

Preparatory Bulletin

World conference of rail workers against privatisation

February, 2003

Editorial

Extravagant!

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Your contributions to this bulletin will be welcome

Such was the word used by the European Commission member appointed to railways to define the status of French rail workers during the interview with the French delegation of railway trade unionists received on behalf of the international Liaison Committee, in the framework of the October 10th 2002 international day of united actions against the privatisation of railways.

The idea of a day of action had been suggested by Russian trade unionists in St Petersburg in November 2001.

To have a status would be extravagant? To have a social safety net would be extravagant?

For the IMF, the World Bank and the European Union, casual labour, flexibility, and charity instead of social protection should become universal laws for workers.

In March 2003, Freight transport will be open to the competition imposed by the European Union.

Sernam [package railway transportation] has been privatised. The special

retirement pension rail workers' fund has recently been regionalised.

Our special retirement scheme is under threat.

The European Union, the government all know and fear; if workers and their organisations unite against that policy, all the plans against workers will be brushed off.

Has the time to halt that policy not come?

On October 10th 2002, a first step forward was taken with the different initiatives that were taken across the globe (Russia, Germany, Bangladesh, Switzerland, Brazil, Pakistan, Britain)

On February 15th and 16th 2003 a world conference of rail workers against privatisations will be convened.

Already now, there are over 300 French rail workers who support that conference. We invite you to join that conference and support it.

The Editorial Board

Report on the meeting with the General Delegation of Energy and Transports of the Brussels Commission

Brussels October 10th 2002

Participants for the DGTREN: **M. J.A. Vinois**, head of the department (railway transports and inter-relation) at the European direction “surface transports” and his collaborator: **Olivier Silla**

From the start, M. Vinois says that the Commission does not require the privatisation of any railway. What is more it has no competence to do so.

He quotes the Rome treaty (1958) that sets 4 essential principles of the European inner market: free circulation of people, goods, services AND CAPITALS.

He also quotes the fact that the European Commission makes no decisions and that its role is limited to making proposals; decisions are jointly taken by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

According to him, building Europe resulted in higher levels of welfare for the citizens of European union member states!!! *The millions of unemployed people of people trapped in casual work homeless people will certainly appreciate Eurocrat top executives' higher-class humour.*

The impending expansion of the Union to 10 new members is fraught with the menace of social dumping because the economic and social situation varies widely from one would-be member country to another and also from them to the present member states.

Trade within the European Union is stepping up. The circulation of rail freight should be more liquid.

The Commission considers that railway transports fail to respect the principle of freedom of services in Europe, since the sector is organised along territorial lines within national barriers: international transports are an addition of national services. The result is that charterers increasingly shun railways especially on the international level. The share of railways concerning the transport of freight remains below 10% because it compares poorly with road transports as far as quality – on-time delivery – is concerned.

In September 2001, the Commission published a white paper under the title “European Policy concerning European transport by 2010: time to make choices”. It wishes to establish infrastructure charges at a marginal social cost and implement the principle: “those who use and pollute have to pay”

At present, in the European railway system, infrastructure charges equal an average 30% of the total transport cost (the average charge in France would total 2 Euros per railway kilometre)

However, when we asked about the railway system debt, especially the French one, the question remained unanswered. As for Belgium, “*a country engaged in a splitting process*”, the person who was speaking to us considered that the railway system’s debt to the public treasury justifies that the SNCB (integrated GI and EF [railway enterprise]) should remain a single organism; therefore the ORC [Traffic Regulating Authority] will have to be a state organism distinct from the SNCB[Société Nationale de Chemins de fer Belges/ Belgian Railways].

Conversely, M. Vinois considers that the position of the French ORC [Traffic Regulating authority] regarding RFF[Réseau Ferré Français/ French network] is quite natural and does not harm the desired neutrality.

M. Vinois adds that Germany has already installed two EF[railway enterprises].

The Commission is in a hurry to develop a European Railway Enterprise. So, starting from March 15th 2003, a single operator should be responsible for the entire international freight system.

It also wishes to get rid of any existing bottleneck by creating a network fully devoted to carrying freight across the whole of Europe and takes a stand to appoint the necessary resources in engines and engine drivers to freight transport.

The “packages” of directives concerning infrastructures provide that:

- ▶ Each GI [Infrastructure Managing Authority] should publish a resource document for the network

- ▶ Infrastructure blue books should be published concerning rail rolling stock

- ▶ The possibility for any member state of the European Union to deliver a permit to the Railway Spaces (provided that the legal, tax, and social dispositions be respected) completed by the possibility given to each member state whose network the Railway Space should like to use to publish safety guarantee certificates.

- ▶ The standardisation of equipments, thanks to the Technical Specifications of interoperability (already published for High Speed, and which are being completed concerning ordinary rail system)

The multiplication of the present systems (driver control, electricity powered engines, gauge, size) is becoming a hurdle in the path of the market. So the ERTMS system that is currently being tested aims at making it unnecessary for impending members to install several safety devices on board their engines (KVB, TVM, LZB, ZUB, ...) like THALYS at the moment.

- ▶ Progressively bringing the safety rule to the same level (over a 5 to 10 year period) and creating a European Railway Agency.

Even if the Commission pays lip service to railway safety by recognising the rules of every country, the purpose is clearly to make it very easy for impending members to join.

After setting a European association of GI (EIM) in which RFF [Strategic Rail Authority] is very active a “European association of rail freight operators” (ERFA) that regroups the new members from Belgium, Germany (Rail-Chem, Ruhrkohle) Italian (FNME, RTC), Dutch, Polish and British (Connex)

On the social level, the Commission advocates social dialogue by sector to be carried on by the Community of European Railways (CCFE) and the European Federation of Transporters (ETF, CES transport branch). In 2003, it will propose a directive concerning the engine driver’s permit because it is the main category of staff that crosses borders.

The Commission speaks of collective bargaining agreements and not of railway worker’s status (only 3 EF in Europe still enjoy a status: France, Belgium and Luxembourg; in Germany those workers hired before 1994 still enjoy the DB status, those hired after 1994 have the general status. The people who receive us say the SNCF status is EXTRAVAGANT; they add that there is no reason an EF (Railway Enterprise) should chose that SNCF status rather than the general labour regulations. As an example, M. Silla quotes the retiring age of the DB (63) that should in no case be aligned on the far more generous one of the SNCF engine drivers.

Concerning the regulations at work applied to drivers, the Commission considers a distinction should be made between

- ▶ What concerns safety (the principle of a medical check-up at regular intervals is quoted)

- ▶ All the rest that comes within the competence of autonomous social partners, such as working hours and rest time!

When the delegation remarks that working time and rest time bear on safety, the people who receive us quote the hitches they come across when it comes to imposing a reliable time measuring device on board trucks (confronting the road-hauliers lobby)!

The people involved in economy are quite aware that the future does not lie with road transport systems in Europe (safety, congested roads..) As early as 1997, the Commission advocated building rail highways. According to it, there was not much response among the railway enterprises that, then, enjoyed a very cosy monopoly situation.

According to the Commission, states would be left with three residual missions:

- ▶ Allocating EF (RailwayEnterprise) permits

- ▶ Allocating capacities (tracks)

- ▶ Setting charges for infrastructure use.

It wishes to promote transparency concerning the railway system (analytical account keeping is needed) by full knowledge of costs. The Commission considers that what obstacles still exist are the result of upholding

traditions and resisting reforms.

When the delegation left, the members said loud and clear that they stuck to the “extravagant” status”!

A few comments: The fact that a representative of the DG TREN received the delegation shows that the Commission needs a degree of integration of trade unions in order to fulfil its nefarious purposes.

It is a fact that the ETF (chaired by Jean-Pierre Brasseur) apparently bows to that game of “European sectorial social dialogue”

Free circulation of capitals, commodities and services far supersedes the circulation of people. When we compare the retiring ages, we are strengthened in our analysis that there is a clear determination to impose the lowest level of social protection in Europe. For the Commission, France seems to be the major hurdle: as a proof, the emphasis laid on the “extravagant” status of the SNCF.

When, about the recorded disloyalty of road transport competition, the Commission answers that it is a difficult debate which it does not wish to shun, that has a strong whiff of what Clemenceau used to say: “if you are determined to do something, you do it, otherwise, you set up a sub-committee”.

Concerning safety, we are reminded of a favourite phrase our former DGA, Francis Taillanter, used to say on the level of our safety regulation that he considered too high and costly; let us not forget that it was built on decades of experience and of drawn balance sheets.

The Commission remains conveniently mute on the situation in Britain; an example that can only act as a foil. Besides, faced with the depth of the catastrophe, the state has to intervene massively, which is a major crime against dominant ideology.

The delegation

England

The TUC demand that railways be renationalised

By overwhelming majority vote, the trade unions demanded that railways be renationalised.

During the vote at their yearly Blackpool Conference on September 12th 2002, the delegates said that it was vital that the railway system return to public state service when one considered the grim series of accidents that had occurred since the railways had been privatised.

“Our industry has been wrecked by the profiteers’ greed and incompetence; they have lined their pockets in that process”
Mick Rix

They also demanded that nuclear power production by British Power be renationalised; notably, 410 million pounds were given to bail the corporation out.

Because of railway privatisation, rail workers are employed by different companies with different statuses.

However, the delegates wrote a support motion to the effect that the government’s action to reinstate Rail track into the administration was *“a step towards complete renationalisation of British Rail”*

The leader of the union of train driver Aslef, Mick Rix, used as an argument the fact that the recent tragedies of Ladbroke, Southall and Hatfield were the result of the way the system had taken since privatisation. *“Lives have uselessly been lost, among whom many of our members”*. *“The network has been wrecked by the Paddington tragedy; if a mere 60 000*

had been spent on moving signal 109 to another place, 33 lives would have been saved”. The chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, thinks he has identified the problem – *“it is rooted in the demands and greed of trade unions and workers who ask for higher pay”*, he said during the conference.

“Let me tell Richard Bowler (chairman of Strategic Rail Authority) one or two things: it is not our members who are creating problems; it is their very often dangerous job that is the problem. It is the greed and the incompetence of profiteers who have wrecked our industry and have lined their pockets in that process”.

Appeal for a world conference in Paris of rail workers against privatisation

Privatisation of the railways, like other public services (telecommunications, energy, water distribution), is on the agenda throughout Europe.

By use of a series of directives, beginning with directive 91-440 that introduced the separation of the rail infrastructure from the rest of the network, the European Union has entered the final stage of the total privatisation of the rail networks.

March 2003 will see the introduction of competition for freight traffic on the Trans-European network. The year 2006 will see the introduction of competition throughout the European network for freight and passenger traffic. The last European Summit, held in Barcelona on 15-16 March 2002, confirmed this objective: *“actively take into consideration the “second railway package” aimed at phasing in competition in service delivery, based on an assessment of the first one.”*

In France, the setting up of RFF in line with directive 91-440 marked the start of privatisation, introducing toll charges and making them payable, for the moment, only to SNCF.

But privatisation also began with the setting up of subsidiaries and European GIEs Groupings of Economic Interests. The results can be seen with the disappearance of Sernam and the setting up of Eurostar (Paris-London), Thalys (Paris-Brussels), and the France-Switzerland and France-Italy sleeper train service.

We can also point to the setting up of Télécom Développement, the subsidiary of Vivendi and SNCF. Another instrument of privatisation is the introduction of regionalisation, which through Gaysot's Solidarity and Urban Renewal law gives the regions absolute power with respect to organising regional transport.

As a first consequence of this law, as shown in the agreements signed between SNCF and the regions, the right to strike is brought into question. The newspaper *La Voix du Nord* said as much to its readers when it commented (January 24th 2002) on the agreement reached between the General Council of the Nord Pas de Calais and SNCF: *“the agreement with SNCF stipulates a minimum service”*.

The consequences of privatising the railways have unfortunately been demonstrated in Great Britain with various disasters. The consequences also include an increase in tariffs for rail-users

and an increase in flexibility for employees. We want none of that, and we are pleased to note that our Belgian, Italian, Spanish, German and other colleagues are also resisting against the same privatisation and deregulation. Our Russian colleagues are facing the same problems. At a conference held in Saint Petersburg in November 2001, organised by Russian rail trade unionists and with the participation of railworkers from France and Germany, a common balance-sheet was drawn up. The European Union is simply implementing the decisions of the IMF and the World Bank, whose only aim is to privatise and deregulate all public services.

At a conference against privatisation and deregulation held in Berlin in February 2002, which brought together trade unionists from 51 countries and every continent of the world, railworkers from France, Russia, Germany and Brazil met up again.

The Brazilian colleague told us about the situation on the railways in Brazil, which is the same throughout Latin America and the United States too. Privatisation has led to the complete disappearance of passenger traffic in Brazil and Argentina. Rail workers from Pakistan pointed out to us that their government also intended to privatise the railways.

Following discussion and debate, the French railworkers who attended the Berlin Conference have made the proposal to organise a world conference of railworkers against privatisation of the railways and in defence of the status of railworkers, to be held in France in February 2003.

Faced with the destructive plans of the IMF, the World Bank and the European Union, only united resistance by the workers can force them back. Considering that defending the railways is an integral part of defending civilisation, in the same way as defending health, education, energy.

Considering that the Russian, German, Brazilian and French delegates at Saint Petersburg agree to call for a world conference;

Considering that at the Berlin Conference contact was made with railworker delegates from Korea, Bangladesh, Italy, Greece, Switzerland, Great Britain, Slovenia, Portugal and the United States;

We the undersigned support the proposal to organise a world conference of railworkers in France in February 2003.

Switzerland

Geneva, Bern October 9th

To the rail workers convened on October 11th 2002 against the privatisation of Russian railways

Dear brothers and sisters,

During the meeting, we have been informed by the Russian rail workers present that industrial action would be organised this Autumn in Russia against the privatisation of railways.

First, we should tell you that in Switzerland, privatisations have first imposed the separation of Postal services from telecommunications. The new telecommunication enterprise (Swisscom) was made autonomous with the state owning a majority of the shares. As for the railways they have been turned into a company, while all the Confederation public sector workers lost their status. Jobs were lost by the thousand to restructuring measures. Within 5 years, the number of rail workers dropped from 36 000 to 23 000, in the meantime, the postal services and telecommunication shed 10 000 jobs.

Lately, the Swiss government devised a law privatising electricity production and distribution that threatens power supplies to the country and that gives up the power stations to speculators. The employees and the population, helped by the Swiss trade Union Confederation (USS), supported by the Socialist Party clearly rejected that law during September 22nd polls. Just after the vote, the Socialist Party hailing that victory, declared: *“the tide of liberalisation has finally been stemmed”*. And, concerning the Swiss railways (CFF), the PS [Socialist Party] stated *“Infrastructure shall not be separated from commercial exploitation”* and that *“both should remain within the CFF as a public enterprise”* That statement offers rail workers some leverage to withstand fresh attempts at liberalisation.

Besides, the trade union of Swiss rail workers (SEV) as well as other trade union newspapers has published information on your struggle to get your demands and against privatisations; the situation is awkward as there is no right to strike. A rail worker who was interviewed by the trade union newspapers expressed the wish that trade unions in the West *“would hold their ground in the fight against privatisations”*

We have just been informed by the international Liaison Committee that an international day is on the agenda on October 10th. Thus, we learnt that a delegation of rail workers from several countries is to go to the European Commission on that day. We are members of the Socialist Party, trade unionists or we do not belong to any party. We shall meet just after your October 10th day of struggle; we shall answer the invitation of the Editorial Board of the *“Journal”*, the newspaper of the group of forums for working class policy, a spin-off organisation of the International Liaison Committee.

We support your fight against privatisations and ruin that hits Russian rail workers and railways. We shall propose that the Swiss trade union and political newspapers widely publicise your day of struggle against privatisations. We shall approach the Swiss trade union of rail workers (SEV) in that sense.

Alexandre Anor, member of the editorial board of “Journal” member of the Socialist Party.

Jean Clivaz, former chairman of the rail workers’ union

Yves Demierre, engine driver, member of the SEV, municipal councillor Socialist Party

Hansjörg Rorhbach, conductor, former chairman of the SEV Bern chapel.

October 10th in Russia

On October 10th 2002, a picket line was organised against privatisations, in defence of rail workers' rights in front St Petersburg parliament. About fifty people stood in that picket line; representatives of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of the October railway and of member unions, the Russian union of train drivers (RPLBJ), the union of the October Railway electricity technicians and many others that supported that action (the Regional Party of Communists, the Russian Labour Party)

That action was organised in the framework of the October 10th 2002 international day of action of united actions against the privatisation of railways (similar actions were organised on that day by rail workers in Bangladesh, Brazil, Britain, Germany, Spain, South Korea, Slovenia,

Pakistan France and Switzerland)

Vladimir Soloveitchik (Regional Party of Communists) headed the picket line. Andrei Gavrilov (chairman of the confederation of free trade unions of the October railway line, vice-chairman of the Russian trade union of train drivers), Leonid Petrov (union of the October railway electricity technicians) Evgueni Kozlov (Regional Party of Communists), Alexander Argunov (Russian Labour Party, "the rail worker" union), Iuri Elistratov (Russian union of train drivers), Mikhail Drujininski (free union of tramway yard N° 2), Iuri Abramson (Regional Party of Communists), Alexander Serov (Confederation of free trade unions of the October Railway) took the floor. The people present adopted an address to the chairman of the Russian Federa-

tion and to the members of the federal Assembly demanding that they refuse "the Aksenenko-Fadeiev reform of transport ways (actually the privatisation of railways); they also adopted a letter of solidarity with foreign-rail workers. In his intervention, Vladimir Soloveitchik criticised the activity of the authorities who in effect forbid that a referendum on privatisation should be held; whereas privatisation opens the way to future sale of railways, power stations and so on. Telegrams of solidarity from Spanish and French rail workers were read while the picket was standing.

Vladimir Soloveitchik

Pétition au président Poutine

Russian rail workers address the President of Russian Federation, the deputies of State Duma of the Russian Federation

«We, citizens of Russia, address you concerning the structural reform of railways in our country. We understand that it is time to transform our railways.

The Minister of Communication Ways and the management of railways do not guarantee the economic and financial activity, nor working conditions for railroad workers.

That amounts to an increased number of accidents in the production, derailments, as well as the loss of highly qualified personnel, among other serious

consequences. Given the low salaries and the revolting working conditions, young specialists refuse to take essential posts.

So, it is necessary to reform the railways, but not through privatisation.

The word of reform itself means improvement of the situation. But the private owner of a railway is only interested in maximum profit. He does not intend to solve the problems of rail workers or to strengthen the defense of the country, or the State security. Railways and all their infrastructure must remain State property and state-managed. Only in that way can be guaranteed:

- national security and defense's capacities of the country
- passengers' and freight security
- free circulation of passengers and commodities across the country's territory
- prices and charges regulated by the State
- benefits of handicapped work-

ers, pensioners and other categories of citizens

- security and normal working conditions for rail workers
- guarantees for lenders and investors.

Transforming the railways and rail transport companies into share companies and its selling to private owners would entail serious economic and social troubles in Russia.

Experience shows it: privatisation of railways has had no positive results in any of the countries that did it.

We must learn from the errors of others!

Do not let Russian railways be privatised!"

Names, profession, quality, address or passport number, signature...

Bangladesh

Demonstration against privatization & observance of Railway workers international solidarity day

Dear Comrades,

Today the 10th of October We from the “Bangladesh Jatiyo Sramik Federation” observed the international solidarity and action day for the rail workers world wide. The rally and subsequent demonstration was very successful. In spite of fear from the ruling party (they were observing one year of their rule) workers attended largely.

Beside workers of our federation the leaders and activists of “Railway workers union” and “Railway Karigor Parishad” (rail workshop staff union) and railway “Running staff Union” attended the rally.

The rally was presided over by Comrade Tafazzul Hussain President BJSF. Among the speakers were. Comrade. Kabir, Comrade Harun (Chittagong) comrade Zakir Hossain and comrade Abadur Rauf and comrade Abu Taher of railway workers union (both of them are the leaders of rail workers action committee against privatization).

All the speakers in the rally criticized the government and the conspiracy of the imperialist

capital and the local agents for the proposed sell out of the national resources, establishments and services. The way the government is privatizing everything in the country, the nation and its sovereignty will definitely be at a stake. The rally unanimously vowed to resist the privatization of railway, port, oil & gas, power and electricity. If necessary the working class will lay down their lives to save the country like 1971.

The rally unanimously supported the struggle of the Russian rail workers and the re-nationalization fight of the British rail workers.

In the street demonstration the workers chanted full throated slogans against the evil designs of the world Bank & IMF.

(Full report and detailed speeches of the speakers will follow).

Two photos are attached.

Tafazzul Hussain,

president of the National Federation of Workers

Germany

Declaration at the rail workers' conference in Delitzsch (August 26th 2002)

On August 26th 2002, 80 rail workers from all over Germany, members of Transnet union, and members of the social-democratic party met in a rail workers' conference in Delitzsch with the national chairman of the SPD's workers committee, Ottmar Schneivier. The colleagues convened expressed the following demands:

- ▶ no to the closure of the 8 rail workshops
- ▶ that the Delitzsch workshop as well as all the others be maintained and that no job be lost

- ▶ an end to giving up the rail networks
- ▶ that all the railway equipments and workshops hit and damaged by the floods be repaired and completely overhauled.

All the jobs must be protected politically by the social democratic federal government. To be certain that the end is achieved, rail workers need a speedy decision by the government even before the general elections. The colleagues require that the government decide immediately to maintain all the jobs and all the railway sites.

This requires that the June 26th 2001 decision to close down and an end to privatisations be repealed.

Railways are 100% state owned. Therefore, the federal government is fully responsible for training rail workers and making sure future rail workers are hired.

- ▶ Workers have rights, they have the right to fight
- ▶ Workers will join forces with their trade unions to secure their rights and will not stop using them.

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