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Voting takes place for the new Secretary General of the International Maritime Organisation in less than two weeks. Shipping Correspondent JOHN LANDELLS spoke to Canada’s candidate William O’Neil.

William O’Neil (right), 61, of Canada, has been president of the St Lawrence Seaway Authority since 1980 and chairman of the Council of the International Maritime Organisation since 1979.

He is a director of Canartic Shipping Company, chairman of the Canadian Committee of Lloyd’s Register of Shipping and delegate to the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congresses and Canadian representative to the Council of the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative organisation.

international approach to shipping.

“I believe I have got the management capability to bring to this organisation and I am very interested in the technical side,” he said.

“I know the problems relating to technical co-operation but there is no point dealing in a theoretical way with an industry which is very practical. You have got to get the two blended and we in IMO cannot lose sight of that fact.”

With environmental concern growing, he said it was important that IMO sustained its leading role in the maritime world and it could point to the anti-pollution conventions it had passed long before “green” policies became fashionable.

But in pushing ahead, he believes it is vital not to lose sight of the capabilities of the shipping industry to make effective changes.

“We are involved in an industry which in the last few years has had financial difficulties and there is a need to balance the desire for technical perfection with the realities of the world as they are.

“We have to examine issues very carefully and take a critical approach but we have to be aware of the changes taking place in international shipping regarding flagging, smaller crews and greater use of technology.

“Technical people always want to be at the forefront of change, while operators stress economic considerations. We have to be careful with legislation, as retrofitting can be very expensive, whereas changing designs can be adapted in new ships fairly easily.

“With advancing technology you have to recognise that some operators do not want to go down this road as quickly as others. Even developed countries can only swallow so much.”

It is therefore necessary, he said, to emphasise the importance of training and education, so that new rules and regulations could be implemented effectively on board ships.