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SATT looks to rebuild after board changes

PORT users have welcomed improvements made during the last two years at the Port of Spain.

The Shipping Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SATT) is now directly represented on the port's board and the Port Users Group, in which the association also has a voice, meets regularly with port management.

SATT's main grievance at the moment has more to do with the Minister of Finance than the port administration. The minister has imposed VAT on port services, which SATT's members, the shipping agents, have to pay out of their own pockets but since their principals, the shipowners, are exempt, the agents have to pay the cost until they can get refunds from the VAT office.

SATT president Pat Lawlor said: "This is costing our members something like TT\$10m a month." He said he would not be surprised if some of the smaller agents went out of business because of it.

SATT has already seen a thin-

ning out of its membership with the fall in imports in recent years and the virtual disappearance of transshipment trade. Its members now number 38.

But Mr Lawlor, is determined to rebuild SATT and widen its appeal. "I want people like ship's engineers, ship chandlers, ships surveyors to join — anybody who has some interest in shipping and the operation of the ports," he said.

One of the lapsed members he would like to see return is the government-owned Shipping Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (Scott) which quit the association a few years ago over an argument about conditions on the docks. Scott has since announced the closure of its liner department but Mr Lawlor would still like to get it back into SATT's fold. He is himself a former general manager of the line.

Although relations with the port are good at the moment, Mr Lawlor believes that the high bunkering charge in Port of Spain, pushes up the cost of using the port unnecessarily and

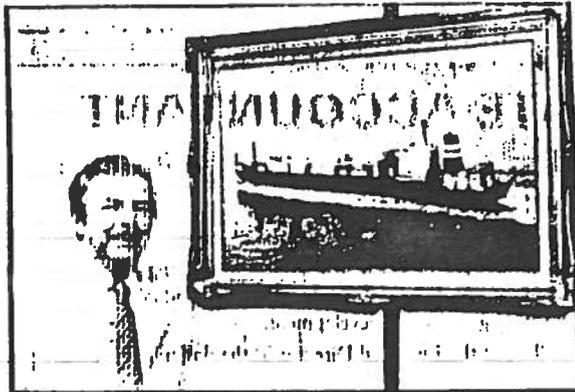
might frustrate the authority's ambition to attract transshipment business back to Trinidad.

"Believe it or not, although we produce petroleum products here, bunkering is more expensive in Port of Spain than in New York," he said. When he was general manager of Scott, Mr Lawlor never took on bunkers in Port of Spain, even though this was the home base of his ships.

He said that bunkering facilities also needed to be re-organised. "The system used is to send a barge from the refinery down the coast and this incurs a barge fee as well. Bunkers should be supplied by pipeline from the port area itself."

Mr Lawlor, who was born in Ireland but has lived in Trinidad since the 1950s, remembers the days when as many as 30 ships used to call at Port of Spain solely for the purpose of taking on fuel.

SATT supports the port authority's desire to attract cruise ships to Port of Spain



SATT president Pat Lawlor is optimistic about the future.

because it means business for its members. But Mr Lawlor does not believe that the port can prosper from non cargo-handling activities such as cruise shipping, land development and equipment rental at the expense of its traditional business.

"I agree that the amount of domestic cargo imported in the future is unlikely to grow very much," he said. "But transshipment has potential, if costs can be kept down. This is where SATT should be concentrating its energies. It will always make more money from a cargo vessel than a cruise ship".

Mr Lawlor is mildly optimistic about 1990. He believes that the economic recession may finally have bottomed out and that the current year will see a small improvement in cargo movements, especially on the export side, as local manufacturers have more and more success in overseas markets. He also hopes that lines such as Nedlloyd will decide to bring more of their transshipment cargo back to Port of Spain.

His term of office ends next month and it is likely that he will be re-elected.

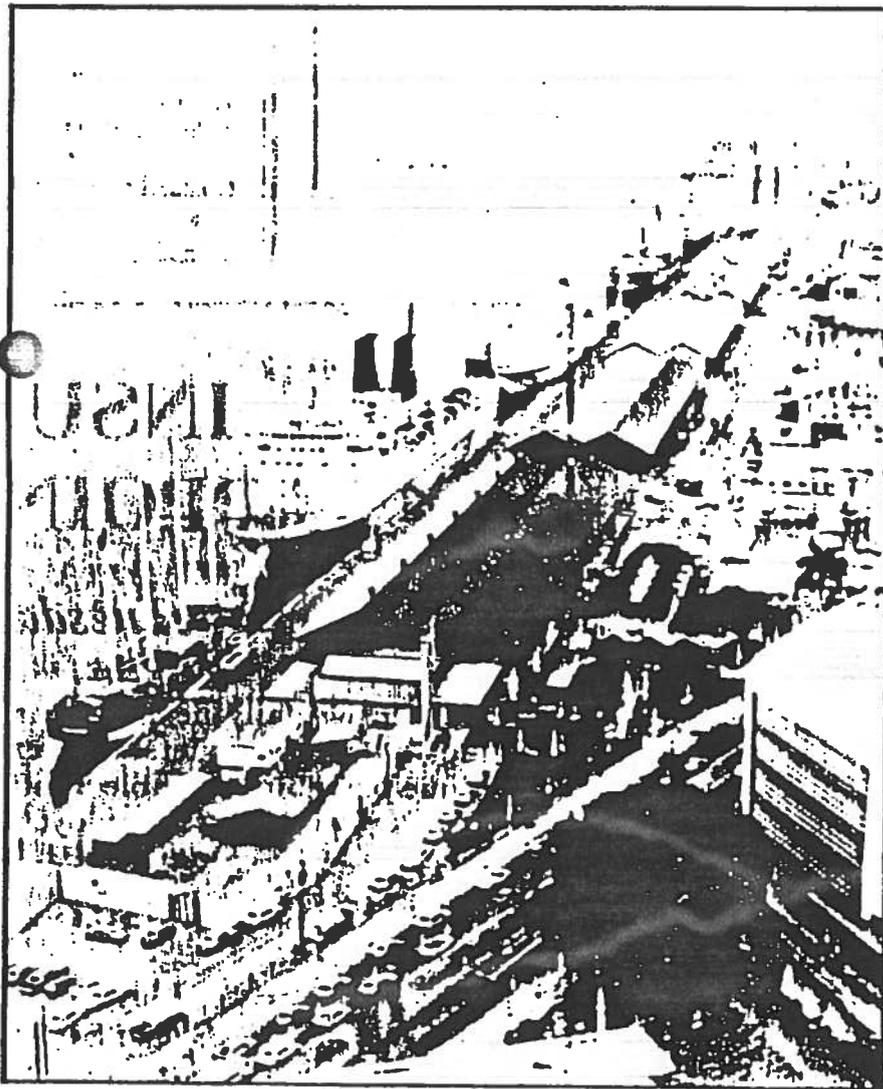
Before he finally leaves the SATT presidency he wants more progress on the question of maritime training at the administrative and commercial levels.

Some training of marine cadets takes place in Trinidad and Tobago but not at shore staff level. Few of the people running shipping agencies in the country have had formal training in their trade.

Mr Lawlor would like to see SATT take the lead in establishing such training in conjunction with the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Trinidad, and the World Maritime University in Malmo, Sweden.

He is confident that funding would be easily obtainable from the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In his other capacity as a partner in the maritime consultancy firm, Caribbean Line, Mr Lawlor is involved in training assignments and feels strongly that such training should be made available in the formal educational system, so that the maritime industry could become just as "respectable" in the eyes of the young as any other.



SATT supports the port authority's desire to attract more cruise ships to the Port of Spain port.