

transportwomen

THE INTERNATIONAL UNION MAGAZINE FOR WOMEN IN TRANSPORT

Call centres
a growing challenge for
transport unions

Women at the top
But are they really
influencing the union
agenda?



2004

Transport Women 2004



Dear sisters

Welcome to Transport Women – the international union magazine for women in transport. The magazine is an occasional publication of the International Transport Workers' Federation, aimed at women activists in the industry.

Our aim is to give you a snapshot of the work of the ITF and its unions in responding to an industry which involves more women than ever before and which is changing rapidly in today's globalised economy. We look for example at the impact for women of transport companies outsourcing call centre work (pages 11-13), and at the specific issues affecting women casual workers at Kandla Port, India (pages 8-9).

Shipping is the most globalised of all the transport sectors, and on page 14 we highlight the role played by the ITF's women flag of convenience inspectors. The aviation sector too is highly internationalised – and is an industry where gender stereotyping can lead to discriminatory treatment ranging from sexist publicity to denial of women's rights. These issues are dealt with on pages 19-21.

Railway unions account for a good proportion of the ITF's 570,000 women members. The experiences of Eastern and Western Germany's railway women figure on pages 5-6. Mexico's City's first woman light train driver shares a day in her life, on page 23.

To inspire readers, we have examples of women trade unionists who have achieved change – on page 16-17 we interview the ITF's Vice-President Alicia Castro, a prominent player in Argentina's era of change. We hope to encourage transport women to have the confidence to seek and lead change (you might like to see Doro Zinke's tips for getting to the top on page 22).

We have outlined ways for readers to participate in international networking as a form of transport union solidarity (see page 7) and highlighted the example of the ITF women's network in Africa. We have also laid out some pointers for improving women's involvement and participation in transport unions (page 18).

For readers who would like to participate more in the ITF, on our back cover there is information about our annual campaign on 8 March, International Women's Day, to promote women in transport unions. Don't forget to check the ITF's website (www.itf.org.uk) for more about this, and more about women transport workers.

And finally, please email or write to us with any feedback or comment you have on this magazine or any other element of the ITF's work for women. Happy reading!

Sarah Finke and Isabel Cortés, ITF Women's Department
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Mexico's first woman light train driver

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is a federation of more than 600 transport workers' trade unions in over 135 countries, representing around five million workers. Founded in 1896, it is organised in eight industrial sections: maritime, railways, road transport, civil aviation, ports, inland navigation, fisheries and tourism services.

It represents transport workers at world level and promotes their interests through global campaigning and solidarity. The ITF is one of 10 Global Union Federations allied to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and part of the Global Unions group.

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Normal and necessary



Transport unions on the whole no longer look upon gender equality as an irrelevant or terrifying goal, but as a normal and necessary part of building the international trade union movement we need.

Diana Holland considers the progress that's been made since the ITF decided 10 years ago to tackle its negligence of women's equality

Ten years ago, the ITF held a women's conference in Geneva. It was the first time women in the ITF had got together on an international level since a one-off in the 1970s, and it was charged with resolving the ITF's negligence of gender issues. This was a big challenge, and meant the ITF had to do some catching up with the rest of the international trade union movement.

Responding to that challenge meant taking a series of important decisions about structures. We needed to change the structures to ensure we had women transport workers fairly represented in the ITF. Most of these decisions arose out of a consensus that developed between the Geneva congress in 1994, and that of Delhi in 1998.

It meant creating reserved positions – five of them – on the ITF executive board for women. It

meant having a vice-president position for a woman – our sister Alicia Castro was elected (see page 16). It meant putting a regular women's conference and an elected women's committee into our constitution. It also meant ensuring we had an ITF women's officer, Sarah Finke, and a women's department in the secretariat to support the work programmes generated by these structures.

Taking on this challenge also meant kick-starting important education projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America to train and support women in member transport unions, and to build networks. Since 2001, it has also meant that there are European women's activities, in the shape of the ITF women's committee. Today there are 406 women trade union contacts in the ITF women's network from all over the world (and we are looking for more).

Making sure gender is taken into account in all ITF education work, and implementing a 30 per cent participation target for women has been more difficult, principally in those sectors that are very male-dominated. Transport is blighted by occupational segregation – an issue we drew attention to through a survey of our women transport members published in 2000.

Campaign platforms

Complementing these structural measures with a special programme of research, information and activities about the effects of globalisation for women transport workers is the challenge that we were set by the 2002 women's conference in Vancouver, Canada. Our priority has been to reach out to unorganised women in new areas of employment, to involve women transport workers, and to extend the organising and bargaining agendas in transport unions.

Issue-based campaigning – for example against sexism in the airlines and to eliminate violence against women – has been another way to fly the flag for equality in the ITF. In 2000 the women's committee joined other Global Unions in campaigning for basic rights on 8 March, International Women's Day. These campaign days now provide women in member unions with materials, information and a ready-made platform from which to launch their own initiatives.

By creating structures, by laying down foundations through education work and network-building, and by organising successful campaigns, the ITF has built a strong gender equality framework over the last 10 years.

Equality in action

What is needed now is to put more meat on the bones of that frame, by ensuring that women's equality and gender work is integrated into the very heart of the ITF's and member unions' work – with the ITF women's committee providing leadership, co-ordination and monitoring. Globalisation, privatisation and casualisation

have a major impact on all transport workers.

But the impact on women working in transport started first, and is hitting hardest, in the jobs done mainly by women, often low paid and undervalued to start with.

Making unions stronger

We need strong unions in the face of these changes, and women's involvement is essential to making unions stronger. This means making practical decisions – for example, putting the issue of gender equality on the agenda of every key ITF meeting, setting a clear 30 per cent minimum of women's participation at ITF events and on ITF affiliates' executive boards (except where membership does not permit it). It also means ITF gender auditing: reviewing industrial strategies with ITF sections for gender impacts, and it means assessing how the ITF's work in international bodies delivers for women.

There has been a positive change in transport unions over the last 10 years. Women transport workers are central, not an afterthought; equality is becoming normal, not something to be ridiculed or feared. Reserved seats in decision-making bodies have not produced negative effects – the contrary in fact. Women have become active in unions via women transport workers' campaigns, and then continued their involvement. This has meant real benefits to unions.

And that's the real test. For the future, workers in the transport industry, both men and women, need strong, progressive and diverse organisations, ready to tackle industrial change and use the strategic role transport plays in the global economy to deliver benefits for all.

Diana Holland is Chair of the ITF Women's Committee and National Organiser for the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), Women, Race and Equalities Sector, in Great Britain.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Two senior trade unionists, from Ethiopia and Mongolia, explain their roles in union campaigning to win stronger working rights for women and men in transport



Buyanaa Shanjmyatav, Vice President, Council of Mongolian Trade Unions, Vice Chair, Federation of Mongolian Railway Workers' Trade Unions, ITF women's committee member and ITF women's representative for the railway section

Around 50 per cent of the population of Mongolia are women, and in the railways, 49 per cent of employees are women too. Trade union membership is 50:50 men and women, with women members often actively engaged.

At the Council of Mongolian Trade Unions (CMTU), women comprise the majority of shop stewards and make up 40 per cent of the executive board. True there are only two women on the management committee of nine people, but then Buyanaa herself raises the leadership statistics as vice president, working in partnership with a male president.

At its last Congress, the CMTU voted in a change to its constitution, to stipulate that at least 30 per cent of posts at the decision-making level should be filled by women. Few women in the Mongolian workforce at large are yet achieving senior positions. But Buyanaa believes hers is a society where women are already aware of their rights, free to

express their opinions and fighting where they can for equality.

"I put a lot of this down to the history of the Mongolian people," she says. "The men looked after the animals, the women ran the home, coordinating everything, working to improve their lives.

"The socialist system we had before 1999 also gave big opportunities to women. Our literacy rates are very high and women are active in politics."

Buyanaa is a graduate in law and economics from Moscow University, and a professor specialising in trade union affairs. As a Russian speaker she has a particular role in representing the interests of the many Russian people who work for Mongolian Railways.

Through her ITF women's post, she is now also coordinating the efforts of national unions worldwide to promote the interests of women railway workers. Women comprise eight per cent of ITF-affiliated railway union members. The ITF's railway women alone account for 95,452 of its 570,000 women members.

A crucial part of Buyanaa's role is to instigate ongoing research among ITF affiliates, both on common women's issues, such as discrimination, harassment and maternity, and on specialised issues relevant to particular regions or jobs within the railways.

"We need to bring women's issues into the railway sector, and take ideas from the railways to inform our women's work," she says.



Terefe Woldu, General Secretary, Transport and Communications Workers' Trade Unions Industrial Federation

DURING YOUR CAREER IN TRADE UNIONISM HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY CHANGE IN THE ATTITUDES TO WOMEN, BY THE WOMEN AND BY THE MEN?

We have been taking workshops and training to the leaders of our member unions, which they take to women members and prospective members. Before that they didn't want to join the unions, they didn't know what the union leaders would think about it. But we have changed their thinking. Today we have 10 women in leadership positions in the union.

HOW HAVE THE MEN ACCEPTED THIS?

When we are doing these seminars, we approach not only the women but also the men. If you can't change the men, you can't get real change. They have to give women the opportunities to become leaders, so they have helped us.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CURRENT CHALLENGE?

Nowadays, with privatisation and restructuring, so many workers are being dismissed from their work. We have begun taking this issue to the courts. We go to the court together with the workers to seek justice.

DO YOU FEEL YOUR GOVERNMENT IS LISTENING TO THE UNIONS?

Yes, for example with these dismissals – we had four or six companies doing this. We discussed the issue with our Prime Minister. We explained that these workers are being dismissed without doing anything wrong. He formed a committee to investigate. As a result of the investigation, the workers came back to their jobs on full salaries.

SO THERE WAS FULL COMPENSATION UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE PRIME MINISTER?

Yes. So we have a good relationship with our government nowadays and we are engaged in social dialogue, where we can have real influence. If there is a problem we discuss it. We talk in a committee made up of two workers' representatives, two employers and one government representative.

DO YOU THINK YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ITF HAS ASSISTED THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN YOUR UNIONS?

Definitely, especially through the ITF women's network (see page 7). By going to network meetings we got training in how to influence women to join our trade unions and even to become leaders. And to get to the stage where we have 10 leaders is great in our view.

DO YOU THINK THAT BY FOCUSING ON WOMEN'S ISSUES YOU CAN UNDERMINE THE OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE UNIONS?

No, we don't only think about women's issues. In our federation we serve road, rail, telecommunications, civil aviation and post office unions in many different ways. We participate in the ITF road transport and railway action days and we were at the congress of the ITF in 2002.

Interview by Eddie Dickson

STEP BY STEP TO EQUALITY

Claudia Menne reflects on the changes to working life for women rail workers in Germany a decade and a half after the fall of the Berlin Wall



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Fifteen years after the fall of the wall dividing the two Germanies and 10 years after the start of the railway reforms, women rail employees from both sides of the old divide are continuing to adapt to an ever-changing industry.

In 1989 the overriding feeling was one of joy at freedoms regained and at the removal of the division between the two halves of Germany. The extent of the economic and political challenge, which was lurking behind the walls of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), only gradually became apparent.

The “winding up of the GDR” which then took place – a concept

borrowed from the business world – clearly illustrates the fact that many people saw the reunification process as driven solely by business criteria. The question was not only which company, but which social institution was viable from an economic point of view.

In the former GDR there was a clear political commitment to upholding equal rights, in addition to an existing right to (full-time) work. These civil rights were supported, among other things, by a legal entitlement to childcare. As a result 90 per cent of women in the GDR were in paid employment, until their rights were lost after German unity.

Out in the cold

By 1993 about 700,000 women were registered as unemployed in the territory of the former GDR. One third of all the jobs in this part of Germany were eliminated within two years. In many cases businesses were shut down overnight and people found themselves out on the streets.

Railway reforms began in 1994 to prepare the ground for unifying and subsequently privatising the two railway networks.

But even before the unification of the Reichsbahn (east) and Deutscher Bahn (west) was complete, there were massive job cuts, particularly in the East German company.

Women in the Reichsbahn were hit disproportionately hard. In the new unified company DB AG, the East German women (who had represented 47 per cent of Reichsbahn employees) accounted for 26.4 of the total unified workforce. The West German women, who represented around seven per cent of the Bundesbahn workforce, still accounted for 6.9 per cent at DB AG.

The majority of the surplus women (who were “parked” in an internal employment company) came from the administrative divisions, followed by ticket and seat vendors and conductors. The issue of qualifications was of no great importance in this radical

downsizing phase. Women with good to very good professional qualifications and the corresponding school certificates were hit just as hard as the women with no formal school-leaving certificate.

The reduction in the women's share in employment went hand in hand with massive closures of childcare establishments. In the Reichsbahn alone the number of childcare centres was reduced from 114 to 26 in the year 1993. Most of these establishments were closed, a few were transferred to local authority administration.

There is no other way to describe it: women were forced out of the labour market. Many opted for existing compensation schemes. In the Halle district for example, 3,089 women out of a total of 5,126 employees took up the offer of compensation from the company.

Blatant discrimination

Discrimination cases began to hit the headlines. The East German Reichsbahn put forward threadbare arguments to persuade the conductresses to opt out of night shifts voluntarily. Jobs such as coupling and shunting were suddenly classified as detrimental to women's health.

These cases were publicly criticised by the unions at the time and the company was challenged to stop such abuses.

The social changes in Germany are described as a "dual transformation". This is meant to indicate that unification has not entailed a simple adaptation by East Germany to West German conditions. Serious structural changes have also taken place in the Federal Republic and must be taken into account.

These intertwined processes of conversion have developed a dynamic of their own. In the old West Germany the model of the male family breadwinner and the female family preserver continues to dominate, both politically and

institutionally, but is gradually being eroded.

In East Germany a previously existing system of compatibility between a woman's roles at home and at work can no longer be maintained. The trend is far more towards increasing uncertainty in women's employment and the exclusive allocation of family work to women.

Present challenges

In the period from 1994 to the end of 1998 the workforce was reduced by a further 44.4 per cent. However these staff cuts affected the women's share slightly less, at just 39 per cent.

After 10 years of restructuring, involving phases of merging and privatisation of the two former state-run railways, the proportion of women in the industry has stabilised at 15 per cent.

The pressure from the employees' in-house representatives and the union (Transnet), is and continues to be enormous. So far the

workforce has been halved, with no compulsory redundancies. The main consideration among the staff representatives has hitherto understandably been to safeguard the remaining work.

Increasingly however, they are turning their attention to the fundamental changes that are underway in the company's employment structure. Development is moving away from the technical and industrial aspects towards the service and service-oriented sectors.

At the same time the demands on employees for mobility and flexibility – workplace transfers from east to west, changes in working hours or in the field of work – have also increased. And the industry is transforming to reflect the growth of logistics and the service sector.

It is not yet sufficiently clear how these trends are being affected by the presence of East German women in an employment market that is both characteristically

western and dominated by men. This is to be the subject of a future study by the Humboldt University in Berlin, with the support of Transnet.

What does seem clear however, is that an active industry policy is required to put the professional integration of men and women at the heart of the collective negotiations, to safeguard their livelihoods and their equal rights.

Claudia Menne is the International Secretary of Transnet union, in Germany.

Transnet and women

Of this German rail and transport union's 201,241 members, 40,249 are women (20 per cent). In 2002 the union recruited 1,900 women into membership.

One of the union's nine-member executive is a woman. Ten women and 136 men hold national positions of responsibility at national level.

In all the Transnet workplaces, there are 8,000 shop stewards and 3,500 works councillors; a total of 1,761 of these are women in both categories (women shop stewards are 880, works councillors number 881). The employers have appointed equality representatives in all group companies; they are company employees, not union representatives.

In accordance with the union's constitution, women are represented on negotiating teams to reflect their proportion of the membership. In addition, women have to be represented on all union bodies and committees to reflect their proportion of membership – making up at least 20 per cent of members.

At most international meetings the secretary of the international department, Claudia Menne, represents Transnet.

Transnet invites both women and men equally to participate in its activities. On International Women's Day, some regional women's steering groups organise their own activities, and some organise joint activities with the national centre (DGB) – men are also among the participants.

In 2002, 340 women members participated in seven national women's seminars, and 15 further seminars were organised for regional women's steering groups. Regional women's steering groups routinely organise their own seminars on a regional level.

Plug in to the network

Becoming part of an international network of activists could create a dynamic framework for women's campaigning in your union



The ITF women's network is open to any affiliated union member with an interest in women's issues. Membership of the network guarantees you regular updates on women's developments in the global movement, access to resource materials, solidarity and support for your campaigning work and a global listing of contacts.

Perhaps you are the women's officer for your union, or an activist with a particular interest in women's issues. You may be someone with communication skills, access to a computer and established working connections with the ITF. If so, why not put yourself forward for nomination? Should your union already have a contact person, there is nothing to stop you from joining the network in an informal capacity.

The network, currently numbering over 600 trade unionists worldwide, relies on its contact people to provide the link between women union members and the ITF. Contact people distribute (and request from the ITF) materials, help and advice. They communicate on women's issues with the ITF and other transport unions in their country, and work with sympathetic

organisations and women's groups on common issues.

Materials from the network can help them plan essential tasks and activities, use communication tools and gain publicity for their work.

Key to the operation of the network are its sub-regional groupings (see box right), supported by ITF education programmes. These allow members to work more closely with contacts in their own and neighbouring countries.

In some countries, contact people for the women's network have formed ITF women's groups at country level, which can input into ITF activities and form a unified voice.

Our vision for the ITF women's network in the future is that it will develop as a strong group of women activists in ITF unions, communicating fast and efficiently by email. In future we will be developing ITF newsgroups, which give ITF women access to specialised information and bulletin boards, on the website. A key target for the end of 2004 is to have a contact person established in every ITF-affiliated union.

Networking for change in Africa

Women trade unionists in Africa have made concrete gains in their levels of participation, communication and status within their unions, after five years of working together through sub-regional networks.

The networks began as the central plank of a women's education project funded by the ITF and Dutch trade union confederation FNV, which is progressing at different stages of development in all regions of the world. In Africa, where the programme is at its most advanced stage, women have reported enormous success in meeting the agreed objectives of better participation in their unions, enhanced status and recognition of women in their unions, and progress in organising women members.

Each participating union has a network contact person whose role is to keep in touch with contacts at country and international level, as well as with the ITF. As a result, participating women at all levels have gained in their self-confidence as trade unionists, gained better recognition of women's issues and developed solidarity with other unions.

Many have also developed an international perspective to their campaigning, through education on the work of the ITF and participation in ITF women's campaigning, which is centred around International Women's Day on 8 March each year.

Of course problems continue. Resources are scarce, there are many obstacles to communication (financial, political and technical), and key women in some of the unions have been lost due to retrenchments, sickness, and even death, due to HIV/AIDS.

However reports from the networks show that women are now taking leading roles in their unions and that the participation of women in union activities has increased since the start of the project. Women's structures have been established at union and country level throughout the three sub-regions participating in the project. Without the support of the education project, unions say, this level of achievement would not have been possible.

Women's network, getting started:-

1. Hold workplace (or other) meetings with women in your industry in order to gauge their priorities for representation.
2. Ask your union leadership for support for these priorities.
3. Ask the ITF for materials that could help you – such as the ITF women's education resource book (*Women transporting the world*), other ITF manuals, journals and reports.
4. Contact women in other transport unions (perhaps via the ITF or your own national networks).
5. Subscribe to the bulletin *Network News* – and contribute to it!

To contact the ITF women's department, email: women@if.org.uk, tel +44 20 7403 2733, or check the ITF website at www.itf.org.uk



A living wage?

For 1,500 women working at Kandla Port in India, casual labour brings food, shelter and a precious income. Most keep away from trade unions and have no wish to challenge their exploitative conditions, as D.V. Maheshwari discovers

The central government-controlled west coast port of Kandla is an exception among India's 11 major ports, in that dry cargoes of all types are handled here by both men and women workers.

Visit it any time, day or night, and you will find traditionally dressed women rubbing shoulders with their male counterparts on the port's multipurpose dry cargo berths.

No one knows exactly how women came to enter what in India is generally a men-only line of work. But, suggests

octogenarian Thavarbhai Dheda who worked at the port for 40 years, the jobs may have evolved from construction work when the port was being built.

"After the partition of India, Harijan (the lower, oppressed Hindu caste) families migrated from Pakistan to India and settled here. Starting as construction workers, mainly to carry big stones on their heads, the women workers later became port workers when the port was completed. As a labour contractor I myself engaged them to carry stones and bulk cargo in baskets," he recollects.

These and local Muslim women were later joined by women workers from other states in India. In 1974 the government launched a shore workers' employment scheme putting port workers into three categories. A category workers were on regular employment getting all the benefits of permanent employees including retirement benefits. B and C categories were respectively given minimum benefits for 21 days' work, and casual engagement whenever there was work.

After liberalisation in the early

nineties, which gave way to privatisation, Kandla was the first Indian port to allow the use of private labour by stevedores, and soon gained a bumper crop of purely casual workers, totally unprotected by law.

Today there are 1,500 daily-employed casual workers at Kandla, a third of whom are women. They work longer hours than the port's 150 regular women port workers (who represent a third of the regular workforce of 450) but their earnings and benefits do not approach those of their regular counterparts, even though they

are legally entitled to the same rates.

The port's regularly employed woman worker gets 233 rupees (US\$5.12) per day for eight hours' work with weekly time off. The privately employed woman worker gets only 100 rupees (US\$2.19) for up to 16 hours work, with night shifts and no weekly time off. And it appears that some women are getting less than the state minimum of Rs99.60 (US\$2.18) for loading and Rs 124.60 (US\$2.73) for unloading per eight hour shift, which is required by law.

Grateful for too little

Elderly women workers Savitaben and Geetaben are more than willing to travel in to the port from their homes far away outside Kachch district to earn what are relatively very low wages. "We get Rs 50 (US\$1.09) per eight hours shift," they report, while handling bulk cargo on one of the dry cargo berths of the port. "Our work, which involves both cleaning the wharf and handling light cargo, is not difficult. This is the second year we have been here – what we get here is more than we used to get at home with much difficulty. We have no problem of any kind."

"They may be happy with their wages because of their poverty but what they are getting is much less than they are entitled to," says Meghajibhai Maheshwari, vice president of the Port Workers' Union. "This is a central government port and legally they should get wages not less than their regular counterparts."

Such rules are not commonly implemented. While port workers are governed by their five-yearly wage revision settlement and conditions of service agreement, these agreements are not extended to casual workers. According to the Kandla Port Trust, port minimums are not applicable to the casual women workers, who undertake only light work.

"Women casual workers nowadays mainly do cleaning work on the wharf to clear them of leftovers of mainly food grain cargo and wood," says Port Trust chairman, A.K. Joti. He points to the central government's labour department which, he says, is meant to look after the interests of labourers. But according to the assistant labour commissioner, S. Sinha, it is not the responsibility of the labour office to set a suitable minimum wage.

The main port union at Kandla — the ITF-affiliated Port Workers' Union – and the All India Port and Dock Workers' Federation have struggled without success to organise the casual women workers and meantime, they say, there is little they can do for them as non-members.

They believe the women are discouraged from joining recognised unions for fear of losing their jobs, along with the residential facilities provided by their labour contractors. As migratory labourers from states as far flung as Rajasthan, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu they have no homes of their own near the port. The contractors who employ them give them land to build temporary shanty houses to live in.

Union leaders say they have not lost sight of the women who are being exploited in their presence. They are still searching for a way to reach out to a group of workers that appears not to qualify for any form of protection. Casual work at Kandla has helped these women to alleviate their poverty to some degree. But employers, authorities and unions alike should be doing more to help them.

D.V. Maheshwari is a freelance journalist who writes regularly on issues related to Kandla Port

My agenda



Seema Mohan, 28, is a junior clerk in the chief mechanical engineers department at Kandla Port on the west coast of India. A union member since her first day in the job, five years ago, she was recently elected vice chairperson of the women's committee of the All India Port and Dock Workers' Federation.

How have you come so far in five years?

I took the initiative to become union literate quickly, but I was very much helped by our general secretary, who promoted women and gave us a free hand in developing our activities and representing our issues to management. We then got exposure through ITF education activities, which prompted our union and the national federation to establish women's structures.

How do you get women actively participating in union work?

Once I overcame my initial hesitation and fear, and realised the strength of collective action, I found we could march into the cabin of any head of department, or even the port chairman, to represent our problem or grievance. Motivating women to take part in an event, whether it is an education activity, a seminar, a local function, a May Day rally, or anything – helps increase their active participation and interest. And of course, union backing is important.

Apart from negotiating individual grievances and problems we have now got proper toilet facilities and rest rooms for women set up in the docks and we are talking to management about the issue of a children's crèche.

Would you say you face no problems in your union work?

No. Port unions in India are very male-dominated set-ups. A typical evening in our union office would be crowded with male members. But we are respected, kept updated and our opinions are also sought. There are individuals in the union, even some office bearers, who want things to be routed "through the proper channels" and don't like us doing things on our own. But I just take it in my stride.

How does your family view your union work?

My husband is quite supportive, and doesn't even mind my travelling. He just asks one thing: "Do whatever you want during the working day, but don't bring the union home."

What then are the challenges for the future?

We now have a local women's committee of 12 members. We meet quite often informally, but the committee needs to function in a more structured manner. We need to develop collective discussion and decision making. The union should also consider giving us representation at office bearer level, which would give a moral boost to the women.

What about the 1,500 casual women workers employed in your port?

They are mostly migrant workers from the states of Rajasthan and Orissa. They go home during the agricultural season. They come back for the rest of the year but then they may work in the port or on construction sites, doing road building work and so on. The private contractors are not bothered, the port management doesn't care and frankly the union has not yet been able to do anything about them.

Interview by Sangam Tripathy

New women's jobs must be unionised

Globalisation has disadvantaged women worldwide, and affected women transport workers in particular ways. There have been job losses in transport, due to downsizing and restructuring. Women lose out because their jobs are often the first to go, and because in some sectors new private companies have failed to apply equal opportunities. In other sectors, the boom in non-permanent work resulting from deregulation has put transport unions two steps back on the path to decent work for women. One example is that of the 1,500 women working in exploitative conditions in Kandla Port, India (see page 8).

However at the same time, globalisation could not survive without cheaper and faster transport. New areas of transport employment are developing – such as call centres. Following ground-breaking debates at the ITF's women's conference in Vancouver in 2002, the ITF is working to ensure that new jobs for women in these areas are unionised jobs.

Since that conference, the women's committee has launched a research initiative to identify the direct impact of globalisation on women transport workers, with the aim of developing campaign and tools – including education materials – to help unions deal with these trends. The research is ongoing and results will be reported to the ITF's congress in Durban in 2006.

Is the customer always right?

An analysis of the work experiences of customer services staff in the transport and communication industries in Spain suggests a social awareness campaign may be needed to generate more respect for women workers in these sectors.

The study finds that the “typically female” qualities often sought by customer service employers are being exploited by the public. At the same time, rising standards of education and skills in the sector are going largely unrecognised.

Carried out for *Federación de Comunicación y Transporte*, part of Spain's trade union centre CCOO, the analysis was based on a series of group discussions with airline cabin crews, baggage check-in staff, cruise ship and railway attendants, rail ticketing staff and telemarketing operators.

It focuses on the experiences of women employed in a sector booming from the effects of the rapid expansion and globalisation of the transport industry. As transport becomes more cheaply available and transport companies multiply to meet demand, customer service operations have become seen as key functions for generating customer loyalty. Meanwhile advances in computer technology have transformed the nature of many customer service roles, such as ticketing, telesales and check-in.

However the women interviewed felt that, while their jobs now demand higher qualifications and skill levels, their social status continues to be relatively low.

In an increasingly competitive environment, the now sacrosanct corporate ethic that the “client is always right” appears to have combined with stereotypical images of women working in these fields, to help perpetuate expectations of subservience among some sectors of the public.

Some of the women felt that the personal qualities demanded of them, such as patience, a friendly personality, and a “way with people” were underrated because of the widespread assumption that these are intrinsic to their gender. Others complained that by wearing often impractical, mildly suggestive uniforms, including short skirts and high heels while “serving” customers, they could be seen as sexual objects working to please men.

Customer service employees such as airline cabin crew and check-in staff commented that this image helps to heighten their feeling of vulnerability to verbal and physical abuse from clients. Meanwhile women working mostly on the telephone or behind a window counter said they felt depersonalised. “They think we are machines, that we don't have any feelings,” said one participant in the study.

Despite these problems, and the high levels of stress associated with long, rotating or unsociable shifts, incessant problem-solving tasks and interaction with irate clients – women reported fairly high levels of job satisfaction, largely related to having coped with the challenges.

Zambian rail sell-off penalises women

In Zambia, 100,000 jobs have been lost as a result of the privatisation programme being carried out on the orders of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The average Zambian household now spends 80 per cent of its income just on food, and Zambian unions are part of a wide coalition protesting at the country's deepening poverty. In February 2004, thousands of workers participated in a mass stay-away and went on demonstrations, dressed in black.

Following the privatisation in November 2003, all the women station guards and train escorts have been retrenched. According to the Railway Workers' Union of Zambia, the new private security company reportedly does not accept that women can do the job.

The railway nursing service has been hived off to a private agency. The nurses are now hired in groups of under 25, which is the minimum number for a bargaining unit under Zambian employment law. The nurses realise they have lost their bargaining rights and fear for their security of employment and wage levels.

Meanwhile, the cleaners have been taken over by “briefcase businessmen”, as they are known in Zambia – operators who are notorious for disregarding labour law and paying poor wages. They are employing the cleaners on a hire-and-fire basis, keeping them under the threat of no job tomorrow. This means the cleaners have now joined the ranks of the vast “informal” workforce in Zambia. Yet they are still working for the railways.

“The labour movement is under threat especially in Africa, where there is a large number of the workforce now migrating into the informal sector,” said Gertrude Bwalya of the Railway Workers' Union of Zambia. “There is a need to organise the informal sector if we are to sustain the labour movement.”



Calling out for a union

Call centres provide apparently attractive, high-tech employment for growing numbers of workers, particularly women. But the high labour turnover tells another story – and presents an organising challenge to unions, as Celia Mather reports

The figures speak for themselves. It is estimated that three per cent of the US working population is now located in call centres. In Europe it is about 1.3 per cent. In Australia, call centres employ about 350,000 workers. In these countries the number of call centre jobs has been rising by 20 to 25 per cent a year.

Call centre work is growing even faster in certain developing countries, as large volumes of work are outsourced from the industrialised countries. English-language work is going to India and South Africa, French-language to North Africa, Spanish to Central America, and German to Eastern Europe. But call centres in many places are increasingly also offering multilingual capacity. Ever improving global communications technology is allowing customer services to become the latest function to “run away” as did labour-intensive manufacturing before it.

The range of services offered is wide. I live in the UK but if I want to know how much is in my bank account I am now put through to someone in Hyderabad, India. Recently I needed the telephone number of a company down the hill from my house and found myself speaking to Johannesburg, South Africa.

Call centre work is growing even faster in certain developing countries, as large volumes of work are outsourced from the industrialised countries.

By locating call centres in areas of high unemployment or in countries with lower average incomes, companies can make huge savings on labour costs. In India some estimate that the total call centre labour force may grow to over a million by 2008. Here, skilled, educated, English-speaking workers are in plentiful supply. They can be paid less than 15 per cent of the comparative wage in the UK and made to work an extra six hours a week.

In most countries, women provide the majority of the labour force in call centres, generally 50 to 70 per cent, and they are mostly under the age of 30. However, the proportion of women varies with the service offered. Call centres that focus on communicating directly with the public largely recruit women. Those servicing customers with computer software support employ a majority of men.

Women may be attracted to the flexible shift systems and part-time work offered by many call centres, hoping this will fit with their childcare needs. However, research in the UK shows that many call centre employers change working rosters with little notice and very few run a crèche.

Transport industry trends

American Airlines and British Airways were among the first to outsource back office administration and ticketing to lower cost countries, in the late 1980s.

In the latest phase, privatised railway industries are outsourcing ticketing and information services. The French SNCF railways central reservation system is now handled in Morocco by Cegetel, a company in the Vivendi group. In February 2004, there were rumours that the travel information service for the London Underground would be moving to India, with the loss of 80 jobs in a London call centre that handles 7,000-10,000 calls a day. The news followed hard on the heels of the planned outsourcing, also to India, of the UK national rail enquiries service.

However, much more than ticketing and information services is being relocated. Services outsourced by many companies to sub-contractors range from payroll accounting, data-entry, and billing, to document processing and software programming. The gross figures for call centre employees tend to include workers in these functions too.

Not all work is outsourced to sub-contractors. Sometimes work is restructured and relocated to centres that remain part of the company.

The German airline Lufthansa has its own call centre subsidiary Global TeleSales, with call centres in eight countries set up to handle its bookings and ticketing as well as those for the other airlines in the Star Alliance.

In the maritime industry, P&O Ferries in Europe has closed its regional call centres and centralised into two, one at Europoort in the Netherlands, and one in Dover, UK where 800 work.

Web-Enabled Call Centres (WECCs) which combine website, voice and text communications will be the next phase, suggesting yet more upheaval for jobs in the sector.

Human computers

So what is it like to work in a call centre? In 2001, the UK national union centre, the TUC, was deluged with phone calls when it set up a hotline to survey working conditions in the country's call centres. Complaints focused on bullying, long working hours, impossible sales targets and general job dissatisfaction. One British woman told researchers, "It's a bit like a nineties factory job. Eighty per cent of it is very routine... You've got call after call... it can start to feel like you're a bit of a human computer."

Call centres have been called the "factories of the new economy", and they vary about as much as manufacturing factories do. Some are very large with 2,000 staff; others may have just five, and there is a wide range in between.

The typical open-plan office environment may appeal to young people. But in reality there is little time to talk to one another. Working mostly in isolation, call centre staff are given only a narrow range of tasks. Meanwhile, software is used to monitor them throughout the day. Alarms may be triggered by calls that take over two minutes, by low sales rates, or even by breaks of over six seconds between answering calls. Workers say this focus on the timing of calls rather than the quality of the service is stressful and demotivating. Add to this the eye-strain and back problems from being at computers all day and the desire "just to get off the phones" becomes overwhelming.

Worse than this, unions have received many reports of oppressive management regimes. Some managers demand that staff ask permission to go to the toilet and they record the time spent. One heavily pregnant worker employed by Stellar Call Centres in Australia was docked \$100 for toilet breaks she had taken over a two-month period. Diana

Ivanosvski, whose union CPSU backed her claim for reimbursement and a written apology, said, “You talk constantly on the phone and your voice dries up and in my condition you also drink because the baby needs water. But I felt that I couldn’t drink at work because I would have to go to the toilet.” Stellar later apologised for Ms Ivanosvski’s treatment.

As for career progression, there are plenty of women team leaders and supervisors in the industry. But there is virtually nowhere to go above this level. Call centres are no longer integrated into the rest of the company, and so workers with ambition must seek retraining and promotion elsewhere.

Not surprisingly, labour turnover in call centres is high. In both the UK and India it runs at about 25 to 35 per cent per annum, but it can be as high as 50 to 60 per cent in particular centres. So many staff leave the Global TeleSales centre in Cape Town that the company has to hold a recruitment drive every second month, looking for 40 to 50 new German speaking South Africans each year. Each one must then receive several weeks’ training.

The companies are clearly engaged in a juggling act between squeezing out very high productivity on the one hand, and losing out on labour turnover and training on the other. There is evidence that this is giving staff some bargaining opportunities, for example where scarce skills such as foreign language competence is involved. Pay may be rising in India, where employers often also provide free meals and transport so as to ensure sufficient staff at night to cover the US day-time hours, and to encourage young women to work at night. Also, 70 to 90 per cent of call centre workers are on permanent work contracts as a way of trying to stem labour turnover.

Union challenges

Customer service staff in the railways, bus companies, airlines and cruise lines have traditionally been seen as part of the transport industry, and organised within transport unions to a greater or lesser extent. However, outsourcing and relocation to call centres implies a loss of these workers to the industry and the unions unless unions take active steps.

In Australia, the unions under the national federation ACTU have been very active in call centres. The ITF-affiliated Australian Services Union has been fighting a long, unresolved legal struggle to get the Global Telesales (Lufthansa) centre there recognised as part of the overseas airline industry rather than – as

the company wants – part of the “contract call centre” industry with lower pay and conditions. However, in February 2003 the union did achieve a big wage victory for the 60 staff in the centre, including the casual workers.

A major organising challenge is the ever-shifting nature of the workforce. The individual workers often only work in a particular call centre for a while before moving on. Once recruited, they are then lost again. Those who are hired through temporary employment agencies present a different challenge, as their employment status is less clear for union organising and bargaining purposes.

But also, in this highly competitive subcontracting market, contracts shift. In the UK, the TSSA union worked hard for four years to organise a call centre that was handling part of the country’s national rail enquiries service. The employer Serco signed a recognition deal with the TSSA in 2003. However, by early 2004 Serco had lost the contract to BT Ventura, whose call centre is in the north of England. So the organising work must start again in a new location. Ventura also has a call centre in Bangalore, India, where a pilot programme has already begun. No-one can foretell how much of the work will stay in the UK.

Another impact of the growth of call centres is that it is changing the gender balance within the unions. Customer services employment of women is growing while many jobs traditionally done by men are being cut back. Unions that go on organising drives in call centres gain many women members. Then they find their bargaining agenda shifts, for example having to focus on demands for

family-friendly working time to an extent that they did not before.

Then there is the location of call centres. They are often in new high-tech industry areas where the unions have to start anew. In India, many call centre staff see themselves as high-tech professionals rather than workers and prefer to join professional associations. Collaboration between these associations in India and unions in Europe has begun.

As well as the need for strong local organising, the restructuring certainly implies new areas for international solidarity. One could imagine, for example, joint action by the call centres within one company such as Global TeleSales in order to win similar high standards for all.

Also implied is greater collaboration between unions in different sectors. In many countries, the unions organising in call centres are those from the finance, clerical and communications industries. So coalitions between sector-based unions to run joint activities on call centres should be fruitful. This is happening at a national level, for example in Australia and the UK. And at the international level, the ITF has agreed to work more closely with UNI, the Global Union Federation for unions in finance, clerical, postal and telecommunications industries.

Celia Mather is currently researching the impact of globalisation on women transport workers for the ITF women’s department.

Winning members by meeting their needs

In early 2003, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) successfully achieved an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with the TLine, the company that runs the Spirit of Tasmania passenger ferries, to cover its call centre staff in Tasmania. In the centre, there are about 180 workers, 80 per cent of whom are women. Now 95 of the workers are union members, of whom 98 per cent are women.

Union membership increased as a result of campaigning for the agreement. The MUA found that the main demands of the TLine workers were structured and transparent management practices, good working conditions, and some flexibility. The MUA encouraged the workers to express their needs in terms of a family life-work balance. The EBA includes parental and carers’ leave, as well as paid union training leave. Now the MUA is trying to recruit the five women staff in the TLine call centre in Sydney too.

At present, the MUA Women’s Committee “meets” with the TLine reps via phone hook-ups. But as a result of the organising campaign, women’s participation in union training in the MUA’s Tasmania branch has risen, and the first ever call centre representative attended the MUA’s national women’s conference in March 2004. Contact: Sue Virago, svirago@mua.org.au

Walking the plank

A GLANCE AT THE GROWING RANKS OF WOMEN ITF INSPECTORS

BY YASMIN PRABHUDAS



Women now make up nine of the ITF's team of 130 inspectors, who visit flag of convenience vessels at ports all over the world to defend the interests of seafarers. As recently as 1999, women numbered only four. Established in 1971 as part of a move to intensify the ITF's campaign against flags of convenience, the inspectorate exists to protect seafarers from exploitation and improve the frequently sub-standard working conditions found on FOC ships.

Inspectors provide advice for seafarers on FOC vessels. They negotiate with shipowners, coordinate industrial action and work with lawyers. Most have a background in seafaring or dock work, and are chosen from candidates put forward by ITF-affiliated maritime trade unions. Shipping is probably the most male-dominated sector of transport, with women making up less than two per cent of the

workforce. However an increasing number are beginning to enter careers at sea or in docks and becoming involved in trade unions. Keeping pace with this trend, the ranks of women inspectors are also likely to keep growing.

Women inspectors are not employed to represent women seafarers in particular (though women seafarers do sometimes welcome the chance to talk through a problem like sexual harassment or discrimination with a woman). They are part of a worldwide team of trade unionists, encountering the same kinds of challenges and rewards as their male counterparts, as well as some different ones.

In 2003 women delegates at the ITF's worldwide inspectors' seminar in Cyprus, submitted a statement urging colleagues to focus on anti-discrimination measures when it comes to

employing women inspectors. They also instigated an informal women inspectors' network to share information through email contact.

WOMEN INSPECTORS' TALES



No typical days

Becoming an inspector was a natural transition for me. I have spent the whole of my working

life in the trade union movement, starting at the New Zealand Seafarers' Union in 1971 at the age of 15.

I coordinate the New Zealand campaign as well as act as inspector and because I have been in the industry and union for over three decades, I have the full support, respect and co-operation of all my inspectors and the people I meet with daily. There is no such thing as a typical day for ITF inspectors – what could be considered a simple task can quite often turn into a nightmare that can stretch over days. I always check the shipping movements in the major ports in New Zealand and identify any ships that require attention and then coordinate inspections from the team of volunteers.

I check national and international news releases for any issues that may require a press statement or where lobbying politicians or unions might be necessary. I maintain relationships with all the support groups such as affiliated unions, missions and agents through regular emails and post outs of material and information. And I attend meetings to promote ITF activities.

Solidarity among women in the maritime industry – particularly the seagoing sector is important because of their isolation, confinement and minority numbers. Women have specific issues and needs which should be identified and catered for, so women can choose a career at sea without prejudice or barriers.

Kathy Whelan, New Zealand



Growing in strength

It was delightful to have seven of the ITF women inspectors at the seminar in Cyprus last year. We got to

know each other a little bit better and shared stories about who we were and how we came to be in this group, and how we felt about it.

We drafted a brief statement and delivered it to the inspectorate body. It was very well received. The guys applauded and applauded when we stood and identified ourselves as the women of the ITF inspectorate; they appeared to be pleased to have us there.

Some of the guys might have been imagining that all the women in the room were office staff, somebody's squeeze, a secretary, or a wife. It might be helpful to dispel that notion and get them to realise that there are capable women out doing inspectors' work.

Having a forum to share our stories of difficulties and successes will enable us to figure things out and be more confident in our work. It was truly wonderful to realise women are growing in numbers in the inspectorate.

Lila Smith, US



Being a woman sometimes helps

I was appointed as an ITF assistant co-ordinator in January 2003. When I was 17

years old I started to work for the Dutch Seafarers' Union (FWZ) as a junior clerk. Then I became an assistant secretary for the board of the FWZ, as well as an assistant to the ITF inspectorate in 1995.

Sometimes being a woman can be an advantage. Last summer, for example, my colleague and I boarded a vessel in the evening. My colleague had been on board the whole day and the captain was very uncooperative. My colleague asked me to come along with him that evening and the captain was a completely different person. I think that if they see a woman

they sometimes change their attitude and behaviour. Crew members who have family problems and as a result of negotiations are repatriated are more thankful – they think that women can press the right buttons in the company when it comes to human rights.

Debbie Klein, Netherlands



Humour and mutual support

I've been an ITF inspector since January 1, 2001. I met the Swedish

inspectors at various union meetings and I was fascinated by the stories they told. I asked a lot of questions and got to visit some vessels with them. When my predecessor retired, I was offered the job. I never hesitated for a second.

There are many challenges in this job. It's very varied and that's what I love about it. In my short time as an inspector I've met seafarers in

circumstances that most Swedish employees could never imagine.

I've been in situations that I'm sure my male colleagues haven't. Like being asked for a kiss before signing an agreement, or a marriage proposal (two actually), things like that. But I can usually rely on my sense of humour or just thank them for the compliment, so that I can get the conversation back on track. I don't mind as long as it's friendly and so far it has been.

Solidarity is important every step of the way and when it comes to my fellow female inspectors I think it's essential. Today I know I can turn to them to get advice, feedback, support or just to have a chat. I look forward to the day when female inspectors are as common as male inspectors.

Annica Barning, Sweden

Yasmin Prabhudas is editor of the ITF online news service, based in London.

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For a full list of inspectors please contact the ITF (see back page).

[Calling women seafarers]

If you work at sea and are interested in sharing your experiences, the ITF would like to hear from you

Women at sea face many challenges. Sometimes, the male-dominated nature of the workplace creates problems for women. It can be hard for qualified women coming out of maritime academies to find jobs. Women can feel discriminated against in the workplace.

The fact that a ship at sea is an isolated place can at times be difficult for women seafarers. If conflict develops, women often have to resolve it themselves, because qualified support is not immediately at hand. Neither can they go home to a supportive environment at the end of a working day. Long periods away from family are hard to bear for men and women alike.

At the same time, maritime jobs can be good jobs. In many parts of the world, jobs on merchant vessels are well-paid jobs. Women can do these jobs as well as men – a fact that has been recognised by maritime academies in several countries.

It may be that the sea is a difficult place for women to work – but if that is the case, it is a difficult place for men too. By improving the situation for women, we also improve it for men.

There are more women working on board cruise and ferry vessels than in the rest of the world's merchant fleet – but these are not easy jobs either. Shift work, stress and distance from home take their toll. Women may not have access to the health services needed to deal with women's issues. Employment often is on the basis of renewable contracts, as opposed to continuous employment. As a result women seafarers are often unable to complete their contract if they become pregnant, which could result in them not being rehired after giving birth. The cruise and ferry industry will most likely continue to increase the employment of women seafarers, and the better companies can be approached to examine and implement good practice examples.

To progress these issues, and look at how unions can support women seafarers, the ITF is looking to develop better contact with women working at sea and would like to hear from any women employed on cargo ships, cruise ships, ferries, fishing vessels, tugs or other maritime craft.

So if you, or someone you know, is interested in joining an ITF women seafarers' network, please email the ITF Women's Officer at women@itf.org.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you.

What I must do

Alicia Castro is a prominent member of the Argentine parliament and one of only two women in Argentina to have achieved the highest office in a national trade union. Claudia Alcuña discovers the driving forces behind the career of a tireless campaigner against male-domination of the aviation sector in her country



What helped you gain a foothold in a world so inaccessible to women?

I had the good fortune to come from a family of independent women. My mother got divorced when I was two years old, and my grandmother was already divorced, which in those days was regarded as a major transgression. As well as that, I had aunts who were feminists, with whom I spent a lot of time – three women who lived alone in San Telmo (the oldest neighbourhood in Buenos Aires). There weren't any sons or nephews, and they really cared about me. They were also women who talked to me a great deal about other women: singers, politicians, poets. I owe a big debt of gratitude to that family environment, because it was decisive for me.

What interests did you have growing up?

From the age of 12, and until I was 18, I was a member of the Argentinean Guides, who are like the girl scouts. I was the team leader. We did social work, and like almost all young people at the time we wanted to change the world and fight against injustice. Every weekend we went to the "Villa 31", one of the poorest districts of the city, to do some hard work.

How did you get into trade unionism?

Discrimination against women

led me to a life in the movement. In 1982, when I started as a trade union militant, after the last dictatorship, it was precisely because I rebelled against discrimination. In Argentina, women could not be pursers or cabin crew chiefs. They could only be auxiliary staff or attendants. I had been flying since 1970, I was a flight instructor on jumbo jets, and although I had to train men, I was always under their command on board.

This prompted me to organise a group of women within our union (Asociación Argentina de Aeronavegantes – AAA). In the beginning there were only 13 of us to take on the world. The then general secretary was organising meetings and mobilisations, favouring an extreme environment of machismo in which men pressed to maintain the old status quo. But we won the struggle against that injustice – now women can be chief pursers – which prompted us to work within the union on other matters, too.

How did you combine your work with starting a family?

My daughter Miranda was born in 1987, so as a baby she went on a lot of union campaigns. My friends can remember that I fed her on "breast and pizza" because we didn't have time to prepare baby food. She was with me through those years of

struggle, and I believe that is the best way to understand what was going on.

When I was re-elected in 1994 to the head of the union, I can remember that I arrived home early in the morning and woke her up. I said: "We've won," and Miranda said: "Fine, mummy. More women bosses in the world."

What have been the biggest challenges in your career?

It was very difficult to lead the union – moving from the first stage of organising women for the fight against discrimination, then to go on to the battle for professionalisation, right in the middle of a really precarious time for labour in Argentina. I came to the leadership just at the time when labour rights were being done away with and salaries were being cut as a result of deregulation and privatisation. We had to think on our feet to confront a kind of crisis that had never been encountered before.

When I first took control, we had six per cent unemployment nationwide, and during my tenure it went up to 20 per cent. It is very difficult to organise workers under those conditions, but even so, we made it. And I do believe that if it had been otherwise, then we would now be faced with a totally Macdonaldised profession, involving an army of

girls with perfect bodies, with temporary contracts and completely replaceable, which is what happened in many parts of the world.

Those were years of very hard work, when there weren't any faxes in Argentina, when we sweated blood to do everything. We not only had to re-establish the union in this complex world of work, but also work together with the big transport unions, something even my own companions resisted.

They asked, "What is Alicia doing in with the truck drivers?" I hope they understand what we were doing with them, after the great mobilisations, which ended with the rescuing of our airline Aerolíneas Argentinas from bankruptcy.

Big demonstrations, supported by all industrial sectors, were responsible for avoiding the closure of the company and, consequently, thousands of job losses. This was not by chance, but the result of a strategic plan, which showed society the meaning of having a national airline, thus making it a national symbol.

We pushed this through against everyone: against the Argentinean government, the Spanish government (which was bidding to take over the

company) and against the general impression that this whole struggle would pass virtually unnoticed. And when we won, a lot of people said: "It's a miracle." Not for us, it wasn't. It was an achievement of will, of determination, of organisation, and of struggle.

Where did you find inspiration during the bad times?

From feeling that this is what I must do.

Is this where the support of your family comes in?

Absolutely. I have a kind of family altar in my bedroom, and it's from there that they watch over me.

Eyes boring into your back...

Very much so. But after so many

years I also have to recognise that, as well as the responsibility, I feel that I like this work. I enjoy it.

Does anything stand in the way of you enjoying your achievements?

The first thing that has to be overcome is the feeling of guilt about getting home late, of not being there for my daughter at the times when she feels I should be. I have to take the trouble of explaining that I'm working on a project which she is going to share in, and, if it comes out well, she will benefit from. As well as that, frankly, I have to work twice or three times as hard to achieve the same recognition as a man, and still show all the time that we are good at what we do.

Despite that, the time always comes when you are inclined to fight for power with a man and tell him: look, this place is mine. I won it. Even when there is no need to do it explicitly, you have to show that you are ready to say it – and to do it.

Claudia Acuña, is a journalist, and founder and president of the cooperative news agency Lavaca.org based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Alicia Castro is ITF Vice-President. Since 1998 she has been a member of the ITF executive board and management committee, and represents her region on the ITF women's committee. She was General Secretary of the ITF-affiliated cabin crew union *Asociacion Argentina de Aeronavegantes* from 1991 to 2003 and has been a member of the Argentinian Parliament since 1997. Alicia's inspirational leadership of her union and her sharp grasp of internationalism have made her a key player in the ITF. During Argentina's period of economic crisis in 2001/2 Alicia was prominent among the progressive forces campaigning for a change to the system.

One in three women suffers "gender-based violence"

A report by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has singled out gender inequality as the chief source of largely undiminished levels of violence against women.

According to the report, published to mark the UN's International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women in November 2003, one in three women worldwide will be attacked – raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused – because she is female.

The day focused on all forms of violence against women – domestic and political, as well as workplace violence.

The report, *Not a minute more: ending violence against women*, shows that despite clear progress, at international, national and grassroots levels, in bringing gender-based violence into the open, "women do not appear to be substantively more free from violence than they were a decade ago."

"As long as women in diverse

countries do not have access to property and employment and equal wages, to the seats of power and to education, the violence that is perpetuated in their lives is viewed as a private rather than a public issue," the report says.

As a spokesperson for the Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railwaymen's Union put it, "Violence against women has little to do with the man being aggravated, and even less to do with what the victim has done. Instead, its roots lie in the man's desire to exert control and power over a woman, and would occur no matter what she did or did not do."

Women transport workers can face particular violence because of their jobs. Cabin crew and ground staff have been the victims of "air rage". Taxi drivers have been violently assaulted by passengers. Women in male-dominated environments often suffer workplace harassment.

A number of ITF-affiliated unions used the UN day of action to focus on their own anti-violence

activities, staging rallies, protest marches and public meetings. Many ordered posters (pictured) from the ITF as a resource for their ongoing campaigns against violence.

More details at:
www.itf.org.uk/english/women/
www.un.org/depts/dhl/violence



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNING FOR ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Participate in your transport union
www.itf.org.uk



Do your women's structures work?

What degree of influence do women really have in your union? Are women in the workforce truly represented in the membership, on committees, as activists, officials and leaders? And most important, do the structures you have work actively to promote equality?



Women face a tough battle for equality in almost any industrial sector, but transport is a particularly male-dominated industry. Transport unions who are determined to improve their representation of women are increasingly convinced that they must introduce and adhere to key basic principles and targets to secure a full role for women in their activities.

These are unions that want their work on women's issues to pay off. Introducing a women's quota for the executive board is clearly a crucial step towards democracy in a union where women are under-represented. However unless the appointed women have particular interests, skills and time to give to women's issues, the quota may not specifically contribute to an outcome on women's campaigning work.

Unions will have different approaches to promoting equality. An equality or women's officer may need to be appointed, a women's or equality department or committee formed. If the budget cannot stretch to a full-time post, an appropriate senior officer may need to take on a commitment to progressing the union's campaigning work. And whatever the size and resources of the organisation, the union should be able to nominate a contact person

on women's issues. This person should act, among other things, as the union's contact person in the ITF women's network (see page 7).

Proof of progress

This level of commitment must be apparent, and women members must see progress being made on issues that may be crucial to them – such as equality in employment opportunities and practices, maternity rights and childcare support. Otherwise they may lose interest in the other benefits of union participation.

Where memberships in many unions are declining, here is a constituency still waiting to be fully tapped. This is increasingly so, since growing numbers of women are entering all sectors of transport. Some are breaking into traditionally male jobs, many more are entering new roles in the transport sector, for example in logistical and administrative support roles, telesales and service call centres.

Statistics that show your union has a strong women's membership, and has proportionate numbers of women officials and decision makers, will impress and reassure women like these that yours is a relevant and progressive organisation.

Making change happen

But the union leadership must then ensure that these structures are taken seriously by the union at large. It must facilitate and encourage them to work systematically to bring about change.

In its role as a promoter of equality, a union leadership could offer targeted training to bring more women into leadership roles. It could ensure quotas of women are part of any important union delegation to a national or international meeting, such as an ITF meeting for example.

It should ensure there are strategic opportunities for women's issues to be brought into all the union's activities. There would need to be a regular women's conference with a policy-making role, which feeds into the union's congress or other policy making fora. Collective bargaining, as the central plank of all trade union activity, must embrace the needs and concerns of all union members. A union constitution can commit the union to the inclusion of non-discrimination and equality clauses in all collective bargaining agreements. Essentially of course, these clauses will be strengthened by increasing the number of women trade unionists participating in the bargaining process.

CHECKLIST FOR EQUALITY

Unions that are committed to equality will do some or all of the following:

1. Have a women's or equality officer, committee, or department recognised by the constitution.

2. Include an "equality clause" in its constitution guaranteeing a commitment to equality in all union activities, eg including a quota or target mechanism to augment women's representation.

3. Monitor the participation of women in union activities and ensure women are

nominated to attend trade union events, as well as men.

4. Appoint women organisers and offer leadership training for women.

5. Keep up to date information on gender breakdown of membership by occupation.

6. Include non-discrimination and equality clauses in all collective bargaining agreements.

MOTHERS GROUNDED

REUTERS/ANURUDDA LOKUHAPARACHCHI



Cabin crew at Sri Lankan Airlines are challenging the right of their employer to determine whether and when they should have children. Sangam Tripathy reports

Skytrax Research of the UK named Sri Lankan Airlines cabin crew “World’s Friendliest Cabin Staff” in 2002. But the professional smiles of the flight crew conceal an alarming picture of discrimination behind the scenes.

Sri Lankan Airlines employs 650 cabin crew, most of whom are women aged 18 to 45. Around 100 are married. None have children. Why? Because they stand to lose their jobs if they start a family.

At the time of writing, clause 21.8 of the company’s collective agreement with the union states: “Cabin crew who fall pregnant are required to stop flying immediately, and apply for another job in another part of the company. If successful in finding another job then they will be covered for maternity leave as per the terms and conditions of the grade of their new job, and the company will use its best endeavours to find alternative suitable employment within the company. Otherwise, if unsuccessful in finding another job within the company, they are required to submit their notice and resign.”

In reality, crew complain, the company’s “best endeavours” rarely result in finding suitable alternative employment. “Since 1999 only one pregnant colleague has ever been re-employed as cabin crew,” says one crew member. “All

others have had to leave and go.”

“I know of one woman who got pregnant and applied for a suitable ground job,” says another. “She was called for an interview, which was cancelled three times. She kept coming back but the interview did not take place. She became very depressed and anxious. In the end she had a miscarriage. Then she just started flying again.”

Professional status thrown away

As trained safety professionals certified by the director general of civil aviation, these workers are responsible for handling any emergency situation on an aircraft. Yet their rights and professionalism are thrown away just because they are pregnant.

Industrial relations law in Sri Lanka clearly states that “the employment of a female cannot be terminated by reason only of her pregnancy or confinement, or any illness consequent to her pregnancy or confinement.” The ITF-affiliated Flight Attendants’ Union (FAU) has now formally complained to the government of Sri Lanka that the maternity clause in their collective agreement, as quoted above, is contrary to the provisions set out in the law. It has also begun negotiating with management to change the terms of the agreement.

The union argues that by placing on the pregnant employee the burden of finding another job in another part of the company the current agreement is contrary to national law. The law states that it is the duty of the employer to assign such duties to an employee who is pregnant which are not injurious to the health of the employee or the child. Yet under the Sri Lankan Airlines agreement, an employee is forced to tender her resignation if the company chooses not to provide her with an alternative job.

“The problem is, it is still disputed whether we come under the remit of the Shop and Office Employees Act or the Wages Boards Ordinance,” says an FAU representative. “So we are denied the benefits of the labour legislation in the country.”

The Employers’ Federation of Ceylon, in a written submission to the Labour Commissioner on behalf of Sri Lankan Airlines, states: “In fact, it is similar to a situation where an employee agrees that his/her employment will cease to be effective upon the happening of a particular event. For example, an employee engaged as a driver will not be in a position to fulfil his functions if for some reason his driving licence is withdrawn or cancelled.”

Challenging this level of denial may be a daunting task. But the union is determined to resolve the issue. It has issued a charter of demands asking, for example, that every pregnant cabin crew should be given a ground job, in the same grade. After returning from maternity leave she would go back to the ground job for a period of 15 months. She would then be entitled to return to flying, in her original grade, after going through some mandatory medical tests and a refresher course.

Negotiations continued as Transport Women went to press, with some key concessions to staff with over three years' service appearing in management redrafts of the agreement. No new rights had been accorded to staff with under three years' service. If this redraft is adopted those with three years' service can expect a guarantee of transfer to ground work

with the right to apply for any vacancies for cabin crew a year after returning from maternity leave. However there was still no guaranteed right to "suitable alternative employment within the company" and no clear entitlement at any stage to return to flying.

As well as negotiating with the management, FAU has raised the dispute with the Labour Commissioner and brought the issues to an international meeting of ITF-affiliated aviation unions. "On the legal front we will go for arbitration if the matter is not resolved, and even further," says a spokesperson. "On the industrial front, we want the issue to be exposed and wider solidarity mobilised nationally, regionally and internationally."

Sangam Tripathy is education coordinator in the ITF's New Delhi office.

New campaign for equality in airlines

Aviation unions meeting in London in December 2003 agreed to launch a new campaign to promote equality for women working in aviation.

The campaign will focus both on basic rights, and on combating sexism in airline advertising and promotional materials.

It will involve the collection of data on transport companies that use blatantly discriminatory practices, and the mounting of publicity campaigns to expose those companies.

Other measures could include the drafting of a code of Conduct to be signed by airlines.

Airline offenders

- Sri Lanka is far from being the only airline to infringe the basic rights of its employees. Malaysian Airline System Employees' Union is in the midst of a campaign against blatant discriminatory practices which include:
 - Retirement age of 40 for women cabin crews (normal retirement age of 55 in the company).
 - Ban on pregnancy for first five years of service, then a maximum of two surviving children. A breach leads to dismissal.
 - Similar rights infringements have been noted in Pakistan and Nepal.
 - As a result of ITF intervention in the case of Malaysia, the employer has promised to "effect the necessary changes where and when appropriate." To date, this has not happened.
 - A number of airlines have been seen to promote cabin crew in a way that undermines their role as safety professionals.
 - The Kapers cabin crew union in Switzerland lodged a complaint against GQ magazine after photographs of cabin crew members were published without their permission.
 - An advertising campaign for SN Brussels Airlines showed a cabin crew member breastfeeding a passenger's baby under the slogan "passionate about you."
 - Varig airlines in Brazil launched a corporate weight loss programme aimed at women employees.

"I know of one woman who got pregnant and applied for a suitable ground job. She was called for an interview, which was cancelled three times. She kept coming back, but the interview did not take place. She became very depressed and anxious. In the end she had a miscarriage. Then she just started flying again."

Picture of betrayal

When a popular men's magazine got hold of a picture of two airline cabin crew and exploited it for its own purposes, the crew's union launched a counter-attack. By Christine Aman

It all started in December 2002, when the Swiss cabin crew union, Kapers, received a copy of the British men's magazine GQ. Inside was a picture showing two female cabin crew members of Swiss International Airlines (Swiss), in uniform, in a quite suggestive pose, with an attached text, making demeaning and insulting sexual references. As the union representative with responsibility for women's issues at the time, I immediately began to investigate.

The two cabin crew members concerned were shocked and disgusted when they saw the picture and article. They explained what had happened, first to the union and afterwards to Swiss. The published picture had been taken following an official photo shoot for Swiss advertising purposes. The photographer had proposed that he would like to take additional private pictures at the end of the official session. The cabin crew members had agreed on condition that the pictures would not be published without their express permission.

As it turned out, however, the photographer did not ask for permission to publish any pictures. Neither did he inform the cabin crew members concerned about the content of the text, or even notify them of his intention to publish an article in GQ magazine.

As soon as the ITF had been informed about the incident, ITF general secretary David Cockroft sent a strongly worded letter of complaint to the chief executive of Swiss. In contrast the company took a very long time to get in touch with GQ. Finally however, following a request from Kapers, the Swiss chairman, Mr Pieter Bouw, sent a condemning letter to the magazine.

Kapers reproached the responsible corporate communications officer for failing to honour the airline's duty to protect its employees. The union believes communications staff should undertake to brief any cabin crew members taking part in a photo shoot or having any other contact with the media, so they are fully aware of what they should and shouldn't do.

Duty of protection

We called for an internal inquiry and asked the chairman to comply with the company's duty of protection by taking a strong position against sexist exploitation of staff by the press. Kapers further demanded that Swiss secure the return and destruction of the negatives, and confirm to the employees concerned that this had taken place.

In his letter of protestation, Mr Bouw stated that GQ's "action projects the trade group of flight attendants as a whole and, in particular, that of Swiss flight



Cutting from GQ magazine December 2002 showing illicit picture

attendants, with an unacceptable sexist image... The Swiss flight attendants concerned had to accept an unacceptable slur on their integrity as a result of this incident, following disciplinary investigations and verbal attacks from their work colleagues."

He asked the magazine to write a letter of apology to the cabin crews concerned, and to write to Kapers with information about the published item. As agreed with the union, he also asked for the negatives or a confirmation of their destruction.

Kapers did not generate any internal publicity about the incident, in agreement with the cabin crew members. The union was anxious not to focus any

more attention on the incident, as this would risk exposing the two cabin crew members to even more disagreeable remarks from their colleagues.

The entire process took three months and had various outcomes. The corporate communications officer responsible for the shoot left the company a few months later. Kapers demanded that Swiss set up guidelines on "dos and don'ts", with a form to be signed before the shooting of any future pictures, in order to provide information and protection for inexperienced cabin crew members.

We never received any letters of apology, nor the negatives, nor confirmation of their destruction.

The two cabin crew members learned a very hard lesson. They were thankful for the union's and finally Swiss's support and, as far as I know, they have not volunteered to be photographed in uniform again. It should also be said that Swiss appears to have learned from this experience. In a subsequent incident, the company reacted in a very professional way.

Christine Aman is a former Swiss cabin crew member and Kapers women's representative.



Doro Zinke, General Secretary, European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF)

Ten tips for getting to the top

BY DORO ZINKE

- 1 **Never pretend that women are the better humans.** This attitude creates additional stress.
- 2 **Do not avoid conflicts, but do not stumble into them, either.** Choose them carefully. And prepare yourself carefully.
- 3 **Even if you have good reasons to hope for a positive result, be prepared for the worst case scenario.**
- 4 **Don't let others kill your energy.** Keep hold of your sense of humour.
- 5 **Create networks.**
- 6 **Allow yourself to be a complete person:** read other stuff than documents, newspapers, and books related to work. Read poems and novels, if you like them, go to the cinema, make music, see friends. A complete person will be better in the job in the long run than an emotional cripple.
- 7 **Do not take medicines against depression or headaches, to have a better sleep, or whatever.** Accept the warning signals of your body. Start yoga or other physical exercises.
- 8 **If you make a mistake, regard it as normal.** Say "excuse me" and repair it. Don't waste your time by hiding the mistake or blaming others – this costs energy and time that you can spend on really important things.
- 9 **Don't be too smart.** Cheating others does not pay off in the long run.
- 10 **Be aware that people cannot keep secrets.**

Speaking out

Views from around the movement



Ann Anderson
Clerical and Commercial Workers' Union, Guyana

It's hard getting women to stand up and take leadership positions, but the struggle continues and we're getting there.



Loretta Woodcock
Canadian Auto Workers' Union

More and more women are working and as a result more will become involved in the trade union movement and they can make a very different contribution from men. I think if more women had been at the table, we would have had the social policies in the Free Trade Agreements which we are now fighting for.



Julie Tisdale
Transport Workers' Union, Australia

The challenges facing women in the trade union movement I think are really part of the struggle for trade unions to recognise the challenges of change and of the future. Our workplaces as well as our unions need to reflect the diversity that exists in the community. This is a particular challenge for road transport in Australia, where the workforce has been predominantly male, and that's been reflected in our union structures.



Anna Hellstrom
Transport Workers' Union, Sweden

A lot of women in Sweden have casual, short-term jobs because there is a tradition that women should stay at home and take parental leave days.

We're trying to get the men to take their share of parental leave, which would enable women to go out on the job market to get more long-term jobs.

Karen Leavy
Maritime Union of Australia



In our union the challenge is just getting women to realise that they are able to do our work. I think we need to get down to a grassroots level and educate kids at high school about maritime and port workers.

Why women..?

The issues women face have to be heard. And the only way this can happen is by having women active in their union.

Jackie, New Zealand

Women carry more responsibilities and burdens, and are able to make wise, intelligent, precise and correct decisions.

Sharon, Malaysia

Women are good managers, both at home and at work.

Mary, Papua New Guinea

Ruth grips the traction lever firmly. It takes her just a few seconds to check the pressure gauge, press a few buttons and turn the “KP” key, a crucial item for opening and closing the doors. Immediately, driver 20324 communicates with the rail traffic controller by radio. She is ready to start another journey.

She takes a few seconds to tuck the blue man’s shirt that she is wearing into her belt. This is perhaps the only disadvantage of being the first woman driver of a light train, a popular means of transport that runs on electricity and covers a section of Mexico City.

Six months into the job she acknowledges that she still works “on her wits” as she does not yet have a thorough knowledge of the thicket of processes available on the control panel, particularly the 18 safety rules which the firm has recently introduced. This is a measure designed to avoid any repeat of the disaster of 21 May 2001, when a train hit several vehicles on one of the many level-crossings that lie along the route.

It was a fateful day: two people were left dead and three seriously injured. The drivers are continuously aware of the event, particularly the bitter experience of their comrade, who received a six-year prison sentence for driving, in the opinion of the judge, with excessive speed.

In the lion’s den

However, Ruth Esther Rojas del Valle, 27, is optimistic, attentive and, above all, happy. She is ready to burst out laughing or display her smile at a second’s notice. She has felt this excitement since the moment she was informed that she had been chosen to be a driver from among a large group of applicants, after four hard months of training. That same day her husband jumped with alarm and told her:

“I won’t allow you to do it! Are you mad? You’ll be walking into a lion’s den!” In his experience as a bus driver operating in one of the most dangerous areas of the city, he was reluctant to accept that his wife was to spend time in such an environment, particularly “on your own, with a load of men!”

As Ruth admits, during the first few days, “I found myself wondering ‘What am I doing here? I’d be better off going home and looking after my two children.’ But suddenly something made me carry on, not just so that I would have a stable job, but to show everyone that I’m up to this challenge.”

So far she has coped well with the vicissitudes of a new job, with working out all those



Up to the challenge

A day in the life of Mexico City’s first woman light train driver.
By Fabiola Martínez

technical terms that at first seemed to her like “a load of double Dutch”, even with working shifts, sometimes from five in the morning to two in the afternoon or from two until 11 at night.

Nor does it bother her that, from time to time, someone will try to make her feel small in the union social centre. Certain drivers will murmur to one another or whisper criticisms, openly questioning her ability to work as a member of a team that provides transport to more than 90,000 people per day.

“The whingers” represent a minority, she says. When their trains pass one another en route, most of her colleagues will give her the thumbs-up as a sign of encouragement.

Making a contribution

She is happy that she is able to make a contribution to the household expenses, even though to start with she is earning no more than six thousand pesos (about US\$600) a month,

but also because she is working as part of a team, for those who live in her city. “It’s not the rich who take these trains,” she says proudly.

Ruth stresses that she has no desire to become a supervisor or a coordinator, still less a rail marshal, because even though she would earn more money, it is in the cab that the excitement is to be had.

She has now broken the mould. Her union, the , and the firm are training up more women. Five female applicants are currently following a course – and arrangements are being made to order a new batch of clothing for women train drivers.

Fabiola Martínez is a reporter for the newspaper *La Jornada* based in Mexico City.

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The ITF women's campaign centres on International Women's Day on 8 March each year. Women in transport unions worldwide take part by holding meetings and rallies, carrying banners, displaying posters, distributing leaflets and many more activities. The action day has become a focal point for their efforts to win better rights for women transport workers.

You can get involved in the global campaign for change. Check out the women's page on the ITF website to find information or request materials.

Participate in your transport union

www.itf.org.uk

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NEED
WOMEN

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Women
transporting the world

