bloodhounds of the Security Police took him to Prison No. 2 at Karlsruhe. From there he was taken to Berlin, to the home prison of the Head Office of the Security Police at No. 8 Prinz Albrechtstrasse, where he was delivered on the 20th or 21st of August, 1941.

His old father says that at the beginning of October, 1941, an official of the Gestapo came to his house in Wuppertal and told him that his son Werner had died in Berlin. So died Werner Lehmann, like so many who found their way to the cellars of the Gestapo. And he kept to the agreement come to between the members of the I.T.F. German seamen's resistance group that if they were caught by the Gestapo they would be ready to die, but not to mention the name of any of their fellow-fighters. Werner did not give to the Gestapo the name of any one of the hundreds of seamen who were known to him as anti-Fascists. He died for the cause and he died decently. Nobody knows where his grave is, but many of his comrades in many lands remember with respect their valiant fellow-fighter.

The night over Germany has now ended, but the day has not yet come when the murderers will be asked why they killed our comrade Werner. Werner Lehmann! The seamen of the I.T.F. will still get their chance to avenge your spilt blood and that of the other fighters, and the seamen have always kept their word! Rest in peace, comrade.

Your comrades of the I.T.F.