

State of the Union

ONBOARD'S resident sage asks "Why, since there is no such thing as job security, are we, as a profession, so anti union?"

There has never been any job security working as crew aboard superyachts. Recently I discovered a friend had been sacked. Wishing to commiserate with him or at least buy the poor bugger a beer, I phoned his mobile. We agreed to meet and after a few gulps of amber fluid he began to tell the story. He explained, he was given the old heave-ho, by the management company, newly employed to look after the yacht by the boss. His crime was that he was caught fraternising with the Chief Stew and the management company had clearly laid down a rule that crew should not become emotionally involved with each other. They claimed that they were simply enforcing the rules laid down by Russian owner. My Captain colleague politely pointed out that both he and the Chief Stew had been interviewed for their jobs by the owner as a couple, hired as a couple and had since married but that seemed to cut no ice with the management company who claimed that the Chief Stew should have changed her surname upon marriage and that simple fact would have altered the situation.

United we stand

The legal argument for such sacking is poor at best and no doubt had the Captain wanted to take matters further, he would have probably won any court case that might have followed. It happens that he did not want to and was in fact happy to be rid of what he called the poorly managed yacht but it was his answer to my next question that raised my eyebrows! I asked him are you a member of Nautilus? He was aghast that I should have asked if he was a member of a marine trade union and said we professional yacht crews would never need to go on strike and so would never need the services of a union. My point is that trade unions offer far more than industrial action and that his own case was a perfect example of where a union would have intervened on his behalf.

Now I am not going to give any organisation a free advertisement in a magazine but I would point out that I became a member of what in those days was called the Merchant Navy and Airline Officers Association since I first went to sea way back when Noah was a deckhand. In all my time of membership I have never been asked to consider industrial action against an employer. Fortunately I have never been in the same situation as my colleague mentioned above but had I been I could have made a phone call to the union who would have put me in touch with a specialist lawyer and the union would have picked up the bill for doing so. The real reason I remain a member is that Nautilus



offers me certificate protection that would kick into action if I were unlucky enough to have my certificate suspended or worse removed. Captains have been fired for all sorts of reasons in situations that would not be tolerated in other industries. I know of one Captain in a two-yacht fleet who was fired by the senior of the two Captains after he had run his own yacht onto a reef. He was so scared that the owner might single up to just one yacht that he fired the Captain on the second yacht and assumed command himself so securing his own billet. Deckhands and interior stewardess are dropped at a moment's notice when charter bookings slump despite having signed on for a summer season. Management companies are on the side of the owner so maybe it is time for all levels of crew to level the playing field and join.

Support act

With the maritime profession under increasing risk of criminalisation, Nautilus International provides specialist support, including a worldwide network of lawyers who can provide free and immediate advice to full members on employment-related matters. As a full member, you have free financial protection against loss of income if your certificate of competency is cancelled. Full members are also entitled to representation during accident investigations or inquiries. None of us would contemplate not insuring our homes or cars so why are so many superyacht professionals prepared to run the risk of not insuring their livelihood? Legal and professional support, plus the certificate protection is essential in sectors such as ours, where employment can be terminated at a whim. You don't need to be a leftie or even a commie because Nautilus is not militant. It's just on your side!