

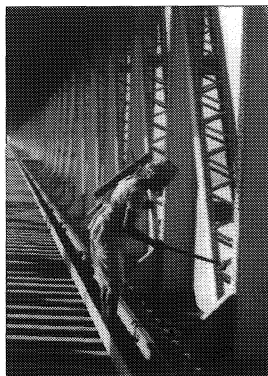
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Chapter Thirteen

The ITF and the Changing Nature of Transport



A British bus conductor in the 1950s.



An Indian railway worker in the 1960s.

‘There has been a steady increase in the complexity and urgency of the daunting array of new technical and sociological problems that have to be handled by the ITF. The sociological impact of modernisation and mechanisation in port working and on the railways, co-ordination of transport, security of employment and rationalisation in the railway sector, the crisis in urban transport, the effects of economic integration on transport workers’ conditions of employment, all these are questions which have demanded and will continue to demand the utmost skill, energy and foresight if we are to see them solved in a way that is comparable with the ideas of our organisation.’ ITF General Secretary Pieter de Vries (*ITF Report on Activities, 1962*)

Technology and its impact on transport workers has always been a dominant theme within the ITF. At the 1921 Geneva congress - where industrial sections met separately for the first time - the newly created Railway workers’ section adjourned the meeting to travel en masse to the Geneva railway station where they observed a demon-

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stration of the then new automatic couplings system for rail cargo.

Throughout the twenties and thirties the ITF and its railway organisations campaigned very strongly for the adoption of the automatic coupling system (despite the fact that the adoption of such a system led to a decrease in the actual employment of railway workers) – it was supported because its adoption led to a significant improvement in the safety of those people who were working.

Sometimes the future does not turn out the way we think it will. In 1925 *ITF News* reported enthusiastically on the plans that were apparently under way by the operators of British Railways to build air strips on the roofs of London railway stations. During the 1950s the ITF Seafarers' Section held many discussions on the creation and introduction of nuclear powered ships. In the 1950s and 1960s the ITF also believed that urban transport systems would be challenged by the development of personal flight vehicles (helicopters and jet packs).

These predictions may seem ridiculous today. When we look back at a century of developments in the transport industries, we can see that there have been incredible developments and changes such that the transport workers at the time of the ITF's foundation would hardly recognise the hardware of transport today. In 1896, sailing ships had been replaced by steam-driven vessels, but sail was still utilised – many ships used their engines for manoeuvring in and out of port and also had sails for long voyages. The nature of technological change in shipping has seen a situation of 100 years ago where a ship could be crewed by



Danish passenger transport workers demonstrating in Copenhagen in July 1961.

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Greek public transport workers demonstrate in 1964 in Salonika.

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over 100 people and would take literally weeks to load and unload being replaced by today's container ship with a crew that can be as few as a dozen and can be loaded or unloaded in a matter of hours.

The railways have also seen gigantic changes in the last 100 years. At the time of the ITF's foundation rail, in the developed world, was the major means of goods and passenger transport. Though this century has seen the emergence of road transport and private cars in a big way, it has not seen the total demise of the railways. It is fair to say that there has been a significant change in the carriage of goods and people from rail to road, but increasing environmental considerations and the growing price of private road transport are leading to a revival of the railways throughout the world.

Perhaps the most dramatic developments (especially in terms of employment) have occurred in the harbours of the world. The introduction of new technology into the ports and its impact on employment has been a constant theme of dockworker trade unionism. In fact, the 1896 Rotterdam dock strike that led to the formation of the ITF was, along with being a dispute regarding attempted wage cuts, concerned with the introduction of new electric cranes about which the workers felt they had not been properly consulted.

The most dramatic revolution in the docks occurred in the 1960s with the worldwide adoption of the container. Containerisation has utterly transformed goods transport. It has also had a dramatic effect on shipping, railways and road transport. The ITF Dockers' Section created a working party to examine the impact of containerisation in 1967

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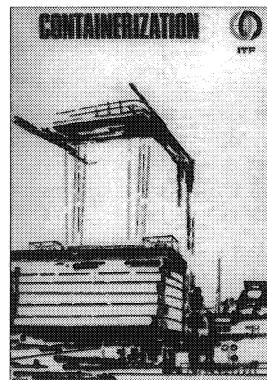
Members of the ITF-affiliated North American International Association of Machinists picketing during the infamous Flying Tiger dispute in 1955. Workers in the new civil aviation industry were quick to establish a strong trade union presence.

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and an important publication entitled *Containerization* was published in 1968. This book examined in detail the world-wide developments in containerisation and restated what has always been the ITF's central position in dealing with the introduction of new technology in the transport industries: 'Namely', as the report states, that 'organised transport workers should be fully consulted over the nature, timetable and impact of the introduction of new technology and furthermore while the ITF generally welcomes technological innovation that improves the working conditions of transport workers it also calls upon employers and government organisations to implement new technology with a view to improving productivity not just getting rid of employment. The ITF then and always believes that if workers are made redundant, they should be adequately compensated or retrained for alternative employment.'

The civil aviation industry has been one of the this century's biggest success stories. When the ITF was founded aviation was a new invention. The first passenger services started operating after the First World War. The first international service was the Pan-Am route between Florida and Cuba. In 1928 the ITF reported that it organised a couple of hundred civil aviation workers who were mostly Germans working for Lufthansa (which was the world's largest airline in 1928). Discussions concerning the creation of a Civil Aviation Workers' Section were first held in 1932. But the section was not created until its inaugural meeting in Paris, France, in 1949.

The civil aviation industry has continued to expand massively since the war and fortunately for the ITF it has developed into an industry that is very highly unionised.



Containerization was published by the ITF in 1968.



ITF Assistant General Secretary Paul Tofahm in Tunisia in 1953 with striking railway workers.

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The 1954 London ITF Civil Aviation conference.

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The greatest challenge facing the present-day industry and the ITF section is the threat of new liberalisation and globalisation. Following the USA decision to deregulate domestic civil aviation in 1978, there has been a concerted worldwide move towards 'open skies' and deregulation. The experiences of the USA's deregulation experiment are ominous for workers in the industry - initially fares decreased and new services emerged, but within a short period of time the US domestic market has been reorganised to suit the interests of a small number of dominant companies acting in a monopolistic or oligopolistic manner. Fares have increased, services have been eliminated, the number of jobs in the industry has been slashed and the pay and working conditions of the remaining workers have been diminished.

The ITF Civil Aviation Section is campaigning with great vigour against the worldwide process of globalisation and the section has committed itself to exploring new means of creating and building solidarity between civil aviation workers.

The trend towards liberalisation and the growing obsession with the deregulated free market can be seen to varying degrees in every transport industry. Deregulation in shipping began with the growth of the Flag of Convenience system after the Second World War and the other transport industries appear to be following that lead. The ITF knows what this means and all sections of the ITF are discussing how to cope with this new situation.

Nothing in the transport industry is certain any more, not even national ownership in the railways as US railroad companies seek to profit from the break-up and



The DC3 (pictured here) was the workhorse of the passenger civil aviation revolution following the Second World War.

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privatisation of national railway administrations. The need to constantly adapt trade union strategies to meet the changing situation while remaining true to the basic principles of our organisation is the heart of the ITF's mission as it leaves the twentieth century.



The ITF's Civil Aviation Section conference in November 1967.