

¡No pasarán!

The ITF
and the
fight
against
fascism



International Transport
Workers' Federation

iNO PASARÁN!

The ITF and the fight against fascism

The struggle to defeat fascism in the 20th century didn't begin in 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War. The anti-fascist fight had been going on for many years, and trade unionists were among the first to recognise the unique dangers posed by this toxic ideology based on racial superiority, anti-semitism, militarism and dictatorship.

Trade union activists were key targets of fascist repression. In Italy, they were blacklisted and punished after Mussolini seized power in 1922. Strikes were outlawed and opponents of the fascist regime were brutally persecuted.

Trade unionists suffered a similar fate in Germany from 1933 under Hitler's rule. Unions were closed down, their assets confiscated and many thousands of union activists were sent to Nazi concentration camps.

Unions resisted and fought fascism throughout these years. They did so clandestinely in countries under the heel of fascist dictators, as well as more openly in those whose governments pursued a disastrous policy of appeasement of fascism.

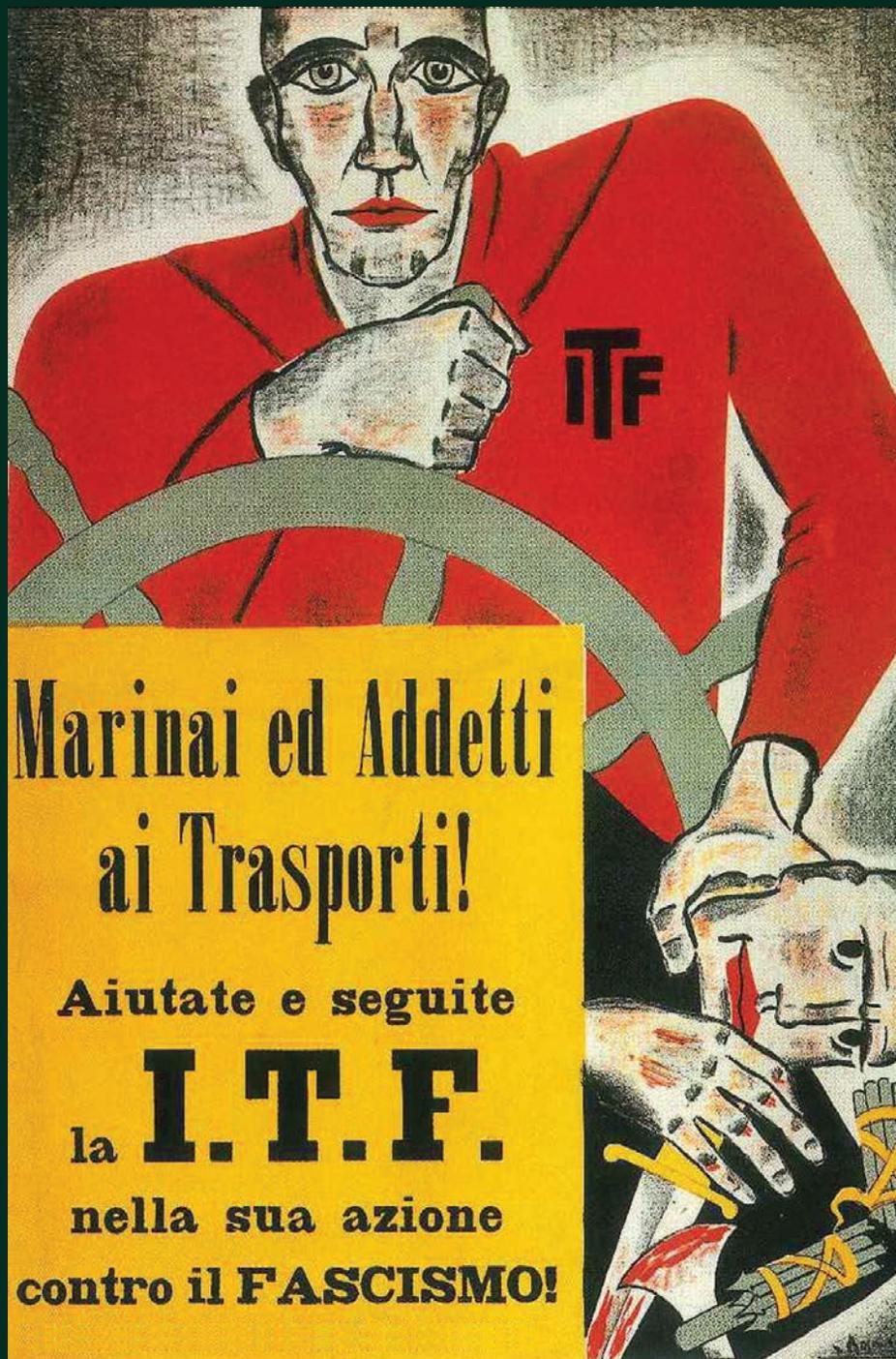
Transport trade unions and the ITF played a leading role in this fight.



Anti-Nazi illustration produced for ITF publications in the 1930s.



Although not an avowedly fascist regime, the dictatorship of Miklós Horthy in Hungary from 1920 to 1944 displayed many repressive fascist characteristics and led Hungary into alliance with Nazi Germany. In the summer of 1920 the ITF organised an international rail border blockade of the country in protest at the persecution of trade unionists and other opponents of the regime. As a result the government was forced to make concessions.



Marinai ed Addetti ai Trasporti!

Aiutate e seguite

la **I.T.F.**

nella sua azione
contro il FASCISMO!

An Italian poster produced by ITF unions in the 1920s to encourage transport workers to take action against fascism.

In Italy more than 30,000 railway workers were sacked after Mussolini came to power. The union's head office was closed, its leaders were arrested – and only released following ITF pressure via the International Labour Organization. The same pattern of repression was repeated across all transport sectors. By 1926 only fascist organisations were allowed to represent workers.

ANTI-NAZI ACTIVITIES

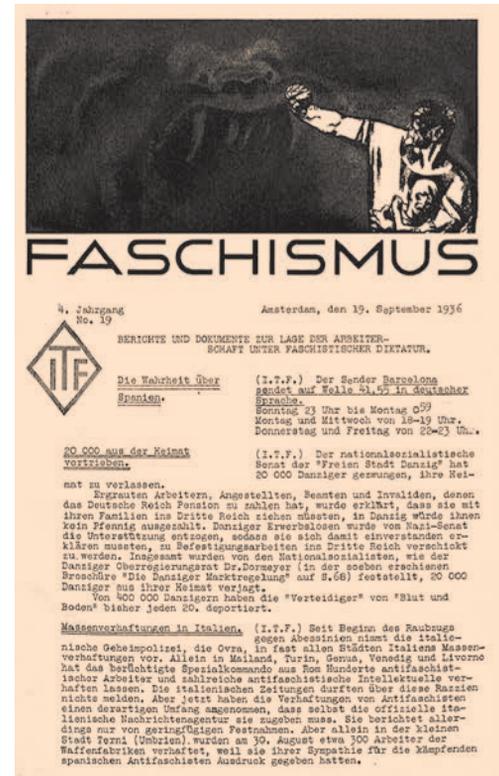
Then based in Amsterdam, the ITF was active in underground anti-Nazi activities in Germany following Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Undercover missions were carried out by ITF officials, and anti-fascist leaflets and newsletters were distributed via secret trade union networks.

But the dangers for trade unionists were immense if they were discovered. Hermann Jochade, who had been the ITF president from 1904 to 1916 and was the leader of the banned German railway workers' union (Einheitsverband der Eisenbahner Deutschlands), was beaten to death by concentration camp guards in 1939.

He was not the only transport union leader to die at the hands of the Nazis. Ludvik Buland of the NJF Norwegian railway workers' union (Norsk Jernbaneforbund) and Pierre Semard of the French railway workers' federation (Fédération des cheminots CGT) were also murdered.

From 1933 the ITF published the fortnightly *Hakenkreuz über Deutschland* (Swastika over Germany). This was renamed as *Faschismus* (Fascism) and its focus spread to include Italy, Austria, Spain and Portugal. It continued publication until the end of the Second World War in 1945.

Most of this printed material originated in the Netherlands and was smuggled to Germany by Dutch inland waterway skippers and crews. Such action helped raise early political awareness of fascism in Holland and gave many Dutch



The anti-fascist newsletter *Faschismus* was published by the ITF until 1945.

Hermann Jochade: murdered by the Nazis.



There is a memorial plaque at the head office of the RMT rail and maritime workers' union in London that names the British seafarers and railway workers who volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

IBMT

THIS PLAQUE COMMEMORATES
THOSE FORMER MEMBERS OF
THE NUS AND NUR
WHO FOUGHT IN
**THE INTERNATIONAL
BRIGADES**
SPAIN, 1936-1939



Alexander Jacob	Graham George C	Nicholls Matthew W
Alexander John	Harris August	O'Connor John
Anderson James	Hayes Frederick	O'Donnell Hugh
Arkley James	Hayman Arthur	O'Donnell John
Atherton Thomas	Hewlett William W	O'Mahoney Pat
Atkinson William G	Hilton Stanley	O'Shea Peter
Baillie William	Hurd Ronald W	Parlett William
Beales William T G	Jasper Fredk G	Paul Edward R
Bentley Albert	Kaminos Anthony	Phillips E G
Bishop William G	Keating James D	Plumb Fredk A
Blundell Joseph F	Kerr Thomas A	Prendergast Jimmy
Boddy Henry	Langley Samuel	Reid James N
Booth John S	Larmour John	Reid John
Bragg John R	Lawther Clifford	Richards George E
Bryan Herbert R	Lee Hugh M	Rutherford James
Byrne Patrick C	Leeson Harold G	Salisbury Alfred
Cole Albert E	Lewis Sidney	Scott James
Collins William	Lichfield Alfred	Scott James
Coward Jack	Londragon John	Shaw Jack
Crompton Vincent	MacDonald William M	Skinner Alwyn E
Croston Harold J	Macauley William	Smith George
Cullen Hugh O'B	Mackie William	Smith Robert S
Dashwood Albert	Magee George S	Storey Stephen L
Dempsey Charles W	Magner Charles C	Stubbs Albert
Dimitriou Euripedes	Maley James	Swindon Charles H
Dimitriou Georgias	McGoochan Luke A	Swinnerton Dennis
Doherty Robert F	McHugh James	Taylor Donald J
Doyle Robert	McKnight William J	Taylor J
Drake John	McLaughlin Patrick Roe	Thewles Bartolomew
Edwards Edward W	McNulty Thomas	Thompson Leonard
Estensen Otto	Morrice Kenneth E	Turner Richard G
Finlay Thomas	Morrison William Z	Walters Samuel
Foreman George E	Morrissey William	Walton Charles
Gallagher John	Mowatt David W C	Ward Terence J
Gibson Pat	Murch John	Williams Charles
Glasse George E	Murphy Patrick K	Williams Edwin F
Glavin James	Nelson Charles	Wilson John
Graham Donald A	Newman Peter	

UNVEILED BY JACK JONES, PRESIDENT INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE ASSOCIATION
8th JUNE 2004

¡NO PASARAN!

people experience in secretive operations and in building underground organisations – something that would prove useful during the Second World War.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

From 1936 to 1939, the international cause of anti-fascism was focused on defending the Spanish Republic against a rebellion led by General Franco and supported by Hitler and Mussolini.

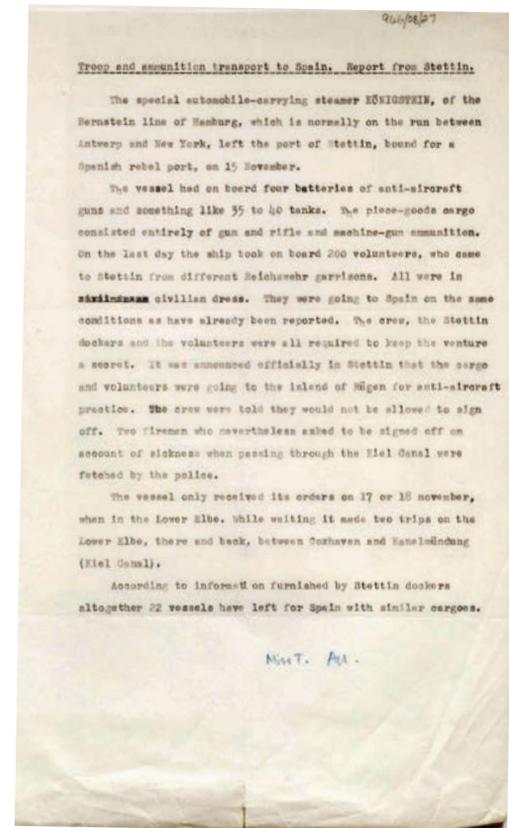
The Spanish Civil War saw the ITF and transport trade unions around the world play an active part in efforts to stop another fascist takeover in Europe.

They warned that Franco's victory would embolden the fascist dictators and lead inevitably to a catastrophic world war. They were proved right, and Britain and France declared war on Hitler's Germany in September 1939, just five months after the defeat of the Spanish Republic.

Many hundreds of transport workers also joined the International Brigades – the 35,000 volunteers from more than 50 countries who took up arms to fight for the Spanish Republic in a remarkable display of international solidarity.

In addition, trade unions played a leading role in humanitarian campaigns to send food and medical supplies to Spain and to help refugees from the war.

The Spanish Republic had introduced social reforms, giving



The ITF compiled secret reports of arms shipments and troop movements to fascist-held Spain.



IBMT

International Brigader and Liverpool docker Jack Jones was the general secretary of Britain's biggest union, the Transport & General Workers' Union, from 1969 to 1978, during which time he was also a vice president of the ITF. He is pictured (right, in leather jacket) with other International Brigaders before the Battle of the Ebro in the summer of 1938.



IBMT



British volunteers in Barcelona in September 1936 named their unit after Tom Mann, president of the ITF from 1896 to 1901.

women the vote, expanding education and devolving powers from Madrid.

These moves were anathema to fascist and reactionary forces in Spanish society. Meanwhile, the Western democracies stayed out of the war and banned arms sales to the Republic, thereby effectively condemning it to defeat.

Britain and France enforced a policy of ‘non-intervention’, and turned a blind eye to attacks on merchant ships lawfully trading with Republican Spain. Scores of seafarers were killed and injured in these attacks by German and Italian bombers and submarines. At least 29 British ships were sunk.

Only the Soviet Union and Mexico supported the Republic. But their help was vastly overshadowed by the volume of arms, aircraft and troops sent by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to help Franco. He was bolstered too by sympathetic US corporations who sold him vital supplies of oil and trucks.

The Spanish Civil War was the first major ‘modern’ war of our age. Civilians and urban centres were deliberately targeted by the fascists. The bombing of Guernica, for example, was portrayed in a painting of the same name that Pablo Picasso painted for the Spanish Republic.

As was to be the case in the Second World War, more civilians than combatants were killed in the civil war, and the sight of refugees in their thousands fleeing the fascist advance in Spain would soon be replicated throughout much of Europe.

IBMT



This 1937 Spanish poster says: ‘All the peoples of the world are in the International Brigades on the side of the Spanish people.’

British Film Institute



The British ship *Stanwell* following a bombing raid on the port of Tarragona.



During the Spanish Civil War a group of exiled anti-fascist Germans made regular radio broadcasts from Barcelona and Madrid to support the resistance inside Germany. There were talks by politicians and writers, often recorded in Paris and brought to Spain for broadcasting. The ITF's underground newspaper *Faschismus* (Fascism) was mentioned in broadcasts.

Artist John Heartfield made this poster advertising the broadcasts.

ACTION TO HELP SPAIN

The call to help the Spanish Republic resulted in many ships bound for Franco-held ports being boycotted by trade union action. The ITF raised funds to send foodships to Republican Spain, and Edo Fimmen, the ITF general secretary, and other ITF leaders paid several visits to Spain to coordinate assistance.

According to one report, the ITF even had its own unit that was fighting on the side of the anti-fascist militia.

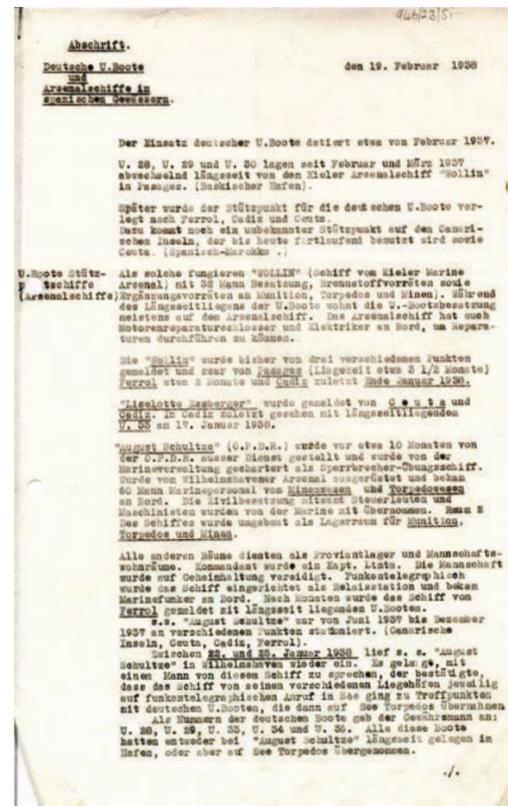
From the start of the war the ITF called on affiliated unions to inspect all shipments to Spain in order to prevent armaments reaching the rebels.

On visits to Republican Spain, ITF leaders met Spanish transport trade unions to coordinate assistance. Two ambulances were donated, and a special fund was set up to help transport union members killed in action.

Transport unions in Scandinavia urged a complete trade boycott of Franco's Spain. But this met resistance from British unions, who did not want to defy their government's 'non-intervention' policy.

However, several individual transport unions did take action, notably dockers in Antwerp.

In August 1936 the Norwegian Transport Workers' Union (Norsk Transportarbeiderforbund, NTF) sent a circular to



This ITF report details u-boat activity around Spain in the 12 months to February 1938.

De Wapensmokkel met de «Raymond»

ALLE VRIJSPRAKEN IN BEROEP BE- KRACHTIGD

Een schadevergoeding van 2 1/4 miljoen aan den fiskus

In 1936 werd door Geo Pierson, uit Luik, voor 1 miljoen frank wapens gekocht bij de firma F. N. te Luik en aan de fabriek Schröder geleverd, met toestemming van den Brusselschen wapenhandelaar Schraff. Willem Pieters belaste zich met het overbrengen er van naar de stapelhuizen van Delaart te Brussel.

Op 7 Augustus van hetzelfde jaar werden de kisten naar Antwerpen gebracht. Aan O. Becu, voorzitter van de Vereeniging der zee-officieren, werd te dien tijde 2 1/2 miljoen frank ter hand gesteld om wapens te koopjen bestemd voor Spanje. Zijn bediende Jan Boogaerts werd bemiddelaar en samen met

kapitein Keurts werden onderhandelingen gevoerd met den Spaanschen ambassadeur, Filomon De Witte, uit Oostende, voorzitter van den Transportarbeidersbond, vroeg daarop aan Arsene Blondie om met de «Raymond» een bijzondere lading te willen overbrengen.

Het schip werd voor een maand in haar genomen en op 21 September werden niet minder dan 121 kisten «dik glas» ingescheept voor Hamburg. In zette moest deze lading overgeet worden op een Spaansch schip, de «Isar», dat Bilbao zou aandooien.

Niet saaije lekte uit. Er werd vastgesteld dat, in plaats van de lading glas, het schip wapens bevatte, waarvan het wettelijk vervoer verboden was.

Alle personen in deze zaak betrokken, werden voor de rechtbank van Brugge gedaagd, namelijk Arthur Keilsen, Aug. Kan, Arsene Blondie, allen uit Oostende; Filomon De Witte, uit Deurne, en Omer Becu, uit Antwerpen.

De rechtbank had De Witte en Becu becht van aankoop van oorlogswapens en munitie, dit zonder wettelijke toestemming. Zij werden veroordeeld tot 3500 fr. boete of een maand gevangenisstraf. Eersgenoemde zag deze straf verboden, omdat hij de wapens in zijn bezit had gehouden. Al de anderen werden vrijgesproken.

De Witte tekende beroep aan en zoo verchenes al de voor de rechtbank gedaagde verdachten voor het Hof van Beroep. De debatten namen verschillende zittingen in beslag. Aan de verdedigingsbank verchenes beurtelings Meester Warth (Oost), Carton (Brugge), Callan (Antwerpen), Verbaet (id.) en Gerard (Luik).

De uitpraak, die telkens werd verdaagd, werd thans gevekt. In een lang gemotieerd arrest waarvan de lezing heel wat tijd in beslag nam, wordt het vonnis van Brugge te niet gedaan en verwijs het Hof De Witte hoogst vermoend, alsook Omer Becu, uit Antwerpen, tot het betalen van 2258 fr. of 2 maanden gevangenisstraf. De aangevoegen wapens alsook het schip werden verbeurd verklaard.

De twee bectichten hebben zich onmiddellijk in verbreking voorsten.

A Belgian newspaper reports the arrest of Omer Becu for arms smuggling to Spain.

Prominent Belgian trade unionist Omer Becu – who would later serve as ITF president and general secretary from 1947 to 1960 – organised the smuggling of weapons to Republican Spain on the *Raymond*. For this he was arrested in 1937 and briefly imprisoned.

During the Second World War Becu was exiled in London and New York, where, as general secretary of the IMMOA International Mercantile Marine Officers' Association, he worked closely with the Allies, particularly the Office for Strategic Studies, a US wartime intelligence agency. Becu recruited other union leaders to work with the OSS and built a radio counter-espionage network that made an important contribution to the fight against German u-boats.



An Aid Spain anti-fascist meeting organised by the ITF in Mexico in 1938.



local branches urging them to take steps to monitor and halt any shipments of arms and ammunition to fascist Spain via Norwegian ports.

At the same time Norway's national trade union federation (Arbeidernes Faglige Landsorganisasjon, AFL) launched a solidarity campaign, supported by the NTF, with the aim of giving financial support to Spanish unions and to the Spanish socialist party.

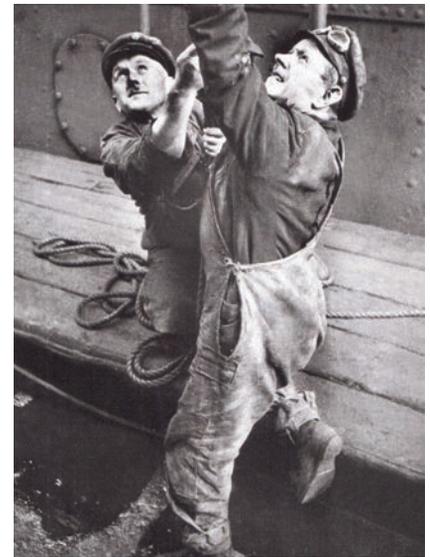
In the autumn of 1936 the Norwegian seafarers' union (Norsk Sjømannsforbund, NSF) advocated a blockade of all fascist-held ports in Spain. The union told members to sign off from ships on their way to such ports.

More than 550 Danes, most of them seafarers, went to Spain to fight in the International Brigades.

Richard Jensen, chair of the Danish marine mechanics' union, became the agent for a Spanish government-owned shipping company. He bought and chartered vessels, mostly manned by Danish seafarers, and smuggled ammunition and weapons to the Spanish Republic.

In Germany, the ITF's secret information network, especially among Hamburg dockers, was able to collect information on arms shipment to Hitler's Condor Legion in Spain.

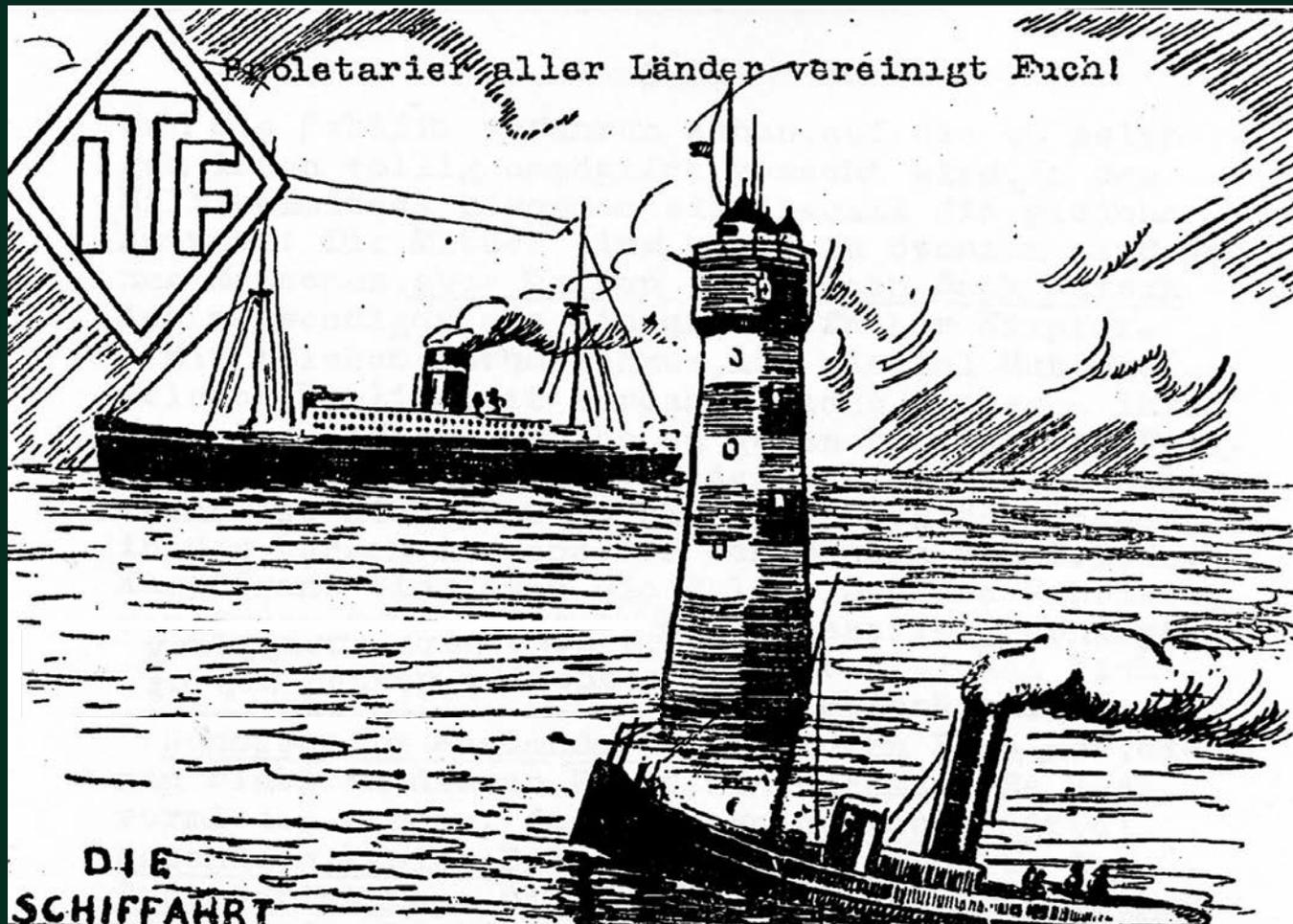
ITF observation posts were also established in the ports of Cardiff, Rotterdam, Antwerp and Gdynia in order to monitor shipping traffic to Spain, and in numerous cases shipments of weapons and ammunition were stopped.



Dockers in Hamburg, from where Hitler's Condor Legion set sail for Spain, secretly monitored shipments to Franco's Spain.



Aircraft parts in Hamburg ready to load on a vessel bound for Spain.



Published in Antwerp, the anti-fascist newsletter *Die Schiffahrt* (Shipping) was distributed among German seafarers and was circulated in Antwerp, Rotterdam and ports in Denmark, Norway and the US.



Edo Fimmen (above) and Nathan Nathans (below).



The ITF's headquarters were in Amsterdam during the 1930s. In anticipation of war, most ITF staff relocated to London in August 1939. One, however, Arie Treurniet, volunteered to stay behind in charge of the Amsterdam office. He was there when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands a year later, was arrested shortly afterwards and spent over two years in Buchenwald concentration camp.

German seafarers! Report all weapons shipments that are leaving German ports bound for the Spanish fascists! Stop these transports by any means!

Down with fascism! Long live the victory of the Spanish workers and peasants!

DUTCHMEN AT THE HELM

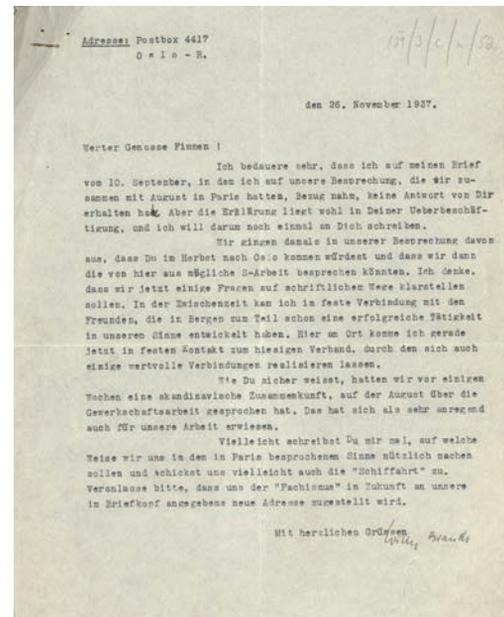
Three Dutchmen at the head of the ITF were closely identified with the anti-fascist struggle.

As its general secretary, Edo Fimmen led the ITF through the period that witnessed the rise of fascism in Europe. He took personal charge of much of the clandestine activity in Nazi Germany and strongly championed the cause of democracy in Spain.

Nathan Nathans, a former clerk with Dutch railways, was ITF assistant general secretary from 1924. He was a tireless campaigner for the Spanish Republic in the early months of the Spanish Civil War, until his death in 1937 in an air crash near Brussels while on a mission to help Spanish refugees.

Fimmen, who died in 1942, was succeeded as ITF general secretary by another Dutchman, Jaap Oldenbroek (later to become, from 1949, the first general secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions).

Oldenbroek used the ITF's underground trade union networks to collaborate with the intelligence services of the



Correspondence from exiled German anti-fascist Willy Brandt to ITF general secretary Edo Fimmen.

For more information

- ‘The International Transportworkers Federation 1914-1945: The Edo Fimmen Era’ by Bob Reinalda (ed.), Stichting beheer IISG: Amsterdam, 1997.
- ‘Solidarity: The First 100 Years of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (no author), Pluto Press: London, 1996.
- ‘Widerstand und internationale Solidarität. Die Internationale Transportarbeiter-Föderation (ITF) im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus’ by Dieter Nelles, Klartext Verlag, Essen, 2001.
- ‘La Marina Mercante y el Tráfico Marítimo en la Guerra Civil’ by Rafael González Etchegaray, Editorial San Martín, Madrid, 1977.
- ITF archives at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick; see www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/studying/docs/antifascism
- Article on the website of Stichting Spanje 1936-1939, the Dutch International Brigades memorial association: <https://spanje3639.org/2015/04/24/zender-298>
- See also the Finnish-based ‘Train to Spain’ project, bringing together artists, historians and labour movement activists to remember the Scandinavian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: www.atraintospain.com

Allies to defeat Nazism. He oversaw many covert operations, including acts of sabotage against transport facilities used by the Axis Powers.

REMEMBER THEM TODAY

The heroic efforts of transport trade unionists who opposed fascism deserve to be remembered today. The early decades of last century saw the rise of modern fascism, a toxic creed that remains alive in the 21st century – though it tries to hide its true nature. Fascist-inspired beliefs still have the power to divide workers, provoke racial and ethnic conflict, destroy trade unions, trample on human rights – and cause wars.

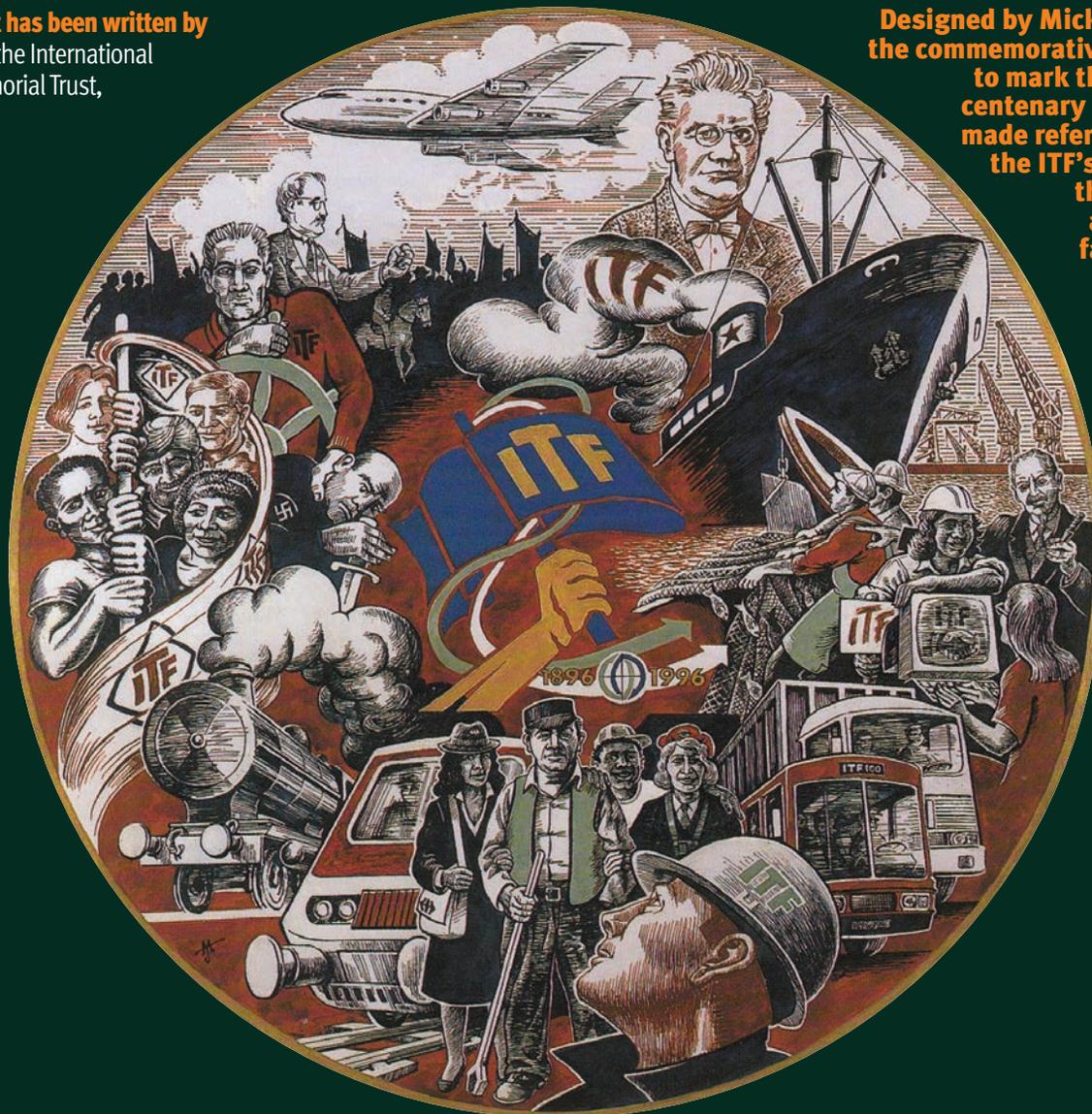
Trade unions around the world must always be vigilant in the face of such challenges. In doing so we can draw inspiration from that generation of brave transport trade unionists who, against the odds and often sacrificing their lives, were the first anti-fascists to say, as their slogan in Spain declared: ‘They shall not pass!’ – ‘¡No pasarán!’



‘Money for Hitler means war in Europe’: anti-Nazi sticker circulated by the ITF in the 1930s.

This booklet has been written by
Jim Jump, of the International
Brigade Memorial Trust,
London.

Designed by Mick Jones,
the commemorative plate
to mark the ITF's
centenary in 1996
made reference to
the ITF's role in
the fight
against
fascism.



With thanks to

- Rien Dijkstra, of the Stichting Spanje 1936-1939, Amsterdam.
- Tore Are Johansen, of the Arbeiderbevegelsens Arkiv og Bibliotek, Oslo.
- Reinhardt Silbermann of the Kämpfer und Freunde der Spanischen Republik 1936-1939 e.V., Hamburg.

This project has also received help from the British train drivers' union ASLEF and from the Norwegian locomotive workers' union NLF.



ITF

ORGANE DE LA FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES OUVRIERS DU TRANSPORT.

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Front unique sanglant

¡No pasarán!
The ITF and the fight against fascism

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