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## Can the new Mr. IMO beat the budget blues ?

Anonymous

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## Can the new Mr. IMO beat the budget blues?

**W**ILLIAM A. O'NEIL is about to take on the challenge of his life. When this 62-year-old Canadian assumes the Secretary Generalship of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on January 1, 1990—taking over for retiring Secretary General Chandrika Srivastava—he will be charged with curing the budgetary headache that has plagued the organization for several years. He will also be responsible for maintaining the organization's work program despite the IMO's serious financial woes.

The monetary malady is a direct result of nonpayment of dues by member countries. Lack of funds has already caused the present IMO council to cut the number of meetings in 1989 in half. Included in this cutback, eight meetings of sub-committees of the Maritime Safety Council have been cancelled.

Member countries are charged IMO membership dues on a registered tonnage basis. This makes for a situation where the United States—regrettably one of the offenders—contributes only five percent of the IMO budget whereas countries such as Panama and Liberia contribute substantially more. Out of a total of about £5 million in uncollected dues, Panama alone is responsible for close to half of the arrears, while Japan, the United States and Liberia—in that order—are responsible for another £2 million.

Adding to the problem, the IMO has very few sanctions against countries that don't pay their dues, according to O'Neil. Non-payers can be refused the right to vote, he says, "but we vote on so few things that this is actually a hollow sanction." He suggests that some stricter sanctions might be imposed against non-



payers under his administration.

Despite the severity of the money situation, O'Neil is undaunted on the eve of assuming the responsibilities of a "senior international civil service officer." The senior position at the IMO seems a natural progression for this much-honored Canadian who has been serving as the president of the Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway Authority since 1980, and the chairman of council of the IMO since 1979. "I'm looking forward to it, and I'm very enthusiastic," he says.

O'Neil's key concern, beyond the budget, is making sure that the IMO stays its course. "The financial issue can take a lot of time, but it's really an internal problem," he says. O'Neil refuses to let the organization get sidetracked by the budget problem, and emphasizes that insuring safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment will remain the top issues on the IMO's agenda. On the question of whether the budgetary restraints are affecting international safety legislation from moving ahead, O'Neil answers cautiously. "Not so far. We'll have to keep the work program going. You can't slip back on safety. If there's a vacuum in what we're doing, someone else will fill it."

O'Neil says the environmental issue is particularly in the forefront since the *Exxon Valdez* disaster. And while that specific problem is not an IMO problem, he thinks it does speak to the need for the IMO to provide ongoing maritime training programs. "Something like the oil spill always raises questions as to what happened," says O'Neil. He says the IMO is concerned that too many maritime accidents are the result of human error. **ML**