

THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF BRITISH SHIPPING

BY

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Introduction

The General Council of British Shipping came into operation on 1st March 1975 following the merger of the Chamber of Shipping of the United Kingdom and the British Shipping Federation, both of which had been established for nearly a century.

Mr. F. B. Bolton, M.C., chairman of the Bolton Steam Shipping Company and vice-president of the Chamber, is the president of the new organization; and The Right Hon. the Earl of Inchcape, chairman of The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, is the vice-president.

The General Council of British Shipping (GCBS) is the voice and representative body of the British shipping industry, nationally and internationally, on all aspects of corporate policy. It represents over 200 British shipping companies owning or operating some 2200 ships totalling just over 50 million deadweight tons—the third largest fleet in the world, and is an incorporated company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital.

Historical Background

The Chamber of Shipping of the United Kingdom

The Chamber of Shipping was founded in 1878. Its objects and purposes, as defined by its Royal Charter, were 'to promote and protect the interests of British shipowners'.

At the start, the new Chamber of Shipping was little more than an association of local shipowner societies. Nevertheless, the first meeting, held in February 1878, lasted from 10 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the afternoon—quite a marathon performance compared with recent annual meetings of the Chamber, the proceedings of which were completed in little more than an hour.

Until 1914, the Chamber's organization was small, though adequate to cope with matters in those days. The first world war changed many things, however, and in 1917 the permanent staff was increased and a new constitution drawn up to cope with new developments.

Between the world wars, the Chamber's organization continued to expand. In 1921 the International Chamber of Shipping (then known as the International Shipping Conference), which is an association representing shipowners in various countries whose fleets are operated on a free enterprise basis, was established and administered from the Chamber, and the Chamber's domestic work was divided into sections dealing with the different types of tonnage.

The features of the Chamber's work, although ranging widely in nature, fell within a fairly predictable pattern. But sometimes the unpredictable happened in a big way and, when this occurred, a heavy additional load resulted.

Such a case was that of the *Torrey Canyon* some years ago. It is really quite amazing that a single error of navigation should have produced such far-reaching consequences, in which the Chamber was immediately involved up to the hilt. Many complex navigational, legal and pollution issues were created by this one casualty. This in turn involved at least four Government departments and three Government or Parliamentary committees.

There was little or no co-ordination of activities in the early days after the stranding and there seemed a real danger at one time that the U.K. Government would go it alone to control the movement of large tankers near the U.K. coasts. The Chamber accordingly set up a Co-ordinating Committee and was able to give positive advice to the Government, particularly on the navigational aspects, and eventually the whole subject was steered into the Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization—IMCO—which initiated no less than eighteen studies into all aspects.

Some of these studies are still going on and the subject is still involving the GCBS to some extent.

The British Shipping Federation

The emergence of strong national seafarers' unions and associations and employers' organizations was a slow process which only gathered momentum towards the end of the nineteenth century. Earlier than this there existed a number of small port unions and 'Companies of Mariners'. The Mercantile Marine Service Association, which is now the main union for shipmasters, was founded in 1857. The National Union of Seamen had its origin in the Sunderland Seamen's Union founded in 1879. In 1890, shipowners founded the Shipping Federation, the forerunner of the British Shipping Federation; it was but one of a number of owners' organizations created to deal with

the growing demands of organized labour. At that time, and until 1914, relations between seafarers and many shipowners were particularly bad and often bitter; it is indeed indicative that an important early function of the Federation was strike breaking.

Who Can Belong to the GCBS?

There are three classes of members, namely :

Members : Persons resident in the United Kingdom or bodies corporate registered in the United Kingdom owning or managing United Kingdom registered ships. Members cover the entire United Kingdom merchant fleet consisting of some 200 or so shipping companies owning or managing about 50 million deadweight tons of shipping.

Associate Members : These comprise associations of shipowners established in the United Kingdom who represent the interests of shipowners in a particular area or in respect of a particular type of ship and also other bodies of which United Kingdom shipowners are members.

Honorary Members : Members admitted at the discretion of the General Council.

To meet the expenses of running the GCBS members pay an annual call based on gross registered tonnage and the total tonnages entered represents practically the whole of the British merchant fleet.

What It Does

The primary object of the GCBS is to promote and protect the interests of the owners and managers of British ships and to take appropriate action, nationally and internationally, to achieve that end. Because of its comprehensive membership it is able to speak for the whole industry. It is not directly involved in the commercial affairs of individual companies but tries to set the climate in which shipping can best serve trade and operate as a free-enterprise competitive industry.

The GCBS is closely concerned with legislation which affects or could affect shipping and while maintaining a position of strict political neutrality it advises, consults, negotiates and, where necessary, takes issue with the Government of the day on policies which directly or indirectly can affect the interests of the shipping industry. Although this work is done in discussion with Ministers and their officials there is also liaison with members of all parties of both Houses of Parliament to ensure that they are kept well informed of developments within the shipping industry and of its achievements and problems.

There are links too with industry and commerce generally in the United Kingdom and overseas.

On sea-going personnel matters, the GCBS represents British shipowners and managers on bodies such as the National Maritime Board (which is the joint negotiating forum in which pay and conditions of service are discussed and agreements reached with the seafarers' representatives), the Seafarers' Pension Funds, and the Merchant Navy Training Board (A joint body set up voluntarily by the Industry, charged with the surveillance of the whole field of training and technical education for those making their careers the Merchant Navy). It provides an advisory service to its members on the development of industrial relations policies.

It is responsible for the recruitment, selection and shore training of most of the rating personnel employed in the Merchant Navy. It also plays an

important part in the recruitment of deck and engineer cadets, and in the formulation and co-ordination of policy on the training of officers.

It administers the Merchant Navy Established Service Scheme which has a two-fold purpose; to offer seafarers a stable and attractive career and regularity of employment and income, and to provide shipping companies with efficient and reliable personnel to man and maintain their ships. The scheme is unique in that it is geared to the special needs of seafarers and operated through GCBS offices at the ports in contrast to the employment agency facilities provided by the Department of Employment through their local offices for persons ashore engaged in other occupations. All seafarers are registered under the Scheme which entitles them to financial provision while they are ashore awaiting voyages, under training, or ill. The scheme also provides medical facilities.

Shipping, being an international business, effective working relationships with the many organizations concerned with trade and shipping throughout the world are important. Accordingly the GCBS is linked with the work of many international and inter-governmental organizations of direct concern to the industry. The GCBS is also linked with the many professional and similar bodies concerned with shipping in the United Kingdom.

The GCBS issues various publications on its work including an Annual Report, a yearly statistical analysis of the British and world merchant fleets and the bi-monthly British Shipping News which is a topical digest of news, views and developments in the industry.

How It Is Run

The governing body of the GCBS is the General Council which comprises all members and meets at least once a year. The conduct of the business of the GCBS is vested in a General Policy Committee (GPC) of not more than forty persons, some elected including President and Vice-President and some co-opted. The GPC, which meets at regular intervals, is in effect the organization's 'board of directors' and as such is its top policy-making body. It is supported by a carefully integrated organizational structure comprising Sections (each representing a different category of shipping), Districts and Functional Committees. These cover every phase of work of the GCBS and are composed of persons drawn from the senior management of member companies and members of their staff who voluntarily give their time, knowledge and experience for the benefit of the industry as a whole.

There is a permanent staff of about 500 of which some 240 are located in the two headquarter offices in London and the remainder in the 23 offices comprising the district organization. At the head of this staff is the Director-General, assisted by two directors. The work at headquarters is administered on a divisional basis as follows:

Industrial Relations: This covers all aspects of this subject.

Manning: This covers manning policy, manning scales, manpower planning, recruitment of seafarers (British Shipping Careers Service), supply of seafarers (MNE), non-U.K. domiciled seafarers, and National Sea Training Trust.

Training: This covers seafarers' and shore staff training courses, the Merchant Navy Training Board, and defence training.

Marine: This covers safety, navigation, radio-communications, life-saving appliances, ship construction, prevention of occupational accidents, prevention of marine pollution, carriage of dangerous goods, technical research, and management services.

Foreign Shipping Policy: This covers liner conferences, documentation and customs, containers, insurance, and EEC matters.

Legal and General: This covers ports, port labour, pilotage, lighthouse administration, shipbuilding, ship repairing, prosecution machinery, personal injury claims, maritime law, parliamentary and press information.

Economics and Statistics: This covers economics including policy research, taxation, shipping finance and statistics.

Central Secretariat: This covers constitution and membership, servicing meetings of the General Council, General Policy Committee Executive and Sections, consultative machinery within the organization, charter parties, library, defence of merchant shipping, annual report, and hospitality.

GCBS/MOD Links

Defence needs in relation to the merchant fleet are the continuing concern of the Ministry of Defence through the Shipping Defence Advisory Committee, the terms of reference of which are to provide liaison between the Ministry of Defence (Navy) and those who control and operate British merchant shipping in time of peace in order to plan for its safety and protection in time of war with the minimum of dislocation to trade.

In the technical field liaison between the Royal and Merchant Navies is fostered through a Ministry of Defence/Industry Technical Liaison Committee, under GCBS chairmanship. The standing MOD(N) representative is the Deputy Director Engineering (M) of the Ship Department of the MOD (Procurement Executive).

Methods of formal liaison include reciprocal representation on various committees, an example being in the corrosion and fouling field where the MOD and the Central Dockyard Laboratory, Portsmouth are represented on the GCBS Corrosion and Fouling Sub-Committee and the GCBS is represented on the MOD Ship Machinery and Ship Hull Corrosion Committees.

Wherever possible a two-way flow of information and experience is encouraged and copies of relevant research reports are exchanged.

How the GBS Communicates Outside the Industry

An important function of the GCBS is to ensure that its views and policies on matters affecting the industry are known and understood at home and overseas. As already mentioned there is close consultation with the Government of the day on relevant legislation and other measures and every effort is made to ensure that members of other political parties are kept informed of the industry's views. There is also close liaison with outside organizations directly concerned with shipping matters, both nationally and internationally.

The Information Department of the GCBS maintains close contact with the national, provincial and trade press, radio and television media, and in particular with the shipping, financial, industrial and labour correspondents in the United Kingdom and overseas press. The opportunity is also taken to keep the public at large informed through speeches by the President of the industry's views on questions affecting its future prospects and plans.

In the recruitment field the organization's British Shipping Careers Service works closely with schools, youth employment officers and parents and is supported by press advertising and specially prepared literature designed to give a factual picture of careers available at sea.

Finale

In a short article about an organization such as the GCBS little more can be done than to glance back at its history and give some idea of its current functions and activities.

In 1877 when the formation of a central national association was under consideration, the advantages of such an association, it was urged, would be great 'inasmuch as subjects affecting the shipping industry would be carefully and periodically discussed by representatives from all the out ports and ship-owning opinion would be more reliably known by the Government and the public'. This is still true of the GCBS today.

The GCBS does not seek to regulate the way shipowners carry on their business—as already stated, its main task is to create and maintain the favourable conditions in which that business can be developed and expanded.

In all its work the GCBS has but one object—the service of the shipping industry and the provision of an organization run by shipowners for shipowners. Today it represents an indispensable safeguard for the interests of the industry and of the individual owner alike.
