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Anti-war action

Railway sabotage in Belarus: railway workers in action

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In the aftermath of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Executive Committee of the Congress of Democratic Trade Unions of Belarus stated: "We wish to assure you, dear Ukrainians, that the vast majority of Belarusians, including workers, condemn the reckless actions of the present Belarusian regime in tolerating the Russian aggression against Ukraine. We demand an immediate halt to hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, as well as from Belarus."

A trade union statement should never be taken lightly. Especially in times of war. Russian military logistics and the Belarusian railway management were to learn this the hard way. According to the human rights centre Viasna, eight Belarusian railway workers were arrested at the beginning of the war for sabotage against a Russian military railway transport.

A few days later, on 2 March, 43-year-old Alyaksei Shyshkavets, a resident of Asipovichy (a major railway junction), was arrested. According to the Ministry of the Interior, he was preparing to carry out acts of sabotage to prevent the movement of certain trains. Two other people were also arrested in Staubtsy on the night of 1 to 2 March. Another "saboteur" was reportedly arrested in Zhodzina on 2 March. At the beginning of March, railway workers reported that rail transport of Russian military equipment and ammunition had stopped crossing Belarus because of the numerous sabotages. In view of the scale of the phenomenon, the Russian agency TASS announced that the Belarusian Prosecutor General had opened a criminal investigation into what it called "acts of terrorism perpetrated by an organised group against the Belarusian railway infrastructure". He acknowledged that signalling facilities and other transport equipment had been rendered "unusable". The arrested railway workers face up to fifteen years in prison. Despite the threats, the sabotage continues.

On 6 March, Siarhei Kanavalau, a Belarusian railway employee, was arrested in Vitsebsk. According to the Ministry of the Interior, he had planned to disable the railway security systems. In Svetlahorsk, a railway signalling unit is set on fire. The police accused three Svetlahorsk residents of this damage. Since then, dozens of acts of railway sabotage have been committed. This is evidenced by the videos posted on a pro-Russian Telegram channel (TG) in which 38 railway workers admit, in a staging worthy of the Moscow trials, to having committed acts of sabotage and being under foreign influence [see photo below].

On 19 March, the newspaper *Novy Chas* reported on twelve railway sabotages that paralysed the rail network, preventing wagons carrying Russian military equipment from reaching the Ukrainian border. On the night of 16 March, on the Farinovo-Zagattya section, the alarm relay box was set on fire.

On 20 March, Oleksandr Kamyshin [who lives semi-clandestinely because he is wanted by the Russian army: see *Ouest France*, 20 March 2022], chairman of the board of directors of Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railways), announced that there was no longer a rail link between Ukraine and Belarus. He thanked the Belarusian railway workers for their quick response to the war. "I recently called on the Belarusian railways not to carry out the criminal orders of their president and to refuse to transport Russian military personnel to Ukraine. Today I am pleased to announce that there is no rail link between Ukraine and Belarus. I won't go into details, but I am very grateful to the Belarusian railways for their quick reaction," he adds wryly.

On 25 March, rail links with Belarus were still suspended. The information was given in a Facebook post by Vitaly Koval, the Ukrainian governor of the Rivne region (north-west Ukraine). In this message published on social networks, Vitaly Koval called it "important news" for the Ukrainian people and expressed his gratitude to railway

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workers for their efforts and concluded: "My friends, the railway connection with the Republic of Belarus has stopped. This means that Russia will no longer be able to supply military equipment and supplies to the occupiers via the Belarusian railway. For more than a month, sabotage has been going on and Russian military rail transport has been largely impeded.

Faced with these unexpected "difficulties", Belarusian railways may be subjected to a large-scale "purge", in which "unreliable employees" are dismissed, says a Belarusian railway workers' encrypted channel. Troops of special units are stationed along railway lines. Some of these armed patrols are said to be in civilian clothes, equipped with walkie-talkies and GPS trackers. They reportedly set up their tents near the tracks.

On 30 March, a squad of these soldiers opened fire on a group of railway workers-partisans in action. The shots were heard near the Babina stop in the Babruisk district (Asipovichy-Zhlobin section). The partisans had opened two relay cabinets (necessary for railway signalling). They managed to set one of them on fire. Until a group of soldiers who were in the woods and were supposed to guard the equipment opened fire. However, the partisans managed to escape.

According to the Belarusian website *Zerkalo* (30 March), at least 40 railway workers are in the hands of the Belarusian KGB. In addition, four other railway workers, including a train driver, are being held in Gomel, at least one of whom has been placed in the KGB's temporary detention centre. All were reportedly subscribers to the encrypted channel "Community of Belarusian Railway Workers", which is denounced as an extremist group.

Translated by [International Viewpoint](#) from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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