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Anonymous

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Pay up, pay up and play the game

When the new Canadian IMO Secretary General W.A.O'Neil takes over from the well respected C.P. Srivastava at the beginning of 1990, he will bring with him a taste of North American-style management.

"THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME Organisation (IMO) is a United Nations 'model agency' which functions efficiently and effectively." A nice compliment but, more importantly, the words reflect the opinion of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations, appointed by the UN General Assembly.

All the more ironic, therefore, that the Indian IMO Secretary General C.P. Srivastava, after 16 years of running a tight ship to tight budgets, is handing over to his Canadian successor W. A. O'Neil what might euphemistically be called a negative cash flow situation. So negative, in fact, that defaulting IMO members owe some £3.3 million.

Bill O'Neil is a friendly guy but he tells it like it is, "The countries who are IMO members decided they wanted their organisation to do certain things related to safer shipping and cleaner seas, so they have to provide the funds. Otherwise, if we don't maintain our role and meet our mandate, some other organisation will step in. If there's a void there's always someone ready to move into your parish.

"If you have people who are making rules about ships and they don't know the pointed end from the blunt end, the whole of the industry could find itself in some difficulty. That bothers me. I think the industry is better and well served by an organisation like IMO."

Bill O'Neil is currently looking for a flat in London near IMO's office because the disadvantages of suburbia and travelling by British Rail soon became obvious. His wife will be joining him before the end of the year and he's already gone native to the extent

that he's decided the best way to get around the capital is by tube.

As the former Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, President of the St Lawrence Seaway and director of the Canarctic Shipping Company, he'll be bringing a whiff of North American-style management to the job of IMO Secretary General. But, as for IMO's current problems, he's fully informed, having served as Chairman of its Council since 1980. Because of this he can maintain a sense of proportion about the money, or lack of it:

"I don't think it's had a serious impact until now. We've been able to sustain the momentum in the organisation with a reasonable number of meetings of the various committees and sub-committees. If we have to cut back on these it could be very serious. Of course it affects the staff, because they know the financial situation and are concerned for their future."

To get the money in he thinks IMO will have to go beyond nagging the delinquent flag states and relying on the ineffectual threat of denying them the right to vote.

"We've got to find some other means of persuading governments to cough up the money. I am thinking of some sort of link between the shipowner, the Government, the flag state and IMO so that pressure is put on the flag state by the shipowner to meet their financial obligations to IMO."

As much as it can be, IMO is a non political organisation. It is directed towards technical matters and pressure, when it is exerted, comes somewhat from the member flag states but mostly from concerned shipowners who worry about being over regulated. Shipowners recognise that they have an obligation to operate their ships safely and protect the environment but what they don't want is to be put in an uneconomical position by IMO regulations, particularly if there is any

degree of retro-fitting required.

Bill O'Neil sympathises with the shipowner, "They are ready to accept improved standards for newbuildings but they don't want the standards changed during the course of building. And, most importantly, they want everyone to be on the same footing so that competitors don't gain an edge because a way has been found to bend the regulations, or the flag state turns a blind eye."

Over regulation is a very real issue. IMO churns out a tremendous amount of regulations, standards and codes and it's difficult enough for developed countries to absorb the mass of information and embody it in national legislation. How much more difficult is it for the developing countries which lack the technical expertise?

"It's essential that we take steps to give them that technical expertise," says Bill O'Neil. "That's one reason we have Technical Co-operation and the World Maritime University where people from the developing countries can learn how to translate all these IMO regulations into workable form in their own countries. A lot of developing countries are major operators in shipping, certainly as far as crewing is concerned, so they have a distinct interest in the safety of ships and their sailors."

One situation that constantly faces IMO is persuading member states to ratify conventions and introduce national legislation to implement Codes and Recommendations. Generally it is not lack of will that causes delay but the sheer practical problems of drafting the legislation and finding time in the legislative calendar to bring it before Parliament. Of course if a member state has no vital interest in

the matter it becomes displaced by more urgent legislation and sinks to the bottom of the list of governmental priorities.

What irritates Bill O'Neil is that none of these regulations are IMO's idea in the first place. They all originate because of a concern voiced by a member state or states. "Let's face it, the reason we develop a Convention is because usually some casualty or tragedy has happened which has generated interest in that particular subject. IMO is the forum where the interested countries can get together to take international action with respect to any particular problem. Every time I read of a casualty I expect something to be brought to IMO's attention. The *Herald of Free Enterprise* and the *Achille Lauro* were both examples—as were of course many pollution accidents such as the *Exxon Valdez*."

The MARPOL anti-pollution regulations are a landmark in IMO's policy of 'Safe ships and clean seas'. MARPOL's five annexes deal with the prevention of pollution from oil, bulk chemicals, packaged chemicals, sewage and garbage. There is now a suggestion that IMO should take a lead in the prevention of atmospheric pollution from ships. This can be a serious problem in certain ports where hazardous chemicals and substances are being trans-shipped.

However, some shipowners take the view that IMO should not get involved and should stick to the oceans and the seas. Bill O'Neil's view is, "If we don't look at air pollution generated by ships, then somebody else will. More than that, they may well decree that certain cargoes cannot be carried by ships at all. I think IMO can take a more positive line, recognising that these cargoes have to be carried and trans-shipped but at the same time finding a safe economical way of doing it without polluting the atmosphere."

A sore point with some shipowners is that the MARPOL regulations have cost them money by requiring them to fit segregated ballast tanks and other anti-pollution items, while the shore facilities for receiving the oil wastes are non-existent in some ports. "I'm very sympathetic to the shipowner about this", says Bill O'Neil. "They've spent a lot of money improving a lot of things. But we must keep in mind that IMO does not have any authority

to act as an enforcement agency. All IMO can do is to demonstrate that the shipping industry is meeting its obligations and try to convince governments that they should meet theirs."

In the development of IMO's legislative proposals a number of external bodies are available to provide specialised technical advice. They include the International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Standards Organisation (ISO), International



Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the International Association of Classification Societies (IACS). Bill O'Neil rates them all highly.

"Which body we would go to for advice depends on the kind of regulation or convention we are developing. We are certainly not staffed to have that level of expertise in every field. I see IACS, for instance, as the expert body with respect to those matters relating to ship matters in their field of competence such as classification items, modifications in design and safety equipment. They deal with these things on a daily hands-on basis and when we need that kind of input at IMO, then IACS is the only place to go."

One member of IACS, namely Lloyd's Register of Shipping, concerned about marine casualties, designed and built a voyage data recorder—a maritime 'Black Box'. Shipowners looked at the device but,

in general, didn't rush out to buy it. A valid sore point with LR?

"Like a lot of other things the shipowner sees any bit of equipment as an extra cost. Unless there's some demonstrable pay off or perceived absolute requirement, they won't buy it. Shipowners have been reluctant to introduce changes unless the economics are there, but things are getting better. Shipowners are sensible people and no longer is shipping the dinosaur of transportation."

As Bill O'Neil prepares to lead IMO into the 90s the vast pollution caused by the *Exxon Valdez* has emphasised the direction in which he feels IMO should go. It was also the theme of a recent World Maritime Day—shipboard management.

"IMO has to look at what future changes will have to be introduced", he says, "One of them is surely dealing with personnel—maintaining high standards of ships' crews and appropriate levels of manning. I don't think it's really a classification society matter. It's the concern all of us have with reducing the cost of operating ships and still maintaining safety standards—the one man bridge, for example.

"We will have to resolve whether one man can stand a watch alone with all the pressure and responsibility. And for how long? Or would it be psychologically better to have two men on the bridge?"

Whatever the outcome of IMO's deliberations on ship management matters he feels that the way ahead is much closer co-operation between the various government administrations, shipowners and IMO. "We're all in this together", he comments, "and we're all trying to get to the same end. We all want to see shipowners making money, otherwise there won't be any shipping industry at all. After we've seen what they have been through in the last ten years it's nice to see at last a much healthier industry coming through today."

Bill O'Neil is a pragmatist. He knows that every time a ship puts to sea there is a certain risk and that this must be balanced against the cost of providing safety measures. Not only that. The cost of not providing them must be weighed up too! For, as he observes drily, "After a major pollution incident money doesn't seem to be any object."