

## The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)

The first international conferences of seafarers and dockers took place in London in 1896 and 1897; the International Federation of Ship, Dock and River Workers founded by Havelock Wilson in London in 1896 first became an international organisation in 1897 and 1898, in spite of its name, by incorporating the Swedish and Norwegian seafarers' trade unions. At the Congress of 1898, it took on the name International Transport Workers' Federation and set forth the objective of joining all transport workers on an international level, regardless of whether the members were seafarers, dockers, railway workers, tramway workers, coachmen, or others. Shortly after the establishment of the organisation, German seafarers withdrew from the ITF, and British trade unions concentrated entirely on founding a national transport organisation. The ITF Congress in Paris in September 1900 "was supposed to draw the international organisation from its lowest point";<sup>1</sup> however, it took several years for an international structure to be created, an international secretary elected by the Congress to be planned for 1900, and a Management Committee established according to region to take up its work in 1902. It took even longer for enough solidarity to be created in the organisation so that resolutions could be implemented and dues paid. The first secretary of the ITF, Tom Chambers, stepped down in 1903 for precisely this reason and sent the organisation into a new crisis. At the Amsterdam Congress in 1904, a new beginning was proclaimed, the headquarters were moved to Hamburg, and the constitution amended according to which a five-member Management Committee was nominated by the organisational leadership in the country in which the ITF had its headquarters, in this case Germany. In the following period, this led to endless complaints that the Germans dominated the ITF. Hermann Jochade became the new secretary, and simultaneously chairman of the German Railway Workers' Union. At this time, it was not at all unusual to be the chairman of a national trade union and also secretary of the corresponding international trade association. With the publication of the "Korrespondenzblatt" in December 1904 and admission of the American International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) in 1905, Jochade was able to achieve his first success; however, he was forced to experience the temporary withdrawal of the British trade unions from the ITF. His attempt to support the labour dispute on the docks of Hamburg in March 1907 with an international act of solidarity failed miserably, especially since strike-breakers were sent in from Great Britain. However, in subsequent years Jochade was often called upon as an adviser for strikes abroad, for example in Belgium, a fact which slowly provided the ITF with a good reputation. When "the first internationally-coordinated strike movement in trade union history"<sup>2</sup> began on British docks, as well as in Antwerp, Amsterdam and Rotterdam in June 1911, Jochade was again the contact person for all striking associations. The strikes ended advantageously nearly everywhere, although only minor success had been achieved in the Netherlands. After ending the disputes, Jochade, who in the meantime had learnt English reasonably well, spent seven weeks in Great Britain to develop a better relationship with his

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<sup>1</sup> Simon: ITF, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Simon: ITF, p. 241.

British colleagues. In the ensuing period, the ITF also organised financial support and other means of assistance during strikes which bolstered its reputation even if some strikes were lost such as the London Dockers Strike of 1912, which involved control of the labour market at the port.

By 1912, the ITF already had 700,000 members; however, all the work with the exception of translation had to be performed by Jochade personally. He concentrated on issuing an international control card for unionised seafarers to facilitate the movement from one organisation to another and to guarantee protection in any unforeseen emergency situations. It was passed by the ITF Seafarers' Section on 10 and 11 April 1912, but ultimately failed because not all member organisations were equally involved in implementing the resolution. His attempt to support the merger of all competing British unions and his insistence on establishing a transport workers' trade union were also not successful. On 1 July 1913, the ITF already numbered 50 organisations and 881,950 members in 18 countries, and in July 1914 it had more than one million members. The destiny of the organisation was largely controlled by the Management Committee, consisting of only German members, a situation which repeatedly led to criticism at congresses without resulting in any sweeping reforms for the organisation. The conference for the reorganisation of the ITF planned for 1914 in Vienna did not take place due to World War I.

For the Management Committee, the war came like a "thief in the night". Hermann Jochade, Secretary of the ITF, believed that the war had been forced upon Germany. "We must defend our country and our culture against the Blood-Tsar and his gang of murderers as well as the hordes of Africans", he wrote in September 1914.<sup>3</sup> Paul Müller, Executive Board member of the German Transport Workers' Union, wanted the German flag to fly permanently over the Belgian city of Antwerp. Only the Association of Municipal and State Employees warned in its newspaper "Gewerkschaft" against going along with the "hurrah-shouting rowdies".<sup>4</sup>

The ITF office and the Management Committee remained in Berlin for the duration of the war, but were unable to carry out their work. Mail and telegraph lines were disrupted, and weekly reports by the ITF were published only at periodic intervals due to lack of information. "Our operations have come to a complete standstill ever since the mobilisation of the war", Hermann Jochade had to admit in September 1914, but he opposed the idea of temporarily setting up a correspondence bureau in Amsterdam during the war when the Dutch unionist Oudegeest appeared in Berlin with the suggestion in November 1914.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Oudegeest was appointed liaison between the warring states with Edo Fimmen at his side.

The initiative to re-establish the ITF after the war came from the Swede Charles Lindley and the Dutchman Johan Brautigam. Robert Williams from the National Transport Workers'

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<sup>3</sup> Jochade to Lattmann, 18 September 1914, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), ITF holdings, file 4.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Nachtmann: 100 Jahre ÖTV. Die Geschichte einer Gewerkschaft und ihrer Vorläuferorganisationen. Frankfurt a.M. 1996, p. 147f.

<sup>5</sup> Jochade to Forstner, 9 September 1914, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), ITF holdings, file 4; Willy Buschak: Edo Fimmen. Der schöne Traum von Europa und die Globalisierung. Essen 2002, p. 21.

Federation at first flatly refused any meeting with the Germans, but allowed himself to be swayed by Lindley. However, his requirement was that the leadership of the new international organisation no longer be dominated by one country. Trade unions from five countries (Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, India, and the Netherlands) were represented at the Amsterdam Conference on 22 April 1919, which was the basis for re-establishing the ITF. The first meeting between the German and the British delegations after four years of war was deeply moving. The British approached the Germans with a simple “How do you do?” as if they had just said their goodbyes the day before and had not been in opposing camps for four years. Nevertheless, the Germans still had to listen to bitter criticism about their actions during the war, in particular that they had not questioned the unrestricted submarine warfare of the German leadership. The Conference resolved to re-establish the ITF and to move its headquarters from Berlin to Amsterdam. An emergency committee was established to amend the constitution drafted in 1914; after some deliberation, the Congress that was to finally re-establish the ITF convened from 15-19 March 1920 in Christiania (present-day Oslo). The Russian unions were also invited but were not able to arrive before the Congress ended.

During the first four years after its re-establishment, the ITF was housed as a subtenant in Amsterdam, first at the NVV at Reguliersgracht 80, then at Alberdinck Thymstraat 30. When the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) moved from Vondelstraat 61 to a larger building in 1923, the ITF was able to move into the prior building of the ITUC, where it was supposed to remain until September 1939. Monthly dues for the ITF were set at 6 Dutch cents per member after re-establishing the organisation, but had to be paid in the currency of the individual countries. The dues were calculated according to the pre-war exchange rate, but paid in post-war currency. The result was a financial disaster. Heavy inflation in Central Europe created huge gaps in the budget of the ITF. The new system for dues introduced at the Vienna Congress in 1922, according to which each organisation was supposed to pay 10% of its average hourly wages, was for all intents and purposes unfeasible. The Secretariat was hopelessly overburdened with inquiries concerning this matter, and the organisation quietly returned to the old system of 6 Dutch cents per member. Through the stable currency in Germany, a more stable situation also returned to the ITF. In the midst of the Great Depression at the Prague Congress in 1931, it was decided to increase the fees from 6 to 8 cents. The ITF therefore had considerably higher dues than other international trade organisations. In 1933, the ITF was faced with a dramatic situation. A financial catastrophe was imminent after the collapse of the German unions in 1933 and the break-up of the Austrian labour movement in 1934. The revenue of the ITF fell dramatically from 167,737 Dutch guilders per year in 1931 to 146,537 guilders in 1933 and once again to 132,259 guilders in 1937.

The budget was again brought into order through painful concessions: the bimonthly newsletter of the ITF was discontinued, the minutes of the congresses and the financial reports were no longer printed, and all other publications, e.g. “Fascism” or “Press Reports”, were hectographed on inexpensive paper. The employees of the ITF agreed to wage cuts which were between 6 and 15% depending on the amount of salaries. In spite of all other setbacks

(the loss of the Czech member organisations in 1938 and the Spanish ones in 1939), Edo Fimmen managed to keep the ITF in business.

The organisation of the ITF consisted of the International Congress, the General Council, the Executive Committee, the Dutch Office or the Presidium, and the Secretariat. The International Congress met every two years, the General Council at least once per year, the Executive Committee at least once per year, and the Presidium eight times per year. The Secretariat met once a week. The ITF General Council elected by the Congress consisted of ten members, the trade unions of the two largest countries, Great Britain and Germany, each had two representatives, and the remaining countries were divided into groups. The General Council decided on all matters between the congresses and nominated the five-member Executive Committee from among its members which received reports from the Secretariat. The Dutch Office or Presidium consisted of two members and representatives appointed by the Dutch trade unions. It had only one task: the daily supervision of the management of the Secretariat. The ITF Secretariat reported on all levels of authority just mentioned, acquired more freedom in the course of the 1920s and 30s, and, thanks to the abundant energy of General Secretary Fimmen, was first registered in the constitution as an independent institution at the Congress of 1930. Afterwards, the Secretariat consisted of the general secretary and his assistant, both elected by the Congress, as well as the secretaries entrusted with the leadership of the sections (railway workers, seafarers, air transport workers, etc.), which were elected by the General Council. ITF congresses lasted at least five days and focussed primarily on one specialized and one political topic: e.g. in 1928, Assistant General Secretary Nathan Nathans gave a lecture on the development of the most recent means of transport, and Edo Fimmen spoke about global capitalism and international organisations. The first congresses of the ITF were general assemblies in which all delegates deliberated on all matters. By 1921, special section conferences were introduced in order to ensure that the special interests of professional groups were granted, at first for railway workers and tramway workers, seafarers and dockers, as well as road transport workers. Initially, special section conferences were held before the general congresses, but later, one day was reserved during the congresses for special conferences.

During the first two years after its reestablishment, the ITF had neither an office nor its own employees. It was only able to survive because it had almost no expenses. The general secretary was also the secretary of the ITUC and was paid there: the staff of the ITUC also performed other non-paid work for the ITF at his request. In 1921, the financial situation was first consolidated to such an extent that the Executive Committee decided to rent rooms and hire its first staff members. In 1922, Nathan Nathans began as the second Secretary of the ITF. General Secretary Fimmen was often on business trips as the ITUC Secretary, and someone was urgently needed to dedicate all his energy to the ITF. When Fimmen stepped down from office at the ITUC in 1923 and placed himself completely in the services of the ITF, he took along with him his treasurer and technical manager Jacobus Oldenbroek. The ITF Secretariat now developed one step at a time and became the envy of many international trade organisations: it had employees for the various sections, an organisational and a

documentation department, and its own translation services (the ITF worked with nine languages in the period between the World Wars, among them Esperanto). At the Secretariat, General Secretary Edo Fimmen was the undisputed patron who made all the decisions, delegated work, and made sure that duties were performed. The ITF Secretariat was not a team as Fimmen later regretted: “Business was always so urgent that it was easier for me to rely on my experience instead of asking you to come together for a meeting and listening to all our friends. If I had done otherwise, I not only would have avoided mistakes, but also would have forced you to work together”.<sup>6</sup>

Edo Fimmen regarded the following duties for the ITF above all: it should be a “source of the best possible information” about social and economic situations in transport which help member organisations to improve the living conditions of their members to the highest international standards, to support international social legislation, and to foster the international right of trade unions to be heard.<sup>7</sup> The ITF should expand overseas and break out of the limited area of the trade union movement confined to Europe.

Everyday life at the ITF was defined by all the hardships that were characteristic of labour organisations in the years between the World Wars. It was not uncommon for letters and queries not to be answered, for member organisations not to consult with the Secretariat at all, and for required surveys not to be returned although it was decided at the congresses that the Secretariat should compile a list of the working conditions of transport workers. Nevertheless, Fimmen proudly announced in 1924 that the ITF had made its first steps towards the joint international battle. This joint international battle could take on various forms. In most instances, the ITF organised financial support, warned about the arrival of strike-breakers, and provided information to the general public. A highlight of the international action in the early years of the ITF was the solidarity for the British General Strike in 1926. The ITF Secretariat was in constant contact with affiliated organisations during the general strike, and special reports were sent out on a daily basis via Radio Hilversum; however, reporting by organisations to the ITF, especially from Great Britain, left a great deal to be desired. The transport of hard coal to England was at the very least seriously obstructed, and, at the request of the British trade unions, so was the transport of food. The fact that the British National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union did not participate in the strike from the beginning was the Achilles’ heel of the solidarity movement, as was the poor organisation in the port of Rotterdam where the coal shipped over the Rhine had to be reloaded. In the second half of the 1920s, the focus of ITF activities continued to shift to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Fimmen understood the importance of international social legislation to improve the working conditions of the entire work force. Labour contracts and the repatriation of sailors, protection from the risk of accidents in the transport industry, and the lifting and carrying of heavy loads were topics that the ITF brought forth within the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It was remarkable how professionally the ITF proceeded: careful

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<sup>6</sup> Fimmen to Tofahrn, 16 July 1942, Modern Records Centre (MRC), Tofahrn papers 238/9/1.

<sup>7</sup> Report on activities and financial report of the ITF for the years 1935, 1936 and 1937. Amsterdam 1938. Modern Records Centre (MRC), ITF papers 159/1/1/72.

preparation, disciplined and planned action by its delegates, accompanying presentations, and, of course, the general secretary's travel to international labour conferences and meetings.

The expansion of the ITF beyond Europe had been on the agenda of the ITF since its reestablishment. The General Council of the ITF received authorisation from the Congress of 1922 in Vienna to send a delegation to America and Australia. However, nothing came of this. The first contract with trade unions outside of Europe took place in 1922 in which representatives of the Japanese Seamen's Union attended the ITF Congress in Hamburg. In 1926, the general secretary travelled with his French colleague Vignaud through the port towns of North Africa and took up contact with autonomous trade unions which were not affiliated with the French umbrella organisation that organised the Italian and Moroccan dockers. In an unusually clear-sighted way, the Congress of 1928 discussed the growing tendency of production to shift to colonial and semi-colonial countries, the restructuring of the organisation into five regions (Europe, South and Central America, Australia, the Far East, the Middle East, and North Africa) and thereby took the first practical steps of expanding the ITF beyond Europe. In 1929, the Japanese Seamen's Union joined the ITF, and in 1931, Fimmen personally travelled to Japan and from there to Shanghai. The immediate practical results were minimal: the Japanese Seamen's Union withdrew from the ITF in 1937, and three of the four Indian seafarers' unions were dropped from the list of member associations in the same year because they had not paid any dues and there was no longer any contact with them. The only remaining one was the National Seamen's Union (Bombay). It was equally difficult to expand the ITF to Latin America although one railway workers' and one seafarers' trade union from Argentina joined the ITF in 1923. Although Fimmen travelled to Mexico in 1925, no other advancements towards membership were made; the railway workers' and transport workers' trade unions told him that out of consideration for the political mood of their members they did not want to align themselves in any political direction, neither with the ITUC, nor the ITF, nor with the Communist Red International of Labour Unions. In 1938, Fimmen was again in Mexico; his suggestion for a Latin American ITF Secretariat branch was accepted with enthusiasm, but was never implemented due to the start of World War II. In 1928, ten associations outside of Europe belonged to the ITF, and in 1930 it was 22, which corresponded to approximately 8% of the membership. In the 1930s, the numbers again dropped, and Fimmen, who had proudly announced at the Congress of 1928 that the ITF had managed to bridge the gap between races, had to admit in 1937 that he was not at all satisfied with the results of all his efforts to make the ITF known outside Europe.

Like no other organisation for the workers' movement in the time between the World Wars, the ITF distinguished itself through international action, which included the fight against fascism, against the perils of war, and against the suppression of unions. This was especially due to the energy of General Secretary Edo Fimmen who occasionally sparked heated debate in his organisation, sometimes had to suffer setbacks, but was always able to stand his ground. The transport workers' trade unions bore the main brunt of the boycott imposed by the ITUC on 20 June 1920 against the Horthy regime in Hungary, in which unions were ruthlessly suppressed. The boycott was a clear failure and was insufficiently followed by trade unions in

Hungary's neighbouring countries with the exception of Austria. A part of the Hungarian workers' movement rejected the boycott, and Austria was severely affected by Hungarian countermeasures. As the beginning of a new phase in the development of the international workers' union, the boycott was abandoned in 1920, and the workers' organisations seemed to enter the picture as an independent power. Actually, according to Edo Fimmen when looking back on 1923, the boycott was hampered due to technical errors and could not be recorded even as a partial success. The Horthy government did not change its position, and the boycott was officially called off on 8 August 1920.

In the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, the ITF also called for a boycott of munitions transported to Poland. The ITF believed that the Polish army was the "spearhead of the Holy Alliance" against the Soviet Union. Remarkably, neither the ITF nor the ITUC showed an understanding of the arguments of the Polish trade unions which had good reason not to believe assurances by the Russian government that they would not interfere with Polish independence. Actually, the transport of war materials was prevented only in very few cases. The practical importance of the boycott was minimal.

In March 1923, the ITF General Council turned to transport workers, railway workers, and seafarers in Europe. The situation on the Russian-Polish border was dangerous and once again the threat of a world war was imminent. The transport of war materials was to be strictly monitored. In the first half of 1923, Edo Fimmen secretly took up contact with representatives from the Russian trade unions in the Central European office of Comintern in Berlin. The result of the contact was a joint conference between the Russian trade unions and the ITF that was held on 23/24 May 1923 in Berlin. The conference called for the unity of transport workers in all countries and resolved to establish a joint international action committee "to propagate, organise, and carry out the fight of transport workers, railway workers, and seafarers in all countries and affiliations against militarism, the perils of war, and fascism".<sup>8</sup> During the conference, Edo Fimmen also met with Karl Radek, both of whom spoke about the "possibility and usefulness of concentrating proletarian forces".<sup>9</sup> The resolutions of the conference failed to be implemented due to the heavy-handed approach of RILU Chairman Lozovsky, who afterwards claimed that the conference was an official meeting between the ITF and the Red International of Labour Unions. However, a majority of ITF members also had considerable doubt about the willingness of the Russian unions to work towards international unity, and, in any case, did not see any sense in an independent ITF initiative without the ITUC. Edo Fimmen was firmly convinced that the Russian trade unions also wanted unity, that the battle between Amsterdam and Moscow had to be resolved, and that there were neither winners nor losers. "Our International", he believed, "will first become a genuine international organisation when the Russians take their place in our international organisation with their virtues and shortcomings".<sup>10</sup> Fimmen's opinion was certainly very controversial within the ITF. His suggestion to invite his Russian colleagues to a conference

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<sup>8</sup> "Rote Fahne", 27 May 1923.

<sup>9</sup> Edo Fimmen to Karl Radek, 15 June 1923, Modern Records Centre (MRC), ITF papers 159/6/2.

<sup>10</sup> ITF: Report of the proceedings of the International Transportworkers' Congress of 1926, p. 57.

of the railway section of the ITF on 30 June/1 July 1925 also met with a rebuff just as the idea to invite the Russians to the ITF Congress in 1926. Continued attacks by the Red International of Labour Unions on the ITUC and increasingly on the ITF, the establishment of “red transport workers’ organisations” apart from member trade unions of the ITF, and finally the devastating experience of the International Union of Labour (IUL) with temporary memberships for Russian trade unions led to the winds finally changing for the ITF. A French motion to accept the Russian trade unions into the ITF, which was still pending at the Luxemburg Congress of the ITF in 1938, was off the table after a dramatic intervention by Charles Lindley: “One could make comparisons between fascism and Russia and ascertain that there is no great difference between the two and that we are basically in favour of the dictatorship”.<sup>11</sup>

Fimmen had never developed his own analysis of fascism, but was one of the very first to recognise the danger that fascism posed. By 1923, one year after Mussolini seized power, Giuseppe Sardelli, previously Secretary of the Italian Tramway Workers’ Union, travelled through Italy on behalf of the ITF to establish new contacts. Two years later, Fimmen’s assistant Nathans carried out the same task. At the beginning of the 1930s, an illegal network was formed with several hundred members. The ITF also drew attention to itself through spectacular actions: 100,000 copies of the transport workers’ manifesto were thrown from an airplane over northern Italy in 1931.

After 1930, the German member organisations unsuccessfully urged the ITF to make preparations for illegal contacts. Once German trade unions had been crushed, the ITF decided in June 1933 to support resistance against National Socialism through financial and organisational means. Edo Fimmen personally travelled to the Saar region, which was under the administration of the League of Nations in 1933, and met with railway officials and representatives of the International Socialist Militant League (ISK); the first flyers were smuggled into Germany. In September 1933, the ITF treasurer and organisational manager Jacobus Oldenbroek travelled to Germany in order to get a firsthand impression of whom they could still work cooperatively. As a result of this and other first contacts, the previous organisational manager of the Railway Workers’ Union, Hans Jahn, came to Amsterdam on his own initiative. Eventually, an extended network of illegal contacts among railway workers emerged, especially in northern and western Germany, as well as seafarers on the Baltic and North Sea coasts. Their influence can certainly be disputed, and estimates of their numbers range from several hundred to well over 1,000 representatives. The Gestapo managed to uncover a major part of the network with the most important representatives following the conference organised by the ITF in the Danish city of Roskilde in April 1935. This did not include the western German railway workers’ group which did not participate in the conference as a precautionary measure and established itself in the Aachen-Cologne-Koblenz-Krefeld-Wuppertal-Dortmund-Duisburg area in the period that followed. In 1936, Fimmen met once a month on a regular basis with his western German representatives whose work, as all illegal work in Germany at that time, was financed by donations from member

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<sup>11</sup> Modern Records Centre (MRC), ITF papers 159/1/1/81.



organisations of the ITF. When the group started to distribute illegal pamphlets, the Gestapo was able to uncover their network. Resistance among the railway workers in southern Germany is often associated with the name of Karl Molt, the prior regional leader of the Railway Workers' Union in Stuttgart, who lived in exile in Switzerland and first came into contact with the ITF in 1936. He was able to win over representatives in Ulm, Plochingen, Stuttgart and Mannheim until 1938; however, contact with political groups was beyond the limits of his connections.

Independent illegal work among the seafarers of the ITF began in 1936 when a group from the Communist Party of Germany working in the port of Antwerp joined the ITF because of their criticism of Stalinist politics. "Die Schifffahrt" was distributed among German seafarers and was published with an edition of 1,300 copies in 1937, 800 of which were circulated via Antwerp, 200 via Rotterdam, and the rest via ports in the USA, Denmark and Norway. Depending on the month, 60-90 of the German ships entering Antwerp were boarded and talks were held with the crews. During the course of 1938, the authorities continued to increase surveillance of the port and less and less work was carried out. There were also other seafarer groups in ports in France, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA, and sometimes also in Norway.

Equally as determined as they were in the resistance movement in Germany and Austria, the ITF also supported the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War. Only ten days after the start of the Civil War, member organisations were called upon by the ITF Secretariat to closely control the transport of war materials. Observation posts were established in the ports of Cardiff, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, and Gdynia in order to monitor shipping traffic to Spain, and, in numerous cases, the shipment of weapons and ammunition for Franco were actually stopped by dockers in France and Scandinavia. The general secretary personally travelled to Spain in order to help coordinate the unsuccessful solidarity action with the Spanish forces. The ITF had its own convoy that was fighting on the side of the anarchist militia. By the end of 1938, work in Spain for the ITF shifted more and more to helping refugees.

Shortly after the Munich Agreement, the ITF Congress met from 31 October until 5 November 1938 in Luxemburg. "Peace has been saved", said Fimmen before the Congress, "but at what price? At the price of lost honour, at the price of having delivered thousands of people to the atrocities of fascism".<sup>12</sup> Fimmen, who became seriously ill at the end of the year, systematically prepared his organisation for the approaching war and early on organized the relocation of the Secretariat to London. On 30 August, a few days before the start of the war, the Secretariat took up work in London, and on 1 October 1939 the ITF opened its main headquarters far away from London, in Crossland Fosse, Box End Kempston, which remained the location of the ITF for the entire duration of the Second World War. A branch office existed in Paris until May 1940, and a second branch office was opened in New York at the beginning of 1940. Although the ITF was deeply affected by the death of its charismatic

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<sup>12</sup> Session secrète du congrès de Luxembourg. Modern Records Centre (MRC), ITF papers 159/1/1/81.

general secretary in 1942, it nevertheless remained operational for the entire duration of the war. In 1942, the Seafarers' International Union of North America (SIUNA) joined the ITF, and two years after the end of the war, the American Railway Labor Executives' Association followed. By 1948, 96 trade unions from 37 countries once again belonged to the ITF with approximately 3.5 million members. The ITF cooperated with the American trade union association AFL in implementing the Marshall Plan in Europe. Poverty and despair among the workers spoke in favour of accepting American aid to quickly lead the way to reconstruction, especially in the transport sector. The new General Secretary Jacobus Oldenbroek continued along the same line as his predecessor, and, in all negotiations involving the restructuring of international trade unions, he defended the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) as the organisational unit of national trade union confederations and international trade secretariats and spoke vehemently in favour of the independence of international trade secretariats. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) collapsed in 1949, and the ITF became a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which recognised the independence of international trade secretariats, among them the ITF, as in the time between the World Wars, and established rules for cooperation. Since 2006, the ITF has been a member of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) which was the merger of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL).

Transport workers' organisations in the Eastern bloc were not a part of the ITF until the fall of communism in 1989. The communist transport workers' unions in France and Italy, which were majority organisations in these countries, were also not a part of the ITF for a long time. Attempts by the ITF to establish anti-communist action groups in French and Italian ports together with the AFL failed and did not move beyond the initial stages because the ITF was pressured by the governmental agencies behind the AFL and felt that it had not been taken seriously, among other reasons. The establishment of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the gradual pressure exerted by the ETUC and European legislation to assimilate led to the convergence of the ITF and communist transport workers' associations. The division of Europe and trade unions into communist and non-communist wings, especially in terms of France and Italy, meant a significant loss of members for the ITF, for which it was quickly able to compensate. In 1957, it temporarily reached its peak of 5.7 million members from 190 organisations in 16 countries. Starting in the 1970s, this number declined due to unemployment and structural changes in the transport sector. This trend was able to be stopped or slowed down in the 1990s through the membership of numerous transport workers' unions from the former Eastern bloc.

The ITF finally developed into an international organisation from the old one that had centred on Europe, even though approximately one half of its members still came from Europe (2006: 52%, compared to 23% from Asia, 14% from North America, 7% from Africa and the Arab world, and 4% from Latin America). In Africa and Latin America, the ITF continues to be poorly represented in spite of all attempts to promote the establishment of trade unions. In 1958, the ITF had 15 African member unions and appointed its first African regional secretary

(Michael Labinjo, headquarters in Lagos). In the early 1970s, ITF membership was limited to Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and the former Rhodesia. The ITF again began to grow faster with the end of apartheid in South Africa. The first Asian office, a “regional information office” with headquarters in Bombay, was established in 1948, and the first Asian transport workers’ conference was held in Tokyo in 1955, more than 20 years after Edo Fimmen’s visit to Japan. An Asian office was also opened in Tokyo in 1955 and another office in Singapore in 1959. Indian, Japanese, and Philippine trade unions became the backbone of the ITF in Asia. As early as the 1960s, the ITF was able to show a strong, growing, and representative membership in Asia; however, there was still a blank spot on the map: Australia. The breakthrough came with the affiliation of the Australian Dockers’ Union in 1971. Attempts at organising unions in Latin America were less successful, although the ITF already had members in Argentina and Brazil in the 1920s, and, after World War II, sent the talented Spanish organiser Trifón Gómez to Latin America, who opened the first regional office in Mexico City in 1955. Coup d’états and authoritarian military regimes in Latin America prevented the development of free trade unions. In 2009, the ITF had regional offices in Nairobi, Ouagadougou, Tokyo, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, Amman, Moscow and Brussels. The European Transport Workers’ Federation with headquarters in Brussels is simultaneously the European regional organisation of the ITF and the European Trade Union Federation of the ETUC for the transport sector. It has reached a number of agreements with companies operating across Europe (aviation companies, ferry services, etc.) about establishing European works councils, and has had a definite leadership role in this function within the ITF for a specific period of time, yet is not an independent organisation.

Structural change in the transport industry has led to a radical transformation in the makeup of the ITF membership. While membership was dominated by railway workers until the 1950s, tramway workers are the largest section today with 30%, increasing fourfold in the past fifty years. The seafarers’ section has also almost doubled.

The headquarters of the ITF have remained in London, exhibiting a remarkable number of consecutive British general secretaries (present General Secretary: David Cockroft) following the resignation of Omer Becu. The organisation of the ITF continues to be based on congresses which make and ratify all important decisions but only assemble once every four years. The General Council normally meets only once every congressional period and therefore has lost a great deal of influence in comparison to the time between the World Wars. The Executive Board is the actual decision-making body which is staffed according to country as in the time between the World Wars. Presidents and vice-presidents, who together represent the various regions of the ITF, have considerably greater political impact compared to the time between the World Wars (when there was only the ITF president). The Secretariat is comprised of some 100 individuals; after difficult internal discussions, the regionalisation planned by Fimmen and others was implemented by creating regional offices (Africa, Asia/Pacific, America, CIS, the Arab world) and establishing the European Transport Workers’ Federation. Based on the model developed between the World Wars, the trade organisation has become more defined: there are special sections for railway workers,

tramway workers, inland waterway workers, dockers, seafarers, fishermen, civil aviation workers, and tourism workers with their own structures (conferences and committees) and joint structures for sections with common interests. This is how the ITF campaign against flags of convenience has been run by the Fair Practices Committee since 1952 in which seafarers and dockers are jointly represented.

The ITF is still dedicated to informing its members about working conditions, changes in transport, and transport policy. The ITF continues to publish the newsletter “Transport International” in six languages which, however, has been surpassed by publications on the Internet which inform members and the public. In addition to educational work, assistance in establishing and developing trade unions has gained more importance than in the period between the World Wars. This also applies to the reestablishment of trade unions in Germany after 1945, in democratic Spain after Franco, in Eastern Europe after 1989, and in Africa and Latin America. Like all other international trade secretariats, all activities are based on defending fundamental coalition rights as they were established in Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 of the International Labour Organization (ILO). International assistance in collective bargaining negotiations and the fight for wages and working conditions has also gained more importance in comparison to the period between the World Wars due to the strong international nature of the ITF. The instruments of assistance have also become more diversified, ranging from direct financial support to solidarity strikes to mobilising the public and intervening with the governments involved. The ITF has very successfully continued on the path initiated by Edo Fimmen to standardise working conditions through the International Labour Organisation (ILO) particularly in maritime shipping (agreements on working hours, education, manning ships).

The ITF has made a name for itself especially by coordinating and developing international wage policy in maritime shipping and through its campaign against flags of convenience. Since the end of World War II, the system of flags of convenience has been used by American and Greek ship owners – ships are “flagged out” in countries with good working conditions and high standards of living and instead registered in countries with low standards of living – until this became a worldwide phenomenon in the 1970s and 80s, intensified by the creation of national, deregulated second registrations. The consequences for the ITF were poorer working conditions for its members and a considerable loss in membership from seafarer trade unions which were no longer able to fight for the living conditions of their members through normal means. In 1949, the ITF attempted to control the start of flags of convenience through the traditional means of a boycott against ships under the flag of Panama – a symbol of flags of convenience countries – but the boycott failed because of opposing forces within the ITF itself and had to be discontinued. A second international boycott declared in 1958 was also not successful. In the 1960s, the campaign drifted along without any major results and was first taken up again after the admission of the Australian dockers’ trade unions and the ITF Congress in Vienna in 1971. The ITF then shifted its interests to organising workers on “flagged out” ships and regulating working conditions by means of collective bargaining agreements. Since it was often not clearly discernable which national trade union was

responsible for the crew of a ship under a flag of convenience, the ITF increasingly took over negotiations itself and immediately assumed automatic ITF membership for the crew of the ship in question after concluding a collective bargaining agreement. A global network of inspectors in major international ports, which has increased to 130 individuals, reflects this worldwide transport network and allows for the negotiation of minimal international standards for wages, working hours, labour safety, and the development of bilateral contracts for international shipping groups through the interaction of national trade unions, port inspectors, and the ITF Secretariat. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the ITF implemented collective bargaining regulations for up to one-fourth of all ships sailing under flags of convenience (and thereby for 123,000 seafarers). The ITF Welfare Fund for seafarers is financed for the most part from fees raised from collective bargaining agreements and helps to support seafarers in emergency situations.