

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON SHIPPING

Attention: The Hon. Peter Morris

We write concerning your invitation to comment on the work of your Commissions, and would begin by saying that we heartily support the initiative of the International Transport Workers Federation in sponsoring your study.

In our opinion, the systems which are presently in place have failed to create a safe and viable shipping industry, and we believe a radical approach is the only way to solve the problems described in your information paper. Some of our ideas are outlined in the sections which follow.

1. Manning and Training

There is nothing very difficult about the skills required to run a ship safely and efficiently - an ability to navigate and monitor the vessel's position, to calculate loading and stability data and to maintain and operate machinery can all be mastered by reasonably sensible people. The problem seems to be that the developed world has lost sight of this basic simplicity and wandered into the realms of higher education whilst, too often, the developing world has failed to meet even the basic requirements of maritime education and training.

As a British deck cadet some thirty years ago, I was expected to master such useless items as calculus, nuclear physics and the waveform at various points in a radar set. None of this knowledge has ever been required in my career in shipping. On the other hand, I was never once shown a full set of ship's stability workings.

It is high time that maritime training was revised to focus on the practical requirements of a seafaring career. Degrees and other more academic studies should only be offered once individuals have obtained a Master's or Chief Engineer's certificate and served time in those ranks. For officers who wish to leave the sea and go into management, surveying etc., there could then be a series of further training choices. Such a system would ensure a steady supply of useful crew members at a reasonable cost, and provide a career path which would take individuals as far as they wish to go in the industry.

Naturally, training and examination would have to be strictly monitored by an independent body to ensure an acceptable global standard.

2. Regulation

The very existence of schemes such as the ISM Code herald the fact that the present system of regulating and monitoring shipping has failed miserably. Governments and registers increasingly lack the resources and manpower necessary to administer their fleets, and have abrogated their responsibilities to independent surveyors or the classification societies. In other words, regulation has become commercialised, and commercial considerations have increasingly been permitted to outweigh safety or regulatory factors.

Some efforts have been made to halt the decline in standards but, all too often, the people who caused the decline are permitted to become involved in the attempted remedies, the involvement of the classification societies in ISM Code audits is just one example.

We certainly do not need more rules and regulations, there are probably too many as it is, but we do need a system which guarantees enforcement of existing regulations. Once again, an international body staffed by well-paid professional surveyors would appear to be the answer.

It is worth noting that, amongst all the horror stories, there are still a good number of companies which run their ships efficiently and well, and manage to compete in the marketplace. We believe it would not be impossible to ensure that all companies meet the same standard. Indeed, it should be feasible to create an industry where it becomes impossible not to meet the standard. No doubt some will argue that our ideas have implications for national sovereignty or would disadvantage the poorer nations, but we do not believe this to be the case. A more practical training regime is likely to be cheaper than the existing system, and there are numerous examples of industries which have adopted international standards.

We believe a system such as the one we propose would work well, and produce a better seafarer. It would also open the profession to practical young men and women who might not meet the present academic requirements.

Classification societies could then return to their roots and confine themselves to setting and monitoring standards for design and construction, whilst governments could maintain their policing role through port state and flag state inspections.

Nautical colleges could still satisfy their desire for university status by offering degrees, but only after seafarers had obtained professional qualifications.

We see no reason why the proposed arrangements should not be better and cheaper than our present unsatisfactory and cumbersome system. Finally, we do not accept the need to reward reputable shipping companies. Rather, we prefer to see a system which makes it impossible for sub-standard operators to continue doing business.

We trust this will be useful.

Best regards,

Alan Loynd

12 May 2000