

Transcript of Interview on 16 July 2000 with Mr. Paul Tolhurst, Chaplain's Assistant, The Mission to Seafarers/Stella Maris, Yokohama.

From daily contact with seamen, both officers and crew, eight or nine cases of complaints were heard in the last 10 months, mostly from the crew.

Examples of complaints are about wages not paid or delayed, extra work demanded by the captain outside normal work, no overtime payments, no observance of recess time, dangerous condition of the ship, etc.

One of the worst examples was a case where a Filipino crew member who was on bad terms with the Indian Captain - stated that the Captain was incompetent and blamed his failures the crew member concerned. Because of this and the Captain's personality, he jumped ship in Nagoya port. He wrote to the Mission in detail later, stating complaints about the safety of the ship and the Captain's lack of competency. (Copy to be sent later.)

Some captains complained of the time pressure exerted by the owner, and stated that this led to them demanding more from their crews. Some contracts were totally unjustifiable: one contract between a Korean-owned ship with Korean Captain and Burmese crew gave the Captain all the powers to order any type of work without extra pay and prohibited the crew from making outside contacts with seafarers' welfare agencies. (Copy to be sent later)

Some contracts treat officers with better conditions, like 4 months work and 4 months off; while the crew gets a contract for 10 or 12 months work , 2 month off. However most crews are given vacation leave to their discretion - they tend to return to the ship when they need to earn more money.

Ships with different nationalities sometimes cause complaints, but for the most part, they are not bad. One German Company, Oldendorff - now Cypriot-controlled? - (which refused to cooperate with ITF) is doing an excellent job in making it a policy to recruit crews with several different nationalities. All crews are very happy and willing to work. One example of this is Hugo Oldendorff - a bulk carrier with 22 crew members on board; this crew is taken from 11 different countries.

Examples of bad FOCs are Belize, Cambodia, Cyprus and St. Vincent. Belize has apparently no standard to apply. Liberia's ships are very large and usually no complaints are heard. Panamanian ships are also getting better. The standards are much better now that they were at the start of 'convenience' registries.

Some private berths do not allow the Mission to visit ships; sometimes this is due to security (as in oil/chemical/gas terminals) or company policy.

Suggestions for improving the situation:

1. Since ships try to comply with standards at the beginning when they are registered and subsequently their quality goes down, more random checking should be made. The inspecting authorities should also be given more powers to enforce regulations, arrest and so on. Threats will not work forever.
2. The evaluation system of the crew members upon leaving job should be improved. The current system where the captain gives final marks, such as Good or VG, tends to reflect too many personal feelings and opinions of the Captain and cannot be entirely objective - could be detrimental to the seafarer.
3. Substandard ships tend to avoid big ports; something should be done to go after them in smaller ports as well; the smaller ports usually have no checking/inspecting carried out and 'dangerous' ships can escape.
4. Strategies should be against ships as well as owners, masters, charterers, cargo owners, shippers, etc., making responsibilities of each clearer. All parties involved with the carriage of goods by sea have a part to play in keeping the vessel and its cargo safe, as well as the health and lives of those employed onboard.

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