

THE COMPANY OF MASTER MARINERS OF INDIA

The Hon. Peter Morris,
Chairman,
International Commission on Shipping,
Canberra, Australia.

Dear Mr. Morris,

I thank you for your letter dated 14th June, 2000 and do appreciate the fact that you have given me the opportunity as the Managing Director of Wilco Shipmanagement, to participate in the task that you have undertaken on behalf of the Commission. I sincerely, regret the delay in replying and note that you had originally addressed a letter to me, dated 6th April, 2000 and it appears that the same has been misplaced in transit. Your letter of the 14th of June, 2000, which arrived in my office at a time when I was travelling and was away on vacation. I therefore, viewed your letter only during the first week of July 2000, by which time, the date of submission stipulated by you was over.

All the same, I did go through your 'brief' and instead of replying to the same, as an individual or the Managing Director of Wilco, I decided to take up the matter with the members of "The Company of Master Mariners of India", (which is an Association of Senior Master Mariners in India). I presently head this organisation as its "MASTER". After discussion on this subject with my senior colleagues of the Company, we have the following comments to make and I do hope that our submission will be considered, even though the same has gone beyond your submission date.

The present scenario in Shipping certainly needs a high level Commission to consider its problems and to seek out the same in an orderly manner, so that a long term solution can be found.

What is wrong with the Industry?

- 1) Excessive Tonnage.
- 2) Some ship owners/operators who are committed to "profits at all cost".
- 3) Low freight rates.
- 4) No incentives to ship owners/managers who maintain their vessels to the highest standards.
- 5) Flag states preferential treatment to its own vessels.
- 6) A drastic reduction in Manning levels, and
- 7) A whole lot of regulations by national and international organisations, which have been introduced from time to time as a knee jerk reaction to casualties.

Over the years, poorly trained manpower was considered to be a major factor, resulting in sub-standard operations, but as casualties are now been investigated and training has developed all around, the same is no more a major flogging horse. However, a reduced manning has indeed introduced fatigue and severe stress for the shipboard personnel.

Shipping is one transport industry, which attracts the attention of the entire world, only when there is a casualty. It is the same casualty that then becomes the topic for discussion by the "pundits" who do not know the first thing about shipping. Soon thereafter, a new regulation gets introduced and is claimed to be solution for all the shipping ills!

Shipping has another unique characteristic. In that, a great deal of people are involved and control shipping operations and the same results in everyone pointing a finger at one another at the drop of a hat. There being so many parties involved, most of the involved persons escape scot-free except the Master and the Crew.

So what is the solution?

In the years gone by, the Master of the ship was "THE MASTER". He was as much concerned with the adventure that lay before him as his own life. He did not have the axe of a "sack" hanging over his head, neither were there so many organisations to interfere with his job. Today, the Master, should have been in a happier frame of mind, as he has his Superintendents, Managers, Class Surveyors, P and I and many more to give him advice constantly. All these unfortunately, increased his worries and tensions, as he had no say in the preparations, but is expected to take the burden when the ship is at sea. God only helps him thereafter and if anything were to go wrong, he would most certainly end up in a jail like a common criminal. Whilst, the rest of the parties keep pointing fingers, mostly at him, "The Master". Where would you find a better flogging horse, especially when he is stuck behind bars in a foreign country, trying to defend himself against local laws?

A great deal of emphasis has been put on sub-standard ships, sub-standard registries and sub-standard owners and more often the "Flag of Convenience" have been considered as having sub-standard ships. Here again, it is necessary to look into the other aspects namely, who the ship owners/managers are? We believe that a prudent owner/manager will most certainly operate safe and efficient ships, even if the vessel is registered in what is labelled as a sub-standard registry. In contrast, a bad owner or manager operating a vessel belonging to a standard registry, may not be operating safely. It is therefore essential, that the vessel's performance should be the main criteria to decide on the standard and quality of the owner/manager or the registry. The registries should be judged by their fleet performance and performance of the owners and managers and this should be the criteria for deciding on sub-standard registries or ship operators.

As I mentioned earlier, it is the casualties that the Shipping Industry is recognised by. It was once said at one of the seminars, that "nobody talks about 99 per cent of the cargoes that gets transported safely, but as soon as one drop of oil is spilt, all hell breaks loose". It is not my intention to defend accidents or environmental pollution, but let us realise that we live in a real world where everything is not perfect.

We have though, not totally been successful in introducing ISM, STCW and PSC. In addition, we are talking about quality in all aspects of the Maritime Industry. The Industry is also looking at changes in the attitudes of the seafarers as well as the cultural environment. Whilst equipment or retrofitting can be done overnight, the changing attitudes and work culture takes a much longer time and I get the feeling that we are already beginning to see the change for the better.

We have also identified the why and how of the sub-standard ships. We have also identified that at times there is a resource crunch. Industry organisations should now come forward to implement their own development and take a leading role in changing the hearts of ship owners and managers and financiers, who are now at the helm of affairs.

Whatever you do, spare the Master and his Crew, since we believe, that if more pressure is applied on them there will definitely be a backlash in the end.

Finally, we would like to wish you all the very best in your efforts.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

CAPTAIN K. GUHA,
MASTER
THE COMPANY OF MASTER MARINERS OF INDIA
ALSO
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WILCO SHIPMANAGEMENT LIMITED

25 July 2000