Steering clear of the shoals: In spite of a severe cash crisis and the departure of its current secretary-general after 16 years of outstanding leadership the International Maritime Organisation is moving into the 1990s with reasonable confidence.

Anonymous
The biggest-ever meeting of the International Maritime Organisation’s Assembly, that agency’s supreme governing body, was held at the London headquarters from October 9 to 20. The Assembly meets every other autumn to agree IMO’s budget and work programme for the next two years. Attended by nearly 600 delegates from 123 of the IMO’s 133 member states, the 16th Assembly was, however, overshadowed by the Organisation’s severe financial difficulties. These difficulties are a direct result of substantial arrears in annual membership payments which are calculated on the basis of the merchant ship tonnage registered under the national flag of each member state (HCB March 1989, page 12).

Perhaps not surprisingly, large tonnage flag states such as Panama, Liberia, the Philippines and Cyprus have also accumulated large arrears in their membership dues. The extent of debt certainly influenced the 16th Assembly’s choice of members for the new Council, which is the IMO’s effective executive body consisting of 32 nations elected every two years. Thus, Liberia only just regained its council seat, although it had cleared the greater part of its arrears at the start of the 16th Assembly. Panama, which made a substantial part payment, did not regain its seat. It owed nearly half the total deficit of £5 million and is IMO’s second largest contributor providing 10 per cent of the Organisation’s funds. Other debtor nations, especially the developing countries, managed either to renew their Council membership, e.g. Brazil, or secure it for the first time, e.g. Philippines.

Although it may seem that IMO is in for a period of prolonged uncertainty, its secretariat and the member states are determined to make the best out of the means available and execute a reasonably substantial work programme.

**IMO SPIRIT PREVAILS**

It is significant that the 16th Assembly refrained from using the sole sanction available against defaulters under the Organisation’s constitution. According to Article 56 of the IMO Convention, govern-
12. For the period 1990-91, however, the Assembly agreed to a somewhat higher allocation and approved a total budget of just over £25.4 million and 42 meeting weeks.

PRIORITY CONCERNS
A total of 24 meeting weeks have been approved for 1990, including two which are to be paid for by the US and which will be devoted to a full-scale diplomatic conference on international cooperation on oil pollution preparedness and response. These and other issues that are to receive priority in the 1990-91 work programme are summarised below.

Oil spill response The US in particular hopes that IMO will succeed in adopting a new convention on oil spill emergency handling. This has been a high-priority objective of the US Coast Guard following the Exxon Valdez grounding in March 1989 and has also been supported by a special working party convened by Mr Srivastava in response to the Paris economic summit of June 1989 (HCB November 1989, page 15).

Maritime casualties The Assembly's October meeting adopted two resolutions concerning maritime casualties. One resolution urges more openness in the release of findings of maritime casualty investigations, which are required by a number of international treaties including the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention. It also calls for improved international coordination of studies into the influence of the human element in tanker casualties in particular (HCB November 1989, page 15).

The other resolution, which is based on a joint proposal of Liberia and the US originally submitted to the IMO Legal Committee (HCB May 1986, page 5), recommends cooperation between different national (flag and coastal state) authorities in maritime casualty investigations and outlines procedures to be followed when conducting them.

Transboundary hazardous waste movements A resolution was adopted requesting IMO's Maritime Safety, Marine Environment Protection and Legal Committees to consider any additional measures that may be needed in the light of the Basle Convention recently concluded by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and which may strengthen the proposed controls on the international transport of harmful wastes (HCB May and August 1989, pages 17 and 53).

Amongst the many other decisions taken by the Assembly's October meeting are a number of resolutions endorsing the work undertaken by the IMO's technical bodies:

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