



In October 2009, TIE Global participated in the 5th Congress of the French rail union SUD Rail held in St. Jean des Montes, France. At the congress the European Rail Union Network together with TIE Global organized an international day, to which rail workers activists from England, Basque country, Switzerland, Germany, West Africa, Spain and Italy participated. Key issue for discussion has been the increasing danger for workers health and for the whole transportation sector because of the retrenchments and reorganizations of the rail and train stations. Retrenchment has led to increased Technical malfunctioning and employee stress. Passengers and rail users are more dissatisfied with the service and this has spilled over onto how they relate to rail employees. Accidents in 2009 in Italy (Viareggio) and Senegal (Dakar-Niger Express) have caused both worker and civilian deaths.

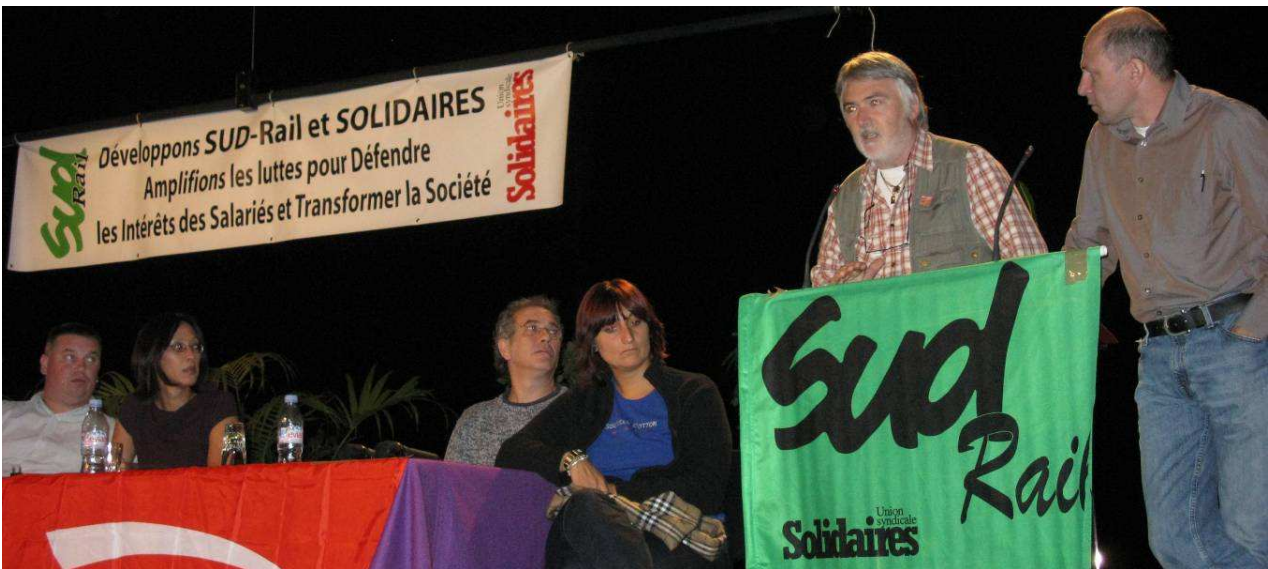
The cooperation between rail unions will be intensified and joint actions will be organized in 2010.

5. Congress of the Sud-Rail railway unions in St. Jean des Monts, France

Develop Sud - Rail and Solidaire - broaden the struggles for the defence of the interests of wage earners and for social transformation /



Sud-Rail held its 5th Congress in a period in which privatization of French railways, from both the state and management, is accelerating. 280 delegates from all over France came together. Also invited were railway unionists from England (RMT), Italy (ORSA), Spain (CGT), Switzerland (Officina from Bellinzona), the Basque Country, West Africa and from Germany ("The Railways from below", "Transparency for the rank-and-file" from the Berlin suburban railways and tie-global).



On the agenda in France is the privatisation of passenger traffic and freight and the splitting up of the single rail company SNCF into many subsidiaries and branches. The Sud-Rail organises all employees who work directly for the railways as well as all those who work in jobs associated with the railways. These include the “sans-papiers” - security guards in and around the railway stations and the train cleaners, who work for private companies. Hence the colleagues at the conference not only come from very different working environments, but also from very different local and regional contexts. These large differences are especially noticeable at such a congress. For instance, there is great difference being active at one of the major railway stations in Paris or Marseille or in one of the smaller towns.



Sud-Rail has a federal structure; the local trade union groups are autonomous and are not subject to centralism. From the various regions representatives are elected to the Federal bureau.

Sud Rail is also very active in building an international network of railway unions in Europe and in Africa.

Simultaneously, a Transportation Federation - UST – is being built for trade unions in the transportation sector / HGVs / - urban transport metro-tram-bus / ferries / taxis / and Sud Solidaires as the single overarching trade union movement in which the various sectors of society / federated public service /

industry / chemicals etc. / are federated.

Topics discussed at the International meeting at the SUD Congress:

- The analysis of the large strikes 2007 / 2008 for the retention of pension schemes for railway workers which despite the high mobilisation could not prevent their deterioration in the future.
- The increasing technical and infrastructural shortcomings of railway operations - similar to the urban railways in Berlin - which generates increasing burdens on workers and provokes as well growing passenger discontent.
- In the discussion at the international round table one learned that in Italy, England and Germany the situation is similar. A TIE participant read a letter from the Berlin group, "Transparency for the rank-and-file". Participants from "The Railways from Below" Initiative reported on their activities. Last year TIE organised a meeting between the TFB (the group "Transparency for the rank-and-file) and Sud Rail. In December 2009 of the Sud-Rail will be coming to Berlin to continue the process of exchange.



Striking for us was the lively, critical debate, marked by respect and held in a spirit of solidarity. One of the main issues was to find quick answers to the organisational restructuring of the railways and their operations. "Should the union reflect the new company structure or try to develop strategic forms of organisation that are autonomous from the hectic pace of restructuring of the SNCF?"



Of course there are big differences in their experience and how broadly based the local trade union groups are. Working with other unions - the CGT in particular - is also very different, sometimes marked by competition and tension. Nevertheless, there are often alliances at a national level. There are also transfers from other railway unions, especially after the last big strike against pension reform. Sud-Rail is strongly anchored among the employees who work in the railway facilities which are the traditional base of established unions like the CGT.

All in all, the congress brought together participants from Dakar, Oran, Tunis, London, Bellinzona, Berlin, Cologne, Marseille, Paris, Montreuil, Metz, and many other places. They experienced how pleasant it is to be "peuple communiste" for 5 days, to think and to argue about social transformation and emancipatory processes in society and the role of a union as a tool to encourage creative and militant self-activity of the railway workers, to promote and provide practical support, to develop cooperative skills, and to transform themselves and society.