Lloyd's List
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Blockchain to impose transparency on shipowners

Industry warned that access to money will be subject to openness and real-time monitoring

Panellists discussed the ramifications of closer scrutiny by lenders, enabled by new technology.

THE AGE of shipping as an opaque business is about to change, all thanks to the prospect of blockchain technologies creeping into the industry, according to experts at Nor-Shipping, *writes Anastassio Adamopoulos*.

The prospect of blockchain in the shipping business means that getting access to finance from banking institutions could have more strings attached.

European Investment Bank shipping head Mark Clintworth welcomed the possibility that blockchain will deter certain owners from seeking finance if they do not wish to be consistently under the microscope. Blockchain will remove some of the secrecy in the industry at least when it comes to finance, he added.

Blockchain would form a base for risk management and absorption through smart contracts, Mr Clintworth said. Such contracts would track covenants, alert to loan to value data changes and maintenance issues, thus removing the need to seek vessel valuations from brokers. Banks would essentially have a handle on their contracts on a real-time basis.

Relish the opportunity

Some owners may feel intimidated by the scrutiny, but others appear to relish the opportunity to demonstrate their credibility.

Wilh. Wilhelmsen chief digital officer Inge Sandvik said: "You will see that players in the market that are serious, they want transparency, they want to be open and they have nothing to hide. On the contrary, they want to show how well they are operating. And blockchain is an enabler for getting that trust into place."

Mr Clintworth acknowledged that privacy issues would need to be resolved and confidentiality frameworks would have to be developed.

However, shipping finance could take another turn thanks to blockchain. Mr Clitworth reiterated that blockchain and the transparency it could bring would enable the EIB to loan to smaller companies by **Continued on page 2**

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removing the costs of having third parties to cover those services.

While the jury is still out on the effect and the extent of blockchain use in the industry going forward, the implications could be significant. ZEM — Zero Emission Maritime solutions co-founder Salman Farmanfarmaian said that if blockchain ends up disrupting anything in shipping, it will be the central authorities.

"So the question is what central authorities in the shipping world will be taken out of the picture in a new distributed a world where different players can trust each other without that middle person," he said.

Songa's Billung bets on bulker prices seeing 'supply-driven' rises

Billung is confident that secondhand prices will go up again in the long run.

Limited newbuild orders will provide upside to secondhand prices, says industry veteran

SONGA Bulk chief executive Herman Billung is betting on a "supply-driven" increase in dry bulk asset prices due to limited newbuilding orders, *writes Max Tingyao Lin*.

Since its launch last December, Songa, the Blystad family's dry bulk outfit, has splashed out nearly $170m one capesize, three supramax and six kamsarmax bulkers in the secondhand market.

The purchases have come amid a pick-up in secondhand bulker prices, driven by strong buying interest from mostly private owners.

"We still see a lot of upside [in secondhand prices]... the most important thing is newbuilding orders are so limited," said Mr Billung, whose company has a stated strategy of buying vessels near the bottom of the cycle to benefit from price recovery.

According to Lloyd's List Intelligence, only 45 bulker orders were placed in the first five months of this year and 174 in 2016, compared with 534 orders in 2015.

The total orderbook accounted for 9% of the global active bulker fleet in terms of carrying capacity as of early May, down from 15.1% a year ago, data from LLI showed. This takes small bulkers into account.

Mr Billung told Lloyd's List that his confidence was partly driven by the fact that gains in secondhand prices, while large in terms of percentages, were small in absolute terms. Bulker valuations were still at low levels historically.

The secondhand price of a capesize bulker was estimated by the Baltic Exchange at nearly $32m on May 30, up 34.7% year on year. The price of a panamax was up 49% at $19.8m and supramaxes were up 48.7% at $17.2m.

New International Maritime Organization regulations such as the ballast water convention, which kicks in this September, and the lower global sulphur cap for bunker fuel, which takes effect from 2020, are "very good in general", as subsequently some owners would find more incentives to scrap aged, more polluting vessels, Mr Billung said.

Picture remains unclear

Even more crucially, investors would be more hesitant in building new ships due to the uncertain fuel options post-2020, Mr Billung added.

Owners can consume low-sulphur fuel oil and marine gasoil, or install scrubbers onboard to continue use of high-sulphur fuel oil. But the full picture of fuel economics remains unclear as refineries across the globe struggle to produce the more eco-friendly

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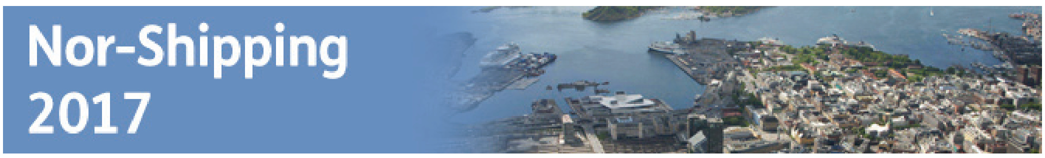

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bunker fuels. “The uncertainty will halt ordering,” Mr Billung said.

That said, the upwards momentum in secondhand prices has slowed in the past two weeks as freight rates are falling.

The Baltic Dry Index fell to 850 points on Thursday from 1,338 on March 29, then the highest in approximately 29 months.

Mr Billung expects spot rates to dip further before recovering in the winter peak demand season. But for the long run, he remains confident that secondhand prices will go up again as one-year time charter rates increase.

“I believe in a supply-driven recovery... [but] it will take time,” he said.

Songa has continued to build its purchasing power, making a debut in the bond market in late-May to raise at least $75m. The five-year senior secured bond, fetched at a floating interest rate of three-month London Interbank Offered Rate plus 4.5% per annum, will be traded on the Oslo Bors later.

The latest fundraising came after Songa, whose shares are trading on the Oslo Axess market, raised $74.2m in December, $5m in January and $100.2m in February via equity financing.

Songa is in no hurry to use its war chest, though. “I would like to hold back for another one or two months, unless I see something special,” Mr Billung said.

“I would like to see the impact of the drops in freight markets on asset prices first.”

Songa plans to continue its strategy of purchasing secondhand supramax, kamsarmax, post-panamax and capesize bulkers delivered after 2009 before finding the chances to sell them at higher prices in the three to five years from December 2017.

All the vessels on its fleet are on time charters ranging from three to 12 months, and Mr Billung said that Songa preferred charters no longer than 18 months to keep flexibility.

“The [investment] concept is very simple,” Mr Billung said.

Growth of intra-regional trade spells bad news for box lines

Technology revolution puts carriers reliant on big ship success at risk, says DSF

Rex: We will see a complete rearrangement of the container industry in the near future.

CUTTING-edge technology will trigger a shift in the fundamentals of global seaborne trade with more goods being moved intra-regional rather than long-haul, a trend that will have dire consequences for liner operators, according to Danish Ship Finance’s head of research Christopher Rex, *writes Linton Nightingale*.

With the major carriers hedging their bets solely on the ultra-large containership narrative, in which the economies of scale generated should maximise revenues, Mr Rex said lines would soon be counting the cost.

“The evolution of 3D printing and robotics etc will see manufacturing relocating to not just where there is cheap labour, but also closer to the consumer, whether this be in North America, Europe or Japan,” he told delegates at Nor-Shipping.

“This means we will see a complete rearrangement of the container industry in the near future, where we will see more much more regional trades and fewer intra-regional trades.

“This will significantly change the market that exists and all the links feeding into the supply chain driving the global economy.

“Container lines have been putting most of their money in building larger and larger ships, but building bigger ships is a long-term bet that the central manufacturing hubs will remain in China and Southeast Asia and not in the US or Europe.”

However, it was not just the box lines that would suffer, so would the emerging markets that relied on demand from developed nations.

“We have to remember that shipping is a service industry, so basically we serve the underlying levels of demand,” said Mr Rex.

“We have a lot of emerging consumers in the east and all the predictions are that these millions will only increase and so will their demand.”

He said that this trade shift could prevent these millions becoming wealthy consumers.

“It is awful news for all the emerging markets where you have combination growth, and you will have to create millions of jobs from other means if populations are to continue growing at their current rate.”

Offshore markets forecast to bottom out by end-2018

Global offshore exploration and production expenditures to recover from next year after higher sanctioned amounts in 2017

Since oil prices collapsed in 2014, energy companies have sharply cut back spending on offshore projects..

OFFSHORE markets will need another 18 months to recover from the doldrums due to a prolonged supply overhang amid slow scrapping, attendees at Marine Money Offshore in Oslo were told, *writes Max Tingyao Lin*.

Since oil prices collapsed in 2014, energy companies have sharply cut back spending on offshore projects, resulting in much lower demand for offshore services, rigs, drillers and other mobile units.

"Globally, the downturn has resulted in the biggest drop in capital expenditures [in exploration and production] ever seen," said Rystad Energy partner Jon Fredrik Muller, referring to the fall between 2014 and 2016.

As several major players, including ExxonMobil and Oil and Natural Gas Corp, had started to award offshore energy production projects this year, Mr Muller said he was seeing more positive signs, though.

According to estimates from Rystad Energy, global offshore exploration and production capital, and operating expenditures will grow by an aggregate 14% from 2018 to 2022 after declining by another 9% in 2017.

"The offshore market is forecast to reach bottom in 2017 and 2018," Mr Muller said.

Offshore sanctioned amounts, referring to investment in greenfield offshore projects during the first investment year, will recover from $38bn in 2016 to $60bn in 2017, $71bn in 2018, $97bn in 2019 and $157bn in 2020, according to data from the consultancy.

"With increasingly competitive projects, offshore sanctioning activity is to gradually return," Mr Muller said.

However, the recovery is expected to come amid prolonged oversupply as scrapping remains relatively slow.

According to GMS, the world's largest cash buyer of ships for recycling, demolition of offshore units amounted to 2.9m dwt in 2016, compared with 2.3m dwt in 2015 and 1.9m dwt in 2014.

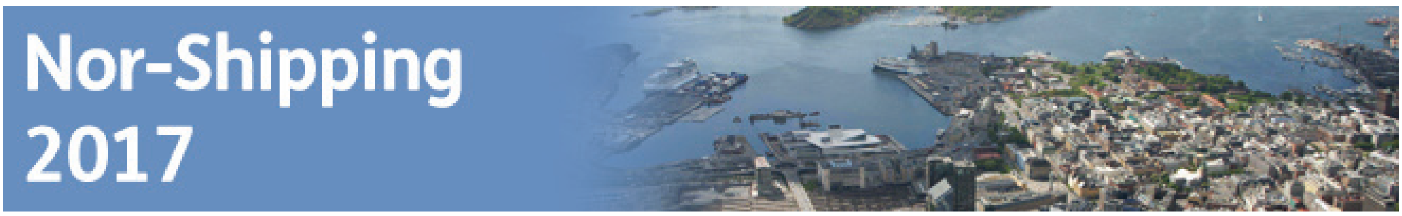
However, GMS president and chief executive Anil Sharma said that the volume was not able to catch up with the large number of newbuilding deliveries. "There was even [net] fleet growth [in the number of ships] in 2016."

The reasons behind slow scrapping include low residual value, logistics challenges and regulatory risks, according to Mr Sharma.

Moreover, some owners preferred to stack their units as costs were low, in hope of a market recovery, Mr Sharma added.

Looking in more detail, Maritime Strategies International's director of consultancy James Frew said the supply-demand fundamentals could be decided by the rigs ready stacked, and those cold stacked for a short period.

"At least a quarter of stacked rigs are unlikely to ever be reactivated. The key question is what happens to the rest of them," Mr Frew said.



BW LPG's Ackermann takes Panama Canal toll rises in his stride

Canal is helping to support demand for LPG, says boss of world's largest VLGC fleet

THE Panama Canal is proposing to raise tolls for gas ships, potentially affecting owners such as BW LPG, which runs a 53-strong fleet of large and very large gas carriers, *writes Hal Brown*.

At this stage, however, Oslo-listed BW LPG is unfazed by the proposal to raise tolls, preferring to focus on the benefits brought to liquefied petroleum gas shipping by the canal over the past year and beyond.

"We are pleased to cater for a higher long-term demand by shortening time and reducing cost by getting competitively priced clean energy to the Asian markets, thus supporting further demand growth for LPG," BW LPG chief executive Martin Ackermann told Lloyd's List in an interview on Friday.

Ackermann: "We are grateful to see that the LPG markets are now truly global."

The canal reopened in June 2016, having been expanded, enabling it to accommodate full-size gas ships for the first time in its 103-year history.

The toll adjustment proposal of the LPG carrier segment takes into account traffic behaviour of the panamax and neo-panamax gas carriers and therefore introduces a separation of the toll structure, creating a new tariff for the panamax locks and another for the neopanamax locks.

In addition, an increase in toll rates for the locks is proposed. An LPG carrier (panamax) with 65,000 cu m of cargo capacity laden would pay $186,950 and an LPG carrier (neo-panamax) of 84,000 cu m of capacity laden — which is also a VLGC — would pay $252,940.

While the canal is proving important to LPG shipping, it is not the be-all and end-all.

"There is a seasonal element to new Panama Canal utilisation, where we have seen greater usage of the canal when the Asian propane forward price curve is in backwardation to take advantage of high prompt prices, and we'd expect lower utilisation of the canal when the forward Asian propane price curve is in contango," explained Mr Ackermann.

Interesting role

There is no doubt, though, that US exports of LPG are playing an increasingly interesting role in LPG shipping.

"In terms of tonnes, the US has become the largest exporting nation in the world by far, while the Middle East is still the largest exporting region," said Mr Ackermann.

"We expect that the US will be the most important driver of incremental export tonnes, but expect the Middle East to contribute to the LPG export growth story in a substantial way as well.

"We've seen the US make a bigger impact on VLGC rate formation than it did historically, while both the Middle East and the US have an equally big impact on total VLGC tonne-mile demand, with both contributing about 45% each, while other exporting regions account for the remaining 10%.

"What we do hope for is an additional US to Asia Baltic route to reflect the growing importance of US LPG exports to the VLGC trade and the differing rate dynamics of loading in the east and west basins."

He added: "We are grateful to see that the LPG markets are now truly global, and that LPG is massively available in both the Middle East and US."

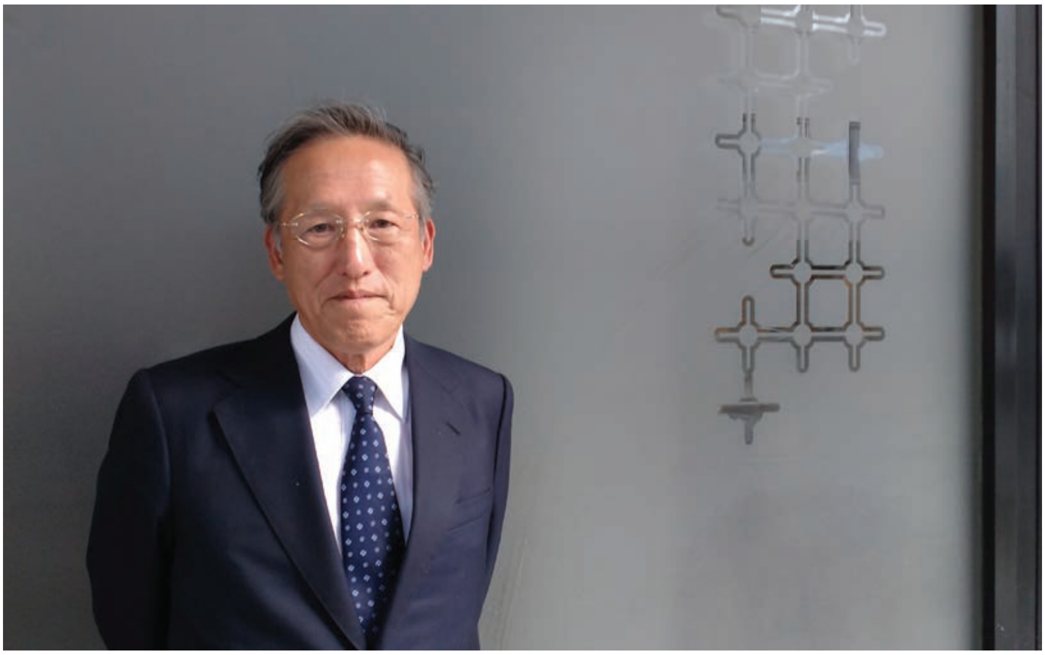
Tolls for LNG carriers will also be modified and raised, under the Panama Canal Authority's proposal. LNG carriers of 170,000 cu m laden will pay $430,800, while LNG carriers of 170,000 cu m in ballast will pay $379,000.

Following yesterday's proposal, there is now a 30-day formal consultation period for industry feedback.

"The proposed modifications safeguard the competitiveness of the waterway, the value of the route, and facilitates the Canal's goal of providing an efficient and reliable service to the global shipping community," said Panama Canal administrator Jorge Quijano.

Simulate Stellar Daisy incident to find answers, says ClassNK chairman

Proper investigation is achievable even as the VLCC-turned-VLOC was lost in high seas



Fujiwara: When MOL Comfort sank, we did many simulations, including those for sea situations and loading conditions.

A PROPER investigation into the *Stellar Daisy* incident is achievable, according to ClassNK chairman Koichi Fujiwara, despite the apparent difficulty of carrying out such a task after the vessel was lost in high seas, *writes Max Tingyao Lin*.

The very large ore carrier converted from a very large crude carrier, owned by South Korea's Polaris Shipping and classified by Korean Register of Shipping, reportedly split and sank 2,000 miles off Uruguay in end-March, leading to the presumed losses of 22 of the 24 seafarers on board.

Media reports at the time suggested the incident occurred after cracks on the 1993-built, 266,141 dwt ship's main deck led to water ingress, but the true causes remain unknown as physical evidence was lost. Polaris, the South Korean authorities, and the Marshall Islands flag state are carrying out investigations.

Citing the example of *MOL Comfort*, the boxship classified by ClassNK that split off Yemen and was subsequently lost in high seas in mid-2013, Mr Fujiwara encouraged the relevant parties to have simulations of loading, ballasting and sea sailing conditions for the *Stellar Daisy* incident.

"When *MOL Comfort* sank, we did many simulations, including those for sea situations and loading conditions," Mr Fujiwara told Lloyd's List.

"Then we reached the conclusion."

In 2014, ClassNK concluded in its investigation report that the 2008-built, 8,110 teu ship could have a ship-specific issue related to excessive lateral load. The probe, coupled with other findings, eventually led changes in International Association of Classification Societies' Unified Requirements and ClassNK's in-house rules related to vessel strength.

Full report

The International Maritime Organization said it expected a full report on *Stellar Daisy* to be brought to the UN body to reduce future chances of similar accidents. Intercargo has called on relevant parties to submit this report in a timely manner to address industry safety concerns.

"At the moment, no action has been taken [in terms of class rules]. All stakeholders are still waiting" for the investigation results, Mr Fujiwara said.

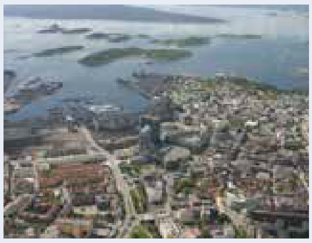
"We have very limited information about the incident."

Some industry officials have been calling for the removal of VLCC-turned-VLOCs from the global trading fleet, with what are perceived to be technical issues with the conversions. After the incident, two more converted VLOCs in the Polaris fleet were found to have cracks.

Polaris has embarked on a fleet structural survey programme for all converted VLOCs it owns, with KR and Lloyd's Register as independent consultants. The Marshall Islands also said it is inspecting the remaining 12 converted VLOCs under its flag before submitting its findings to the IMO.

Mr Fujiwara confirmed ClassNK had overseen the conversions of four VLCCs to VLOCs. What it did was to check the conversion design first, and if the design was all right, surveys will be carried out during and after the conversion.

Only one of the four vessels is still trading. "We checked its survey records... we didn't find any special measures [for it] are necessary," Mr Fujiwara said.



Nor-Shipping 2017

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Hyundai and Lloyd's Register to develop LNG-fuelled bulkers

Project announced amid tighter environmental regulations in shipping

David Barrow and Bong-Jun Jang signing the agreement at Nor-Shipping. *Lloyd's Register*

MORE companies are joining the race to design and develop bulkers that can run on liquefied natural gas.

Hyundai Heavy Industries has teamed up with Lloyd's Register to design 180,000 dwt capesize bulkers that can be fuelled using LNG on short- to medium-haul trades such as the Australia to Asia route and long-haul trades such as the Brazil to China voyage, the duo said during Nor-Shipping in Oslo.

The move comes amid tighter environmental regulations in shipping. While the technology has had success on barges and some tankers, more work is needed to see if LNG can be used in the propulsion of bulk carriers.

One of the problems inherent in the use of LNG as a fuel is the size of the tanks needed to store the gas. LNG fuel tanks are roughly three times the volume of equivalent traditional fuel tanks, but vessel designs need to accommodate the tanks without reducing cargo capacity.

Since more gas is available globally, and due to stricter regulations imposed by the International Maritime Organization on nitrogen and sulphur emissions, "there is a continued need for ship designs to evolve to provide further alternatives to traditional oil-fuelled designs", HHI and LR said. They added that since newbuilding orders were predominantly in the larger sizes, the 180,000 dwt vessel was chosen for the project.

Lloyd's Register's director of innovation and marketing David Barrow said: "These HHI designs offer the possibility for owners to comply with emissions regulations worldwide while keeping the investment viable and competitive." HHI's senior executive vice-president Bong-Jun Jang said: "We sincerely believe this joint development project will bring environmentally-friendly and economical solutions for future bulk carrier designs and be remembered as a milestone in shipbuilding history."

The joint development project follows a similar move in January.

A group consisting of Mitsui OSK Lines, BHP, Rio Tinto, Woodside, DNV GL and SDARI agreed to work together to develop a design for an LNG-fuelled capesize bulker for the Australia-China trade lane.

The group said on Thursday that it had designed an LNG-fuelled 210,000 dwt newcastlemax with dual-fuel engines which is in the approval process.

Its two LNG fuel tanks would sit directly above the engine room and submerged a few metres below the main deck, which offers protection for the tanks, enhances fire protection, and does not reduce the carrying capacity, even for volumetric cargoes such as coal.

A fuel tank of about 6,000 cu m was found to be the optimal size, the companies said.

Falcon Energy cancels $654m jack-up orders

Builder Shanhaiguan New Shipbuilding Industry takes a hit

SINGAPORE-LISTED Falcon Energy has cancelled three of the four jack-up rig newbuildings placed at China's Shanhaiguan New Shipbuilding Industry, *writes Cichen Shen*.

The orders were made in 2013 by FTS Derricks — then a subsidiary and now an associate of Falcon — for $872m in total, or $218m per unit. Falcon, an offshore services provider, said on Thursday that it had given $784.8m in four performance guarantees for the due and punctual payment by FTS Derricks of the final instalment upon delivery of the jack-ups.

"The performance guarantees for three of the four rigs amounting to $588.6m given by the company have become no longer of effect as the builder and FTS Derricks have each respectively exercised its rights under the three relevant construction contracts to terminate the said contracts."

The issue of the fourth jack-up was being discussed and a conclusion was expected shortly, the company added.

The move came as Falcon faces difficulties in obtaining

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suitable loans on favourable terms.

The company in April sold a 21.8% stake in CH Offshore, a platform supplies and anchor handling tug supply vessels operator, to SZ Offshore for S$20m ($14.2m) to ease pressure from creditors.

The order cancellation also came as Chinese yards, which flocked into the offshore sector in 2013, are struggling to tackle the undeliverable offshore newbuildings. According to shipping consultancy MDS Financing, about $20bn worth of offshore projects, including rigs and support vessels, are now stacked at Chinese yards with no buyer willing to take delivery.

Shanhaiguan is a subsidiary yard of state conglomerate China Shipbuilding Industry Corp. It recorded a net loss of Yuan617.7m ($90.8m) for 2016.

Protest and progress

Letter to the editor: Shipping was well-represented at climate change negotiations

SIR,

This claim from your report of Nor-Shipping is totally incorrect:

"The lack of the shipping industry's presence during the recent United Nations climate change negotiations, or indeed complete non-attendance, was highlighted by several environmental organisations."

A full ICS delegation, accompanied by many representatives of our member national shipowner associations, was present throughout the Paris climate change conference.

This included speaking at the main event in Paris organised by IMO, although the environmentalist non-governmental organisations you quote may perhaps have been too busy to notice; rather than joining this meeting, many of them chose to disrupt it, parading outside singing sea shanties!

More to the point, the industry's commitment to finding an ambitious solution for the reduction of the sector's CO_2 emissions is demonstrated by the Aspirational Objectives it has recently proposed to IMO, for consideration at important meetings that will develop an IMO CO_2 reduction strategy which start in four weeks' time.

Simon Bennett,
International Chamber of Shipping

Simon Bennett is Director Policy & External Relations, International Chamber of Shipping.

MICHAEL GREY VIEWPOINT

Defending conservatives

What is Uber other than an onshore flag of convenience operation, providing cut-price transport using cheap labour?

DESPITE the heading above, this is nothing to do with the upcoming UK general election, prime minister Theresa May's U-turns, or whether a nasty party is really quite nice. Note the small "c", so be warned that this is no political diatribe, but an attempt to speak for an industry labouring under accusations from people, mostly with something to sell, that shipping remains in the stone age and is resistant to their kindly attempts to assist in its modernisation, *writes Michael Grey*.

Just the other day, at the Nautical Institute's excellent Command Seminar, which I will return to on another occasion, we were treated to a harangue from an equipment manufacturer suggesting that the industry attitudes to progress were "Jurassic". I suppose he could have accused the industry of being Carboniferous — or even, heaven forbid, Pre-Cambrian — so we obviously have been making some progress.

It has become almost a way of identification for progressives, apart from never wearing neckties, to condemn the shipping industry for its lack of disruptors in our ranks and allegedly being so unsupportive of the innovators who dwell among us, gnawing their knuckles in frustration at the industry's intransigence. Think of Amazon's brilliant supposed move to lease their own ships! Listen to the brilliance of shippers! Embrace blockchain technology and the amazing analytics made possible by BIG Data and generally, stop being such stick-in-the-muds!

Scarcely a conference goes by without some seer demanding the maritime industry embrace the genius illustrated by Uber or some other digital platform, while the audience shifts uneasily in their seats as the harangue progresses, wondering whether this person might have something important to say, or perhaps counting the minutes to lunch.

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Are these disruptors eructing a lot of hot air, or offering a lot of old ideas dressed up in new clothes? *netsuthep/shutterstock.com.*

But is the shipping industry so very conservative? And indeed, are these people who are shouting so loudly just eructing a lot of hot air, or offering a lot of old ideas dressed up in new clothes? Take, as an example the taxi firm Uber which is supposed to be such an exemplar of innovation. Is it as clever as all that? I would suggest that its inventors probably pinched the idea from the shipping industry, for what is Uber other than an onshore flag of convenience operation, providing cut-price transport using cheap labour? Go compare — as somebody else urges.

Shippers are getting terribly scientific about their sea transport options, we are told, and the industry must adjust to their wishes, or see them establish their own shipping operations. What on earth is new about that? The oil companies all built up huge fleets to carry their own cargoes, until they realised that this was costing them too much, and increasingly shifted to a flexible, obliging charter market. Anyone of more mature years will recall the extraordinary operation run by the Vestey empire, which saw the produce from their farms in South America and Australia, processed in their meat works, carried in their beautiful fleet of Blue Star liners and sold in their massive retail operation in British high streets.

These ideas come and go, witness the Vale and Rio Tinto own fleet operations, following decades where miners would not dream of controlling their shipping as it was just too much trouble and far too expensive, when compared to chartering, with a plethora of available tonnage.

We are urged to embrace scale and standardisation, "bigness" being a useful catchphrase to beat up our fragmented and insufficiently consolidated industry. But you can go back a long way into history to read of shipping operations where all these things were recognised, fashionable for a while and then, receding like the tide, to return a bit later.

Purchasing power

I have just been reading Richard Woodman's magisterial study of the shipping of the East India Company, A Low Set of Blackguards, which tells us that between 1600 and 1834, this "user" of shipping chartered rather than owned, but encouraged the design of standardised ships to meet their specifications, recognising the advantages of scale and purchasing power.

I don't suppose many readers will have heard of Michael Hendy & Son, but Simon Ville's English Shipowning during the Industrial Revolution tells us that between 1770 and 1830 Hendy was a colossus of the coasting and short sea trades, building up a huge fleet, pioneering the economies of scale in the purchase of stores, spars and sails, with some very advanced ideas about securing and retaining competent manpower. They might be considered a sort of progenitor for Maersk, if you wish. There were no "apps" in those days, but they seem to have managed quite well.

Talking of apps, we are encouraged to believe that the days of the shipbroker as an essential bridge between cargo and ship are fading into eventide. Once again, some "techies" with something to sell are behind these messages, which they suggest will empower shippers and by eliminating brokers, squeeze the costs of shipment (which are not exactly breaking the bank), still further.

We have been here before, and shipbrokers, threatened as a species at the time of all the dot-com nonsense, have exhibited tremendous powers of survival. I expect they will weather this storm too, once the gullible realise that a friendly, experienced shipbroker, with a wealth of data and expertise backing him or her up, provides a lot more service than is available from some mere device.

So if the shipping industry does operate to a geological time frame, moving rather slower and more conservatively than the so-called disrupters would wish, it does, like the cargo their ships carry, get there in the end.

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