

**SEAMEN'S RECRUITMENT
COMMITTEE**

REPORT



DELHI
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No. 1208.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA:
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE.

Delhi, the 2nd March 1922.

RESOLUTION.
(Lascar Seamen.)

On the 26th September 1921, the Legislative Assembly adopted the following resolution :—

“This Assembly recommends to the Governor General in Council that the draft convention for establishing facilities for finding employment for seamen adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation of the League of Nations convened at Genoa on the 15th day of June, 1920, should not be ratified, but that an examination should be undertaken without delay, of the methods of recruitment of seamen at the different ports in India in order that it may be definitely ascertained whether abuses exist and whether those abuses are susceptible of remedy.”

A similar resolution was adopted by the Council of State on the 27th September 1921.

2. In consequence of these resolutions, the Government of India made arrangements for a preliminary inquiry into the conditions under which seamen are recruited at Bombay and Calcutta, the only ports in India where seamen are engaged in large numbers. This inquiry which, under the orders of Government, was intended especially to verify the existence and extent of corrupt practices, was conducted by Mr. A. G. Clow, I.C.S., Controller of the Labour Bureau in the Government of India, accompanied by representatives of the shipowners and seamen selected by the Governments of Bombay and Bengal. For the enquiries in Bombay, the Government of Bombay nominated Mr. F. L. Barnett, Marine Superintendent, of Messrs. Turner Morrison and Company, and Mr. Mohammad Ibrahim; for the enquiries in Calcutta, the Government of Bengal nominated Mr. C. S. Penny, Marine Superintendent, British India Steam Navigation Company, and Mr. M. Daud, M.A., B.L., General Secretary of the Indian Seamen's Union. A

large number of witnesses were examined in each place, and investigations were made in the Shipping Offices, on the ships, and in the seamen's boarding houses.

3. The Government of India have now decided to appoint a Committee which will include two Members of the Legislature in addition to the five gentlemen who have taken part in the preliminary enquiry. The Committee will sit at Delhi to examine the evidence already collected and to report what reforms are possible in existing methods of recruitment. The Committee will be constituted as follows :—

Mr. A. G. Clow, F.S.S., I.C.S., *Chairman.*

Sir Frank Carter, Kt., C.I.E., C.B.E., M.L.A.,

Mr. N. M. Joshi, M.L.A.,

Mr. C. S. Penny,

Mr. M. Daud, M.A., B.L.,

Mr. F. L. Barnett, and

Mr. Mohammad Ibrahim.

H. A. F. LINDSAY,

Secretary to the Government of India.

Note.—The draft Convention referred to above is published in bulletin No. 17 of the Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour (Superintendent, Government Printing, India, Calcutta, 1921).

Report of the Substantive Committee.

1. The preliminary investigations conducted by the sub-committees at Bombay and Calcutta disclose a state of affairs which we regard as highly unsatisfactory. A full account of the facts is given in the appendices to this report.† Generally speaking, it may be said that while bribery is serious among certain sections of the seamen in Bombay, it takes in Calcutta as far as the deck and engine-room crews are concerned, the form of systematised extortion. The serious unemployment existing among seamen, and the temporary character of their employment are undoubtedly responsible to some extent for the aggravated bribery now found to exist. But the chief and the immediate cause is the presence of interested intermediaries who come between the shipowners and the seamen, *viz.*, the brokers and ghat serangs, who have been able to influence the selection of seamen.

2. We are fully aware of the difficulties and risks involved in interfering with the present recruiting system. An attempt to make substantial modifications in the conditions prevailing in any large industry is always fraught with danger. The present system of recruitment has been in force for more than sixty years. It is understood by the seamen and it has succeeded in providing crews promptly and easily. An endeavour to change it is liable to meet with opposition from those who instinctively fear any kind of change. In addition to their opposition there will be opposition from the large vested interests that have been created by the present system. The existing organization is a source of considerable legitimate profit and of greater illegitimate profit and those who find it lucrative will naturally do all they can to render change difficult. And while dislocation in a particular industry can usually be regarded by the community generally with comparative equanimity any disturbance of shipping reacts at once upon the whole community.

3. In spite of the above considerations we regard it as imperative to devise a fresh system of recruitment. The present system, especially in Calcutta, can no longer be defended and it should be brought to an end at the earliest possible moment. While the same urgency does not exist in Bombay, the evidence shows that bribery exists there on a scale which cannot be ignored, and that on occasion it

† See pages 11 to 35.

can assume a form almost as serious as that which is normal in Calcutta. We propose, therefore, in the first place, that the licensed brokers be dispensed with. Secondly, we propose that the managing agents of the British India Steam Navigation Company, Calcutta, be asked to dismiss the ghat serangs and ghat butler now employed. We suggest below alterations in the law which will make the future employment of such intermediaries impossible.

4. If the brokers and ghat serangs disappear, arrangements must be made to carry on the legitimate part of their work. This can only be effected by some kind of employment Bureau. The present Committee owes its inception to the consideration by the legislature of the Draft Convention for establishing facilities for finding employment for seamen adopted by the Genoa Labour Conference in June 1920. We therefore devoted special consideration to the proposals contained in that Convention. [Two alternative systems are suggested in the Convention. In one the system of employment offices is organized and maintained by representative associations of shipowners and seamen in co-operation; in the other, the system is maintained by the State. These seem to us to be the only feasible alternatives. Of the two, we regard the first alternative as, in principle, the better one. Unnecessary interference by the State with the conditions of labour in any industry is undesirable, and a system which is maintained by mutual co-operation of the parties concerned is likely to work much more smoothly than one which depends on the power of the State. At the same time, we recognize that there may be difficulties in securing the necessary co-operation. There is an organization at Calcutta containing a large proportion of men of all grades, and at Bombay the union contains nearly all the saloon crews, but in neither port are all the seamen in unions at present. We are anxious that the reforms which we hope to see introduced should not be jeopardized by the failure of either party to co-operate, and we therefore suggest that, if it proves impracticable to obtain the co-operation necessary to put the first alternative in operation, the second alternative—that of a state organization—should be adopted. At the same time, the first alternative should be set down as the ideal to be aimed at, and we trust that with the growth of healthy organizations amongst seamen and of mutual trust and good will, it will not be long before it can be brought into being.]

5. The employment Bureau which we propose to set up in each centre will have at its head a single officer. We consider that he should be an officer having practical maritime experience, as recommended by the Genoa Conference, and it is desirable, also, that if possible he should have had experience of shipowners' and seamen's

organizations. The success of the scheme will depend largely on his personality, and his selection will therefore be a matter of the highest importance. We consider that a considerable proportion of the present trouble in Calcutta can be traced to the fact that the supervision of recruiting has been entrusted to shipping officers who are constantly being changed and who, prior to taking up their posts, have not been working in the mercantile marine. The officer selected as head of the Bureau must have had this experience and he must be able to work sympathetically with shipowners, ships' officers and men and with the organizations of the shipowners and the men. Similar care should be exercised in the choice of his assistants.

6. One of the main functions of the Bureau will be the maintenance of a general register of seamen of each grade including recruits. Separate registers should be maintained for each line that so desires, and an additional register should contain the names of seamen who are not on the books of any of the lines having separate registers. It should be within the power of the Bureau to remove the name of any man from the register (*e. g.*, in the event of serious misconduct being proved) or to suspend any man entered on the register. Such a man would then be debarred from obtaining employment in any ship. At the same time, in accordance with the principle enunciated in the Genoa Convention that "freedom of choice of ship shall be assured to seamen and freedom of choice of crew shall be assured to shipowners", it should be within the power of the shipowner (or his authorized representative) to demand the removal of any seaman's name from the register of the line concerned. Similarly any seaman should be entitled to have his name removed from the register of any line. In such cases, unless there are reasons for the contrary or unless the man's name is entered upon the register of another line by mutual arrangement, the name should be entered on the additional register. Separate registers must, of course, be maintained of types of crew that do not normally sail together.

7. We consider that the power of selecting all seamen, including serangs, should be restricted to two classes of employees of the owners or agents, *viz.*, the Superintendents and the Masters of the ships. The Chief Officer, Chief Engineer and Chief Purser should have the power to select serangs or butlers, subject to the approval of the Master. And we propose, as regards serangs and butler, that they should be at liberty to nominate any serang or butler who has been discharged from a ship of the same line not less than three months before. Should the officer responsible for the selection not desire to choose such a serang, his choice should be made from a fair proportion of men taken from the top of the

roster maintained by the Bureau for that line, *i.e.*, from those serangs or butlers belonging to the line who have been longest out of employment. We hope by these provisions to ensure two ends—to encourage lines to give men, as far as possible, continuity of employment, and to ensure that each man on the list shall have his claims regularly considered. Where neither the ship-owners, their agents, the Superintendent, nor the Master are present at the employment office (*e.g.*, in the case of a ship at another port belonging to a firm having no agent in the port of engagement) or where they waive their right to select, the choice would devolve on the Bureau.

8. In both Bombay and Calcutta, it should be possible to select the sukhanis on the system proposed above for the serangs. The work of the sukhanis renders them independent of the serang, and he need not be given a voice in their selection.

9. The serang is, in large measure, held responsible for the work of his crew, and it is necessary therefore to ensure that he should have some say in their choice. The Calcutta crews, with the exception of the Maldivis, are not split up into self-contained groups, and there is no close attachment between the serang and his crew. It is desirable that the power of the serang to select his crew should be limited as far as possible, without compelling him to sail in command of men who will make trouble on board or discredit him. We propose to secure this by taking the crew (including the hands between the serangs and the ordinary seamen) by roster, and by allowing the serang to make reasonable objections to any particular men so taken. It may prove advisable to allow the serang to nominate one or two men more directly. The nomination or rejection would, of course, in all cases, be subject to the approval of the selecting officer. It should also be possible for men to be taken who have been discharged from ships of the same line not more than one month before. The saloon crew should be similarly chosen.

10. The Bombay problem is more difficult. The crews, especially the deck crews, there are more closely attached to particular serangs: they frequently come from the same or neighbouring villages, and from almost a family on board. We think that while the system proposed for Calcutta might be applied with advantage to the Punjabi and Pathan firemen, who stand in need of more protection than the other Bombay seamen, it would be a mistake to interfere with the power of nomination the serang at present has in respect of other crews. The approval of the selecting officer will be

necessary in all cases. The system by which the butler can choose a few of his crew and the rest are taken by roster should be adopted for the saloon crews in Bombay.

11. An important function at present discharged by the brokers and ghat serangs is the payment of advances. We considered the suggestion of dispensing with advances, but came to the conclusion that this was not a possible solution. The seamen demand and require the advances. It is clear that Government cannot act as an insurance agent and undertake the monetary risks involved in desertion. But it should not be difficult to arrange for private agencies to undertake the risk. A maximum rate of commission might be prescribed, and licenses could be granted to approved agencies to make advances at a commission not higher than the rate prescribed. The commission would be payable by the shipowners as at present. The full advance would be recoverable from the shipowners for all men who sail. Suitable agencies for the purpose would be the Seamen's Unions, co-operative societies, and respectable private individuals (*e.g.*, the present brokers in Bombay: we are not prepared to recommend the same for Calcutta). The licenses would be granted by the employment Bureau, and the advances would be paid, as at present, in the presence of the officer of the Bureau. The Bureau should afford assistance to advancing agencies to prevent the loss of advances.

12. Under the existing system, the brokers are responsible for getting the crew on board. If any of the crew desert it is their duty to fill vacancies. This duty will have to be undertaken by the employment Bureau, and it will be the most difficult part of its work. We suggest that a system similar to that followed in England be adopted here, and that a certain number of spare men be sent down on the day of sailing, to fill vacancies arising suddenly from desertion or as a result of the medical examination. These men would be chosen by the head of the Bureau from the roster for that line or from the additional register, and they might receive a day's pay from the shipowners for being present, unless of course they were signed on. The men rejected at the final medical examination might also receive a day's pay. The number sent would depend entirely on the instructions of the shipowners. Cases of desertion should be carefully gone into, and "failed to join" should be entered on the continuous discharge certificate. The officer-in-charge of the Bureau should have power to suspend a deserter for a long period. Habitual offenders might be punished with removal from the registers.

13. We have given careful consideration to the question of setting up the Advisory Committees of representatives of shipowners and seamen contemplated by the Genoa Convention. We are agreed that such Committees, if they worked smoothly, would be able to perform useful functions in advising the head of the Bureau. But we are not agreed as to the advisability of introducing these Committees at an early stage. Four members of the Committee, Mr. Clow, Mr. Joshi, Mr. Daud and Mr. Mahomed Ibrahim consider that the Committees should be set up as soon as practicable.* They would prove most useful in assisting the head of the Bureau to complete the scheme for recruitment. In our report we have dealt only with the broad outlines of the scheme; the details to be filled in later will be numerous and it is essential that at this stage, the head of the Bureau should be kept in close touch with both shipowners and seamen. The remaining three members, Sir Frank Carter, Mr. Penny and Mr. Barnett consider that there is a distinct danger that an Advisory Committee will result in serious friction and will hamper the head of the Bureau to such an extent that the establishment of the new system will be jeopardised. They think that the head of the Bureau should be given a free hand to set the system in operation, and Advisory Committees can be introduced at any stage when their necessity is obvious.

14. We consider that bribery, whether direct or indirect, to obtain employment for seamen should be regarded as a serious offence, and punishable with a considerable term of imprisonment. At present the maximum penalty is a comparatively small fine coupled with the loss of office in the case of certain persons. This most inadequate penalty, coupled with the difficulty of obtaining a conviction in cases of this type, has acted as a complete check on prosecutions. We suggest a maximum of two years rigorous imprisonment. A heavy penalty, *e.g.*, a fine of Rs. 1,000 should also be possible for unauthorised persons who endeavour to supply seamen to any agency other than the employment Bureau. On the other hand, there should be complete liberty to shipowners, seamen, their representatives or their organizations to supply seamen to the Bureau. In the case of the offences referred to above, the head of the Bureau should have power to institute prosecutions on complaints or otherwise, and the cases should be treated as public prosecutions.

15. No separate figures are available to show how far the fees now levied under Sections 5 and 6 of Act I of 1859 meet the expenses incurred in recruitment. But we consider that these fees should be diverted

* I desire to make it clear that, in my opinion, it will not be practicable to set up these committees until the consent of both parties has been secured.—A. G. Clow.

towards maintenance of the employment bureau, which will exercise the functions at present discharged by the Shipping Office.

16. Inquiries have not been made in ports other than Bombay and Calcutta, and we have, in consequence, no evidence regarding conditions at the other ports of India. We have, therefore, confined our discussions to Calcutta and Bombay.

A. G. CLOW.

FRANK CARTER.

N. M. JOSHI.

CHAS. S. PENNY.

MAHAMMED DAUD.

F. L. BARNETT.

MOHAMAD IBRAHIM.

The 8th March 1922.

APPENDIX A.

Report on the Preliminary Inquiry in Bombay.

1. The Committee met in Bombay on 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 16th, 17th and 18th January.

Sittings of Committee.

In addition to recording formal evidence, the members of the Committee made a number of visits to the Shipping Office, to ships in the harbour and to the seamen's lodging-houses in the city, and interrogated those they found there. The witnesses examined included representatives of all the leading firms engaged in shipping, officers of ships, seamen of various capacities, shipping brokers, officials concerned in the supervision of recruiting, and a few independent persons. 94 recorded statements* are appended to this report, but that number represents only a fraction of those whose information has been utilised. Where informal inquiries were made from large gatherings of men, a record was kept of the information given by one or two typical men, and the others were asked to corroborate or check what was said.

2. The Bombay Government selected Mr. F. L. Barnett,

Representation on Committee.

Marine Superintendent of Messrs. Turner, Morrison and Company, to represent the shipowners on the Committee, and Mr. Mohamad Ibrahim to represent the seamen. It is necessary here to refer to a controversy regarding the appointment of the latter, who was chosen at a meeting of seamen called for the purpose. The Indian Seamen's Union, which is the only union among the seamen of Bombay, through their President, Mr. Baptista, entered a protest against the action of the Bombay Government in not asking them to make a nomination to the Committee, on the ground that the Government of Bombay had not acted in accordance with the spirit of the International Labour Organization; in consequence of this protest, no official representative of the union appeared before the Committee. It would be out of place to enter into the merits of the discussion here, but it should be added that the Indian Seamen's Union consists entirely of those employed in the saloon crews, who are nearly all Goanese, and the present rules of the union (more especially those relating to masses for the dead) make it difficult for others to join the union if they wish to do so. There is no union among the deck or engine-room crews, and it has always been among those that the more serious abuses were alleged to exist. At the same time, Mr. Baptista was kind enough to send Mr. Clow a long personal letter, containing much information and his views on the question, and to permit him to utilise this for the work of the Committee. This has accordingly been used for the preparation of this report. The witnesses include, moreover, several members of the union, and a minor official of it.

3. A crew on board ship is organized in three groups—the deck crew, the engine-room crew and the saloon crew. The deck crew works under a serang responsible to the Chief Officer.

The serang has one or two (rarely three) tindals who assist him in the control of the lascars and lascar boys. In addition the crew includes the four sukhanis (quartermasters) whose duties make them almost independent of the serang; in a few ships they are actually independent. The deck crew is completed by the kassab (storesman), winchman, bhandari (cook; he has sometimes a mate) and topas (sweeper). With an Indian crew, the carpenter is almost always a Chinese, working directly under the Chief Officer. Some ships carry European quartermasters with the rest of the crew Indian. The usual path of promotion is from lascar boy to lascar, to kassab or winchman, to tindal, to sukhani, to serang.

4. The engine-room crew works under its own serang, responsible to the Chief Engineer, or one of his assistants. The serang has usually two or three tindals, and in the Peninsular and Oriental Company there is a separate serang for the coal-trimmers, responsible to the head serang. In at least one line, there is a separate grade of paniwallas between tindals and serang. In addition to the fireman and coal-trimmers, the engine-room crew includes a donkeyman, a kassab, an oilman, a bhandari (and mate, if required). Promotion is from coal-trimmer to fireman, to oilman, kassab or donkeyman, to junior tindal, to first tindal, to paniwalla (where this grade exists), to serang.

5. The saloon crew works under the butler, who is responsible to the purser, or Chief Steward, if the ship carries one. The crew is practically in two sections, the one comprising the saloon crew proper (*i.e.*, general servants, officers, boys, etc.) working directly under the butler, and the other consisting of the galley crew (cooks, butchers, bakers, scullions, etc.) working under the chief cook. Promotion is less graded than in the engine-room or on deck, and a man in one section (butchers, bakers, waiters, scullions, etc.) stays in it as a rule.

6. The deck crew may be either Hindu or Musalman. The Hindus come mostly from Surat and its neighbourhood; a few come from Diu and other places on the coast. The Musalmans come chiefly from Bombay and Ratnagiri. Others come from Daman or Malabar, and there are a few Maldivis (from the Maldiva and Laccadive Islands). It is rare for a crew to include men from more than one locality, although in an emergency a crew may be completed by a

few men belonging to a different type. But both on ships and in the boarding-houses on shore, the men from the different areas keep themselves separate. The engine-room crew is always Musalman. The chief classes are the Bombay Musalmans, the Konkanis, the Punjabis, and the Pathans (from the North-West Frontier districts and beyond). The latter two classes are recruited only by the Peninsular and Oriental Company. Here again there is no mingling of the classes; between Punjabi and Pathan the division is quite as sharp as between the others. An Indian deck crew is occasionally taken with an engine-room crew of Sidis, or others not recruited from India. The saloon crew is almost invariably composed of Goanese. The bhandaris and topases belong to no definite district; the majority, possibly, come from the United Provinces.

7. There are at present three shipping brokers licensed under Section 18 of Act I of 1859. Their main function is the supply of seamen, and the payment of advances to them. All three brokers are members of one Parsi firm, Messrs. Chichgar and Company, which has held this business for several generations. Two firms engaged in the coastal shipping trade employ seamen directly without the intervention of the brokers; all the other shipping firms work through the brokers, who have thus a virtual monopoly of the business. A separate partner deals with the work of the Peninsular and Oriental Company, but this is merely a private arrangement made by the firm. The brokers receive a fixed commission from the firms employing them; this takes the form of a percentage (usually $7\frac{1}{2}$ but in some cases 5) of the advances made to seamen when they are engaged; these advances are usually the equivalent of one month's pay. This charge is, of course, independent of the fees chargeable to ship-owners and seamen under sections 5 and 6 of Act I of 1859.

8. Where crews are taken on articles, and the only crews who are not so taken on are those employed in the small coasting ships, the engagements are of two kinds. Six months articles, which are used, as a rule, for ships that are not going west of Suez, engage seamen for a period of six months, and do not expire when the ship returns to the port of engagement. Twelve months articles, which are normal for ships going to Europe or America, last for a year, unless the ship returns to the port of engagement and remains there for 48 hours. Thus every seaman employed is discharged at least once a year, and most men are discharged more frequently. It is this factor, first of all, that introduces into their engagement features that are absent from engagement on shore. There is, of course, nothing to prevent men discharged from being taken on again in the same ship, and there are obvious advantages in doing so. But one Company, at least,

has introduced a rule that no crew should remain more than six months on the same ship. This was apparently a concession to discontent due to unemployment.

9. Practically every ship that carries a Bombay crew requires some new men when it returns to Bombay and most of them require fresh crews. It will be convenient to deal first with the deck and engine room crews, and to treat of the saloon crew later. If a fresh crew is required for the deck and the engine-room, the first step is the selection of the serangs. The Commander of the ship reports to the agents, who inform the brokers. The brokers then send a number of serangs of each class and of the type required with a printed form giving their names, and from these the Chief Officer selects the deck serang, and the Chief Engineer selects his serang. The selection is usually made at the shipping office but may take place on board ship or in the office of the agents. The officer making the selection then fills up on another form the number of the discharge certificate of the serang he selects, and the serang takes this back to the broker, and is told to bring his crew. In making the selection, the officer of the ship is usually guided by previous knowledge of the men; if they are new to him, he judges them by their appearance and their record as shown on the continuous discharge certificates which are now practically universal. Separate discharge certificates are still occasionally issued, but not to serangs. It may be added, in passing that the monotony with which Commanders enter the character and ability of every seaman on every occasion as "very good" detracts considerably from the utility of the certificates. If the ship is not in port, *e.g.*, if the crew is to travel to another port as passengers, the selection of the serangs is done by the agents' Marine Superintendent or other officer.

10. The serang then collects his crew. If he belongs to Surat or some other place on the Bombay coast, and if time allows, he may go to his home for the purpose, but more usually the crew is collected from the men living in the boarding-houses in Bombay. The boarding-houses inhabited by the men of each class are close together; each class has its own area in Bombay, and men are attached more or less permanently to the same boarding-house (unless they belong to Bombay) and pay rent for it, whether they are at sea, in Bombay, or at their villages.

11. The crew is then produced before the officer making the selection. As a rule the Chief Officer and the Chief Engineer come to the shipping office for the purpose, but the selection is sometimes made on board

ship. The Committee saw the process in both cases. The serang produces each man in turn, and he shows his discharge certificate, and is approved by the officer, unless there is any sound reason for rejecting him. Some companies have a private medical examination at this stage by their own doctor, to minimise the risk of rejections by the official doctor when the ship is ready to sail. Generally speaking, rejections on any ground are few, and the great majority of the men chosen by the serang are taken. A few officers take the precaution of noting the number of each man they approve, to prevent personation later.

12. This selection is usually made two or three days before the ship sails, and the crew is signed on immediately after it has taken place. The articles are read over to the men, with a formal warning not to pay money to anyone, and the signing-on is done in the presence of the Shipping Officer or his assistant by one of his clerks. The broker's man is there at the same time, and, as each man is taken, he hands over, in cash, an advance of money. Advance notes, though used for Europeans, are not given to Indian seamen. The advance to be given is a month's pay in most cases; in some coasting ship it is half-a-month's pay. The broker does not pay the full amount when the man is signed on; he deducts an amount which is paid on the day on which the ship sails.

13. This deduction was stated to us to be five rupees, but, as we found later, larger deductions are made in the cases of some types of crew, especially Punjabis and Pathans, who are regarded as unreliable and more likely to desert. In one case that we came across in the shipping-office, fifteen rupees was being deducted from each man's pay; this would come, for most men, to at least half the amount. The deduction is apparently left to the discretion of the broker, and he is able, by increasing it, to reduce his risk of loss on desertions to a minimum. But the system appeared to be understood and accepted by the men, and no one complained or even suggested, that the full amount was not ultimately paid. If men desert, the broker loses the money advanced by him to those men, and this is one of the chief services rendered by the brokers to the companies. As the men's discharge certificates are retained after they sign on, it should be difficult for deserters to obtain employment again, but apparently this is not the case. Desertion is not regarded as a very grave offence, and after a few months, the man recovers his certificate and tries again.

14. It not infrequently happens that, owing to sickness or other causes, new seamen are required to fill up vacancies when a complete new crew is not wanted. In such cases, if time permits, the serang will

go and bring fresh men. But this filling-up of vacancies occurs usually when the ship is spending only a short time—perhaps a few hours—in Bombay. In such cases, the Commander of the ship generally sends intimation ahead to the agents and they inform the brokers of the number of men wanted. The brokers then collect the men, and have them ready for the arrival of the ship. Such men are collected by the brokers runners, who are known popularly as ghat serangs. The ghat serangs are also used, as the brokers admit, for assisting serangs who cannot obtain men to complete their crews.

15. But these ghat serangs play a rather larger part in recruitment than is generally admitted. Their
 Ghat serangs. very number in itself proves this. There are 6 ghat serangs kept by the brokers for the Peninsular and Oriental Company alone (exclusive of Goanese and Sidi ghat serangs), and 6 for the other companies, making 12 in all. This large number can be explained, in part, by the fact that separate ghat serangs are considered necessary for the different types of crews, and by the separation of the Peninsular and Oriental work from the work for the other companies. But the ghat serangs keep assistants and are apparently well occupied. They are ex-serangs, and keep boarding houses in some cases. They give the serangs information of ships requiring crews; and call serangs to the brokers to be sent before selecting officers. They certainly collect seamen themselves in some cases. They are used for the payment of the advances to the men. And they probably participate in various other ways in the organization of the crew and in seeing them safely on board the ships.

16. The ghat serangs receive no pay; instead they are given
 Pay of ghat serangs. Rs. 40 monthly, which, as we were told by one of the brokers, is intended to cover their travelling expenses. The assistants they keep are not paid by the brokers, and one assistant we examined was getting as much as Rs. 25 a month in addition to his food from the ghat serang. This would make it obvious, even if there were no direct evidence, that the ghat serangs receive money from seamen.

17. It is quite evident, moreover, that the ghat serang is in a
 Power of ghat serangs. position of some power. The ghat serang is the brokers' intermediary at almost every stage. He is in a position to give accurate information regarding ships. This in itself is not very important, for serangs have not much difficulty in finding out when ships want crews. But the ghat serang could make it difficult, if not impossible, for a serang or seaman to whom he objected to enter the brokers' office. The ghat serang has many methods open to him of prejudicing the

claims of particular men, and, as the brokers' confidant, it is easy for him to make his power appear to be larger than it is, so that he appears to be, in a very real sense, the channel of employment. It is also clear that the ghat serang can make it difficult for a serang to keep his crew. The men can be bribed or intimidated into deserting if the serang falls out of favour. This is true even when the crew is collected at Surat.

18. Where, as in Bombay, there is usually a considerable mass of unemployed serangs and seamen competing for jobs, it is inevitable that men should attempt to turn the scales in their favour by offering money, even where none is asked. An illustration of this is furnished by the fact that officers, especially engineers, are frequently offered bribes by serangs in order to influence their choice. The evidence shows that this practice is not confined to India; British seamen occasionally offer bribes to officers to secure employment.

19. If the ghat serang is the channel of employment for the serang, it is the serang who virtually selects the men, when he is present. There is a big surplus of seamen efficient enough to satisfy the officers of the ship, and the serang can usually pick and choose amongst them. This is especially true of seamen belonging to Bombay, and of Punjabis and Pathans who cannot return to their homes frequently. In the case of those living in accessible places in the mufassil, e.g., Surat, the serang has probably a more limited choice, and may even have to search for men. Moreover the happiness or discomfort of the men when at sea will depend largely upon the serang, and the power he has by being in a position to obtain employment for his men is enhanced by the knowledge that the voyage will be made under his command. It is kept in check, with Bombay crews, by the clan spirit among the men. Where the crew comes from one village, or a set of neighbouring villages, a certain *esprit de corps* operates as a considerable check on abuses. And unemployment has apparently not reached the stage when a bad serang can get a crew without difficulty. It will be noticed later that these checks are lacking in Calcutta.

20. We obtain no satisfactory evidence indicating that bribes are given to ghat serangs by deck serangs. Nor were we able to trace complaints in this department. It is fairly clear that the ghat serangs have some source of income apart from their pay, and it would be a very striking exception to current custom if nothing was given. But whatever is given is given more or less voluntarily, and certainly

does not exceed the *dasturi* or commission that is almost universal in such transactions.

21. The engine-room serangs and crews are men of less education and lower social status and they are therefore easier victims. This is especially true of the Punjabis and Pathans, who come at the bottom of the scale. About a year ago, complaints were made on two occasions that large sums were being given by serangs of this class. These complaints were not substantiated, or even supported, on inquiry, and there are sound reasons for doubting their accuracy. But it is probable that they had a foundation in fact, and it is in evidence that two ghat serangs working with Punjabis and Pathans grew rich on the proceeds of their work. These men were dismissed by the brokers. The sums now being taken from the Punjabi and Pathan seamen—and on this we have most reliable information—are not such as to make large bribes possible. One engine-room serang told us that the ghat serangs ask money when the serangs have difficulty in getting a crew; and they can always make it difficult for a serang to obtain a crew, or to sail with the crew he has collected. As will be seen later, the ghat serangs also obtain money directly from the seamen. The seamen moreover stated that the serangs made payments to the ghat serangs; the usual sums in these cases are from Rs. 50 to 100. With firemen serangs of other classes the sums are almost certainly smaller.

22. Direct evidence was obtained of the bribery of the serangs by the men. The practice prevails to a limited extent among the deck crews, and to a more serious extent in the engine-room crews. Among the deck crews in the leading lines, the seamen probably pay from 5/- to 10/- each to the serang when they obtain employment. In the smaller lines they probably pay less. No deck hand who spoke of the practice appeared to regard it as repressive; it was regarded more in the light of a customary due, voluntarily given. Some explained it by saying that it was to meet the expenses of the serang in travelling to and from the shipping office; occasionally it was spoken of as a loan. (On two occasions we actually saw money passing in the shipping office); in both cases deck crews were concerned. One man, who was a deck tindal, was collecting a small sum (it was said to be six rupees and appeared to be about that amount) from each of his men; he and the men then paying explained that it was a debt for supplying the men's kits and boxes. In the other case, where Maldivis were concerned, the serang was taking a rupee from each man. He said that it was for a seamen's fund, but it was certainly not for any regular fund.

Bribery of serangs: deck crews.

Later, in Calcutta, Maldivis said that the serang's charge to each man was one rupee ; they are a very clannish little group, and it may be as small as this in their case. We had proof, on another occasion, that the tindal is concerned in the collection of the serang's dues, and he probably participates in them.

23. If the cesses levied from the deck hands are more or less voluntary, the same cannot be said of the
 Engine-room crews. engine-room crews Here there is more organization of the levies, and they are objected to by at least some sections of the men, viz., the Punjabis and Pathans, who come lowest in the social scale, and therefore pay most. The deck hands are all men of a higher type than the engine-room hands ; they live in lattis, which, if they are decidedly inferior to the Calcutta lattis, are fairly respectable. (The firemen's lattis are cramped and insanitary, and, in the case of the Punjabis and Pathans it is scarcely possible for the men to remain in them and they spend most of their time on their beds in the street.) Incidentally, the inhabitants of respectable muhallas endeavour to prevent these men living there. It was from these men that we received definite complaints and appeals for action, and a number of them gave us the scales charged. (The payments made by them are of three kinds, *bhanji*, which is the payment made to the serang when a man is taken on for the first time, *ugrani*, which is the payment made to the serang each time a man signs on, and the *salami*, or *dasturi* given to the ghat serang. *Bhanji* appears to be a month's pay as a rule. *Ugrani* varies according to the grade in which the man is rated ; the usual scale works out to rather less than half a month's pay, but more is occasionally taken.) The payment to the ghat serang is two rupees. Small payments are probably made on promotion in addition. It is significant that the men who made the strongest protest did not contemplate the abolition of all payment ; they suggested that Government should fix the rates for *bhanji* and *ugrani*, and proposed sixteen rupees for the one and five for the other. It is perhaps worth mentioning that five rupees per head was the usual rate of *ugrani* before the war. Among the other types of engine-room crew, bribery prevails, but the bribes are certainly not greater than those detailed above, and are smaller as a rule. The Punjabis and Pathans work for the Peninsular and Oriental Company, which pays higher rates than the other companies. There are a fair number of Bengali seamen in Bombay, most of whom wait in the hope of filling vacancies in Calcutta crews, and some of whom have definitely migrated to escape the extortion in Calcutta. These have no ghat serang, and pay nothing except a small *salami*, usually two rupees, to the serang. Both in the case of the deck crews and the engine-room crews the cesses are usually levied at the time of signing on. *Bhandaris* and *topases* appear to

enjoy an exemption similar to that of which evidence was found in Calcutta.

24. It is now possible to form an estimate of the interest of the serang in the system. Taking for example, a Punjabi engine-room crew employed by the Peninsular and Oriental Company and applying a scale of rates quoted to us, the serang would receive from the men from Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 according to the size of the crew and the ghat serang from Rs. 60 to Rs. 100. Now, a reliable estimate which was confirmed by a tindal for the same type of men, put the amount paid by an older serang to the ghat serang Rs. 100 to Rs. 50 or even less, while a new serang might pay Rs. 200 or more. Sums ranging from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1,000 are said to have been paid on occasions, but such large sums are exceptional. As the sums paid can usually be met from the advances, and loans are unnecessary, it is fairly clear that there is a big margin for profit to the serang. These are certainly the extreme cases. With other types of crew the sums are smaller and in a few cases they are very much smaller, but it is probable that in most cases where bribes are taken, the serangs find the system about as profitable as the ghat serang do. Incidentally, the sums said to be saved in Bombay help to indicate that the illegal cesses are not very heavy, and the readiness with which seamen dispute trifling sums when they are being paid off shows that they have a very accurate reckoning of the amounts they should receive.

25. The financial transactions of the brokers with the seamen are, as we have seen, conducted through the ghat serangs. And it is therefore not surprising that the belief should exist that the brokers participate in the bribes given to the ghat serangs. One set of firemen we interviewed were quite convinced that this was the case, and it is quite likely that the ghat serangs support their demands by stating that the money has to be paid to the brokers. It is also in evidence that the brokers lend sums of Rs. 40 or Rs. 50 to the serangs; this is repaid when the serang gets employment. This is an objectionable practice, for, apart from the suspicion it gives rise to, it gives the broker a direct interest in securing employment for particular serangs. But there is no genuine evidence to show that the brokers have any hand in the bribery, and the indications are all the other way. The total money taken is limited, and out of it twelve ghat serangs have to pay their assistants before they receive even their own pay. Again, the brokers, by virtue of the monopoly, have it in their power to practise extortion on a large scale, and there is certainly no such extortion as is found in Calcutta, where no monopoly exists. Finally there is evidence that the brokers dismissed men who had been taking bribes in considerable

quantity. Except in so far as the brokers obtain their staff at a much cheaper rate than would be possible if there were no bribery, they do not appear to make any profit out of the system beyond their legal commission, which is considerable.

26. (There is one other class that has the power to obtain bribes ; this is the officers of the ship.) Officers

Bribery of officers.

specially engineers, are not infrequently offered bribes ; these have also been offered on occasion to the officers of the agents on shore. And junior engineer officers occasionally take bribes, but the practice is fortunately uncommon. At the same time, the serangs when extracting money from the men, are apt to allege the necessity of payments to officers as well as to the ghat serangs, and the men have no opportunity of verifying such payments.

27. In the case of the saloon crews, the conditions of recruit-

Organization of saloon crews.

ment are fundamentally altered by the existence of a fairly strong and comprehensive union. The Goanese who form these crews have been organized in *koors* or private clubs for many years, and these clubs are very numerous in Bombay. It is not surprising therefore that efforts at wider organization amongst them were made at a comparatively early date. It is not necessary to enter here into the various internecine quarrels that have marked the history of the organizations or their financial troubles. About a year ago, however, the existing unions amalgamated under the leadership of Mr. Baptista, and it is only just to note that he appears to have made a strenuous effort to put the accounts of the union on a satisfactory footing, and to prevent peculation. The Indian Seamen's Union is registered under the Provident Societies Act of 1912.

28. Until a few months ago, the new union included all the

Recruitment of saloon crews.

saloon crews with the exception of some Mangaloreans, and it has been able to exercise fairly effective control over recruiting of these crews. An arrangement was made by which the broker supplied only the men approved by the union, and this arrangement was agreed to by the firms concerned. The broker receives the same commission in respect of these men as is given for the other sections of the crew. The union at the same time has endeavoured to eliminate the opportunities of bribery and the causes of disputes by keeping a roster of the men, and by attempting to ensure that they shall be employed in rotation as far as possible.

29. This method deserves attention, because it is one that would naturally suggest itself early as a solution of many difficulties, and it has

The roster system.

been tried with other sections of the crew, but not with success. In the case of the union it has been a qualified success. They have wisely allowed a certain latitude to the butler to choose a few members of his crew, and the system has probably given satisfaction to a large proportion of the members. Such difficulties as it has encountered can be traced to the failure to carry it out completely in one direction and the attempt to carry it too far in another. Complaints were made to us that the subordinate officials of the union took bribes for falsifying the roster; as union officials in England, where organization and supervision is much more perfect, have been known to take bribes for securing employment for seamen, this is not surprising. Again, the union has attempted to distribute the unemployment by making a rule that butler should remain not more than two years on any ship, and other members not more than one year. This rule tends to lead to difficulties with the officers, who naturally want to retain men who have done good service, and it also tends to swell unemployment, by increasing the number of vacancies artificially, and thus attracting more new-comers than would otherwise come. In practice, too, it is open to evasions; for example, a cook told us that he got round the rule by putting a substitute on board when he went back to Goa, and then resuming his post afresh when he returned. If a more rigid control were exercised over the roster, and if it were used only to fill vacancies which occurred naturally, the present difficulties might disappear.

30. A further difficulty has been caused recently by the seces-

Secession of galley crews.

sion of a section of the galley crews from the union. These men made numerous complaints against the union at the time of the dispute; it is not necessary to detail them here, but they included an assertion that men who were at the bottom of the roster would obtain jobs by paying Rs. 10 to the union officials. They repeated these assertions to us, but they seemed to be in some confusion as to how much of the payment to the union officials was legal dues, and how much was bribery, and it appeared that their objection to the union was based quite as much on unwillingness to pay the subscriptions as on anything else. It is, of course, a difficulty about recruiting through the union that the men have to pay the subscription before they can secure employment, and that the subscription is, to some extent, a payment to secure employment, even where it is levied in absolute good faith and spent honestly on the work of the union. It is said that the union is endeavouring to bring new men to fill

their places; this must increase unemployment among this class of man, but it is not an unfair tactical move in an industrial dispute of this type.

31. It is possible that the services of the minor officials of the union receive some acknowledgment from the men they put on board, but we found no direct evidence of bribery. If sums pass, they are almost certainly small. The saloon crews are men of much higher education than the deck or engine-room crews, and, even if they were not organized, they would not easily submit to exactions. And the organization amongst them, both of clubs and union, increases their protection from corrupt practices.

A. G. CLOW.

F. L. BARNETT.

MOHAMAD IBRAHIM.

The 28th February 1922.

APPENDIX B.

Report on the Preliminary Inquiry in Calcutta.

1. The Committee, which in Calcutta included Mr. C. S. Penny, Marine Superintendent of the British India Steam Navigation Company, and Mr. M. Daud, General Secretary of the Indian Seamen's Union, met on 20th, 21st, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 30th, 31st January and 1st, 2nd and 3rd February. The witnesses included representatives of the shipping firms, officers of ships, seamer of various capacities, shipping brokers, shipping officials, lodging-house keepers and moneylenders, officers of the seamen's union, and a number of independent persons. Evidence was taken at the shipping office on a number of ships and at lodging-houses; these were chosen at random and without previous notice; the majority of the seamen examined in the office of the Committee were produced under the auspices of the Union, who were asked by the Government of Bengal to give a list of witnesses. 160 recorded statements* are appended to this report; as in Bombay, these represent only a small fraction of those whose information has been used.

2. The organization of the crew is similar to that described in the Bombay report. The Indian seamen recruited, with the exception of a few Maldivis among the deck crews, and a proportion of Goanese in the saloon, are all Bengalis. These are not separated into small clans that are self-contained; the only broad distinction observed is that between Calcutta men and men from the mufassil; and this not so rigid a division as that between Bombay Musulmans and Ratnagiri Musulmans, for example. The Bengali seamen are all Musulmans; they come chiefly from Calcutta, Sylhet, and the districts of Eastern Bengal, especially Chittagong and Noakhali. There is, of course, a rigid separation of deck-crews, engine-room crews, and saloon crews. The majority of the engine-room crews come from Sylhet and the majority of the deck crews from Eastern Bengal. Calcutta men supply most of the saloon hands.

3. There are two firms of shipping brokers, those of Mr. A. C. Ghose and Mr. P. B. Sen. The broking business has been in their hands for many years. In addition to the licenses held by the heads of the firm, licenses have been granted to the son of Mr. Ghose and to two brothers of Mr. Sen, making five licenses in all. Competition between the brokers is virtually eliminated by the division of the firms amongst them; the greater part of the business appears to be in the hands of Mr. Sen, and Mr. Ghose, who is a solicitor, devotes only a small part of his time to the shipping business. They receive a

* Not printed.

commission at the rate of 5 per cent. (in a few cases $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.) of the advances they make to the seamen on signing on. The British India Company, which controls at least half the total shipping of Calcutta, does not work through the licensed brokers, except where they are acting as agents for other firms. They employ instead seven private brokers of their own known as ghat serangs, or ghat butler in the case of the saloon crews. These men receive pay from the Company at the rate of Rs. 75 a month, and a commission of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the advances, for which they are responsible. Except that they are paid servants of the company and appointed and removed by the company, their position is not essentially different from that of the licensed brokers. They should not be confused with the ghat serangs of Bombay, who are servants of the licensed brokers. The corresponding persons to the ghat serangs of Bombay are known in Calcutta as dalals or sarkars.

4. The system by which the crew is selected is similar to that in Bombay, but, as crews are much more frequently required for ships which are not in the port in Calcutta than they are in Bombay, the agents have more to do with the selection as a rule. The first step with the deck and engine-room crews is in every case the selection of the serang. In a considerable proportion of cases the ship's officer concerned wishes to retain the serang who has just been discharged, and in that case the serang sails again, and may keep a small section of his old crew. But in many cases new serangs are required. On the question of the selection of the serangs, the evidence of the shipping office officials, of the brokers and of the officers of the agents was somewhat conflicting, but the evidence generally made it clear that, in all but a few exceptional cases, the choice of a new serang, whether it is done by an officer of the ship or an officer on shore, is restricted to those serangs who are sent by the brokers or the ghat serangs, as the case may be. This is an important point, for it is quite clear that those responsible for the choice frequently believe that they have a wider choice, and they have in several cases followed a procedure expressly designed to give them a wider choice. The evidence, however, is quite convincing on this point; the method by which this result is achieved will be discussed later.

5. In the selection of the crew, the serang has the predominant voice. In the case of the British India Company, the crew has to be selected by him in consultation with the ghat serang and in other cases they have to be approved by the broker, who is responsible for supplying them. In the case of the engine-room crew, the choice of the firemen and coal trimmers is usually left to the tindals, who select a certain number each. The crew is then produced before the officer of the ship (or if the ship is not in port, the officer of the

agent) responsible for the final selection. He accepts the men produced by the serang, unless they are obviously unfit, or have bad records, and the latter is rarely the case. At this stage, as in Bombay, there is usually a medical examination by a doctor employed by the company. The crew is then signed on, and the chief officer or chief engineer adds to the articles a declaration that he has personally selected the crew. This declaration is not made in Bombay, but it would be much truer in Bombay than in Calcutta, where the scrutiny by the officer appears to be more perfunctory. Some extra men turn up on the jetty in the hope of filling vacancies caused by rejections, but their number is small.

6. The men have now to receive their advances. The British India Company pay cash, which is handed to the men individually (but which finds its way elsewhere later); the brokers give what are known as hand-notes. These are promissory notes on printed forms which purport to be instructions by the Commander of the ship to the brokers to pay the advance, but, in practice, they are both drawn and accepted by the broker. The usual note is for one month's pay. The broker's dalal, who is himself, in some cases, a lodging-house keeper, then goes to the lodging-houses of the men, and pays half the value of each note, less a discount for his personal profit; the usual discount is 4 annas for an ordinary seaman. 8 annas for a tindal or sukhani, and one rupee for a serang. An endorsement is then made on the note. The broker does not hold himself liable to pay the rest of the note until the ship has left India, which may be as much as a fortnight later. But the men cash the remaining half of the note with money-lenders who undertake the risk of desertion and charge one anna per rupee on the full value of the note, *i.e.*, two annas per rupee on the sum they pay. The rate appears exorbitant, but there is evidence that the brokers are dilatory in paying cash for the notes, and as will be seen later, the rate for all money advanced to seamen is high. The broker's risk on desertions is thus reduced to half a month's pay, and the lodging house keeper has usually to undertake that risk for him. Similarly, the ghat serangs hold the serangs responsible in the case of desertions.

7. It is the exception for any serang to go to sea who has not given a substantial bribe to the broker or to the ghat serang. The sum paid to the broker is usually from Rs. 200 to Rs. 500; the sums paid to the ghat serang range from Rs. 300 to Rs. 1,000 as a rule. Lower sums can generally be traced to some special circumstances. Higher sums than Rs. 1,000 are occasionally paid, but it appears probable that the highest sums include payments made on account of the opportunity given of smuggling opium or other excisable articles. This is confirmed by the fact that on ships engaged on the Rangoon

run, the bhandari occasionally pays sums that he could not possibly recover out of his food transactions with the passengers. The reason why the payments on the British India Company are usually higher than on other lines is that service in their boats is preferred both by the serangs and the men. They are the premier line, give better quarters than some other lines, carry larger crews on the whole, and usually attract a better type of man. In the great majority of cases, the money paid to the brokers is given to them personally; it is usually taken in their houses. Instances were, however, mentioned when the money was given to the brokers' dalals, but this appears to be rare. Five rupees are taken by the shipping office clerk from the serangs for each deck or engine-room crew that is signed on. What has been said regarding bribery of officers and engineers in Bombay applies also to Calcutta.

8. The charges made above against the brokers and ghat serangs are grave ones, and it must not be forgotten that they are based on evidence that was not taken in the presence of the persons accused. But it may be confidently asserted that anyone who reads the recorded evidence will be forced to accept them and those who made the inquiries were convinced of their substantial truth beyond any manner of doubt. The witnesses produced by the union included a number of men who had been out of work for some time, or who had grievances, but even if none of those had appeared, the evidence of the ships' officers and engineers and of the men taken at random in the lodging-houses, on the ships (as a rule before their own officers), and elsewhere, together with the documentary evidence furnished by the books of money-lenders, and in some cases, the private accounts of the serangs themselves, would have established the facts beyond all reasonable doubt. It is scarcely necessary to say that the brokers and the ghat serangs denied all connection with, and even knowledge of bribery. Each of the ghat serangs solemnly assured us that he had never even been offered a bribe; the ships' officers' evidence shows that they, on the other hand, are offered bribes with fair frequency! The ghat serangs and the brokers are men of wealth.*

9. Both serangs recover the sums paid from the crews, but the system followed by the deck serang differs from that of the engine-room serang. Each of the upper men of the deck crew—tindals, sukhanis, winchmen, kassabs—pays the serang a lump sum before sailing. The tindals pay little; Rs. 10 is a typical sum, and in some ships they actually receive a little from the serang. The sukhanis pay more; Rs. 40 is not an uncommon sum for each of them. The winchmen and kassab may pay the same, or rather less.

* Generally: but details were not collected in every case.

They are then free of further cesses, and they get the whole of their pay when they return. The khalasis, or deck hands, pay according to a graduated scale; before going on board each man settles with the serang the amount he is to receive as pay while on the ship, and the difference between that and the company's pay is known as the "increase". This goes to the serang. The older and more experienced hands pay very little increase; the younger men pay a large proportion of their pay. It is consequently to the serang's interest to include as many young men as he can in the crew, but he has to secure the services of a fair proportion of capable men, as otherwise his crew may incur the censure of the Chief Officer, and he will not be allowed to sign on that ship again. It occasionally happens that a serang actually pays one or two rupees a month to a very good seaman, but this is rare. The following two examples will illustrate typical scales of increase. Both are taken from serangs' private account-books; one was obtained on the ship, and another in a latti. One of the account-books, which was an old one, has been retained; the other was in use and had to be given back. In a British India ship paying Rs. 22 to each lascar, the serang had one man on Rs. 21, two on Rs. 20, three on Rs. 17, three on Rs. 16, one on Rs. 15, three on Rs. 14, one on Rs. 13, and one on Rs. 12, giving a total monthly increase of Rs. 88 out of a total pay bill (for the company) of Rs. 330. We checked the list by asking several of the men to state their pay. The amount paid to the ghat serang was only Rs. 250, and other cesses (to shipping-office clerk, etc.) came to Rs. 16. This serang had just incurred considerable expense in a lawsuit arising out of the previous voyage. In a ship belonging to another line which was paying each lascar Rs. 18, the serang had one man on the full pay of Rs. 18, one on Rs. 17, three on Rs. 16, two on Rs. 15, three on Rs. 14, two on Rs. 13, one on Rs. 12, and one on Rs. 11. The serang had paid Rs. 200 to the broker, Rs. 5 to the shipping office clerk, and he had received Rs. 74 from the men above the rating of lascar; these, he explained, were old men, and consequently gave little. The increase in this case works out to Rs. 48 out of a pay-bill of Rs. 252.

10. There are two differences in the method of recovery for the Engine-room crew. engine-room crews. One is that the tindals assist the serang to pay the initial bribe; for this purpose they borrow substantial amounts. The contribution of the first tindal is usually Rs. 160 to Rs. 200; the second tindal provides about Rs. 100. These sums are loans to be repaid when the vessel signs off and the levies are made from the men; the tindals usually pay small sums (*e. g.*, Rs. 10) in addition. The other difference is that each of the firemen and coal trimmers pays on the same scale, whatever his age and experience. This amount is never less than one month's pay in six, but is not as a rule much more

than that ; it is always calculated in months' pay. For a twelve months' voyage it varies from two to three months' pay for a six months' voyage the amount is halved.

11. It appears, at first sight, that the system is extremely profitable to the serangs. In the case of the deck serangs, the total increase far exceeds the payments to the brokers and ghat serangs ; in the case of engine-room crews the amounts received leave a big margin over the original bribes. But this takes no account of usury. The sums the serangs pay to the brokers and the ghat serangs have to be borrowed from money-lenders, and the money-lenders' invariable rate of simple interest is two annas in the rupee, or 150 per cent. a year. Consequently on a twelve months' voyage, the sum to be repaid is much more than double the sum borrowed. But even this does not represent the full charge. For the brokers have carried the system of bribes one stage further, and the ghat serangs have copied them. They insist on the serangs depositing retaining fees with them. A serang has to deposit at an early stage a sum which varies between Rs. 60 and Rs. 100 as a rule, for the privilege of being on the brokers' books, and thus having his claims considered when a ship comes in. There is a big surplus of serangs—the disinclination of a man who has once officiated as serang to sail again in a humbler capacity is partly responsible for this—and, with the best will in the world, the brokers would have to keep each man waiting five or six months for a ship. During this period they have the advantage of the deposit, and the serang is paying interest on it. When he gets a ship, the deposit is set off from the amount of the bribe agreed upon, but the interest is not refunded. Thus a serang who deposits Rs. 100 and is given a ship after six months for an additional payment of Rs. 200 would have to pay the money-lender, on return from a twelve months' voyage, the sum of Rs. 825. As a matter of fact, the deck serang can generally reduce the amount he has to borrow by the payments made by the sukhanis and other hands above the rating of lascar, which he receives within a week or two of borrowing the bribe-money. These payments are obviously fewer in the engine-room, and the bribes are on the whole heavier, so that the burden on the serang is much greater there and even with the assistance given by the tindals, he has difficulty in clearing himself. As an example of the scale on which borrowing is done, one money-lender who lends only to engine-room crews stated, and supported his statement by his books, that he had two lakhs on loan to serangs, tindals and other engine-room hands. All this sum was well secured ; in most cases, the sums were lent on the joint security of several members of the crew, and the lodging-house keeper has usually to stand security in

addition. Yet on this two lakhs, a sum of Rs. 25,000 was being paid monthly as interest.

12. Generally speaking, if the serang makes only one voyage on a ship, and is then thrown out of work, he makes little profit, and may be considerably

Subsequent voyages.

out of pocket. But in most cases he has the expectation of repeating the voyage, and if he is taken on again, he has more opportunity of profit. We found it to be the invariable rule that, where the old serang was taken on again by the ship's officer, the bribe was greatly reduced. Similarly, where the serang had any special influence with the officer of the agents, he had to pay less. For example, on one ship we visited, the deck serang had rendered conspicuous service by saving 40 lives from a wreck, a deed for which he had received Lloyds' medal. The Marine Superintendent of the line had given orders that he was to receive a ship whenever one was vacant, and he was, of course, known to the Marine Superintendent personally. He explained to us that in consequence of this, he was able to get ships with very much smaller bribes than the ordinary serang, and quoted striking figures in support of this. On the same ship, the engine-room serang had done four consecutive voyages, and whereas he had had to pay Rs. 700 for the first voyage, his subsequent payments had been Rs. 300, Rs. 200 and Rs. 300. This is not surprising; what is surprising is that serangs who have been directly selected by the officers should pay anything at all. But they clearly regard the smaller payments as a form of insurance; a day may come when the officer is changed, or the serang falls out of favour; then, if he has flouted the demands of the broker or the ghat serang, his career is at an end. And there is always the danger that difficulties may occur with the crew; one serang showed us a certificate from an officer to the effect that, though he had given satisfaction, he had to leave through trouble with the ghat serang.

13. It is this fact of the power of the brokers and ghat serangs

Power of brokers and ghat serangs.

to extort money that is most difficult to explain. Most of the representatives of companies, and, be it added, the officials of the shipping office, seemed inclined to doubt the fact, but the evidence establishes it beyond cavil. The sums are paid, and they are not paid voluntarily, or through misapprehension. The power rest on a number of circumstances. The fact that only the brokers and ghat serangs receive accurate information of the demands for serangs and crews is important, and if the ship is not in port, this fact is all-important. And the broker or the ghat serang has the power to make it difficult, if not impossible, for a crew to sail without his consent. Into this a certain amount of intimidation

enters, but difficulties can be raised in numerous other ways. The officer of the ship cannot take the risk of selecting a new serang who has not the approval of the broker or ghat serang. He knows that, if he does so, he runs a risk of finding himself without a crew, and the blame will then be placed on him by the agents; he should have followed the normal procedure. Nor is it easy for serangs that do not come through the regular channels to get access to the officers; if they do get access, the broker can influence the officer by telling him that the man gave trouble on his previous ship or cannot get a crew, and there is no means of verifying this with the present unsatisfactory method of endorsing discharge certificates. Again, it is no use applying to the shipping office, for they disclaim responsibility for selecting serangs, and refer the applicants to the brokers or the agents. Finally the serangs find it difficult to approach the agents; some agents refer them directly to the brokers, and the serangs believe that the doors of all the offices are fenced against them. Everywhere the serang who does not come through the proper channel finds his way blocked, and the proper channel means money.

14. On more than one occasion we had accounts of the precautions taken by officers, in a sincere endeavour to check bribery. Endeavours to check bribery. our to prevent abuses, and in the honest belief that the precautions were successful, and found, by further inquiry, that the precautions were ineffective. The Chief Officer of a ship would explain that he made a point of changing his serang as seldom as possible and of filling a vacancy by appointing a tindal, and the serang would come forward and state, before the Chief Officer, that he had paid Rs.600 for that ship. A Superintending Engineer would detail the care with which he kept a list of his serangs, and took them, as far as possible, in order, and a visit to his ships would show that large bribes were being paid for each of them. But at the same time, it was made clear to us that, where that officer concerned takes pains to make the selection his own, and to leave as little scope to the brokers and ghat serangs as possible, he does succeed in reducing the amounts that the latter can extort. If the men felt convinced that the tenure of office of such an officer would last their time, it is possible that they could almost withhold bribes altogether. But the readiness of the serangs to give bribes to better their prospects of employment is well illustrated by the fact that bribes are reported to have been given to a clerk who was supposed to have, and doubtless pretended to have, control over a list of serangs for a certain company, when as a matter of fact he was unable to alter the list. There is no doubt that the serangs and the men, if they could combine to prevent bribe-giving, have it in their power to stop the practice at any time. It is only because there are two men for every job that it can

continue. During the war, when crews were more difficult to get, bribery diminished.

15. In this connection, it is interesting to note that an attempt was made by a small section of the men to combine to prevent bribes being taken. **Sukhanis' combination.** Last October, the sukhanis formed a sort of union; the underlying idea was that no sukhani would give a bribe, or sail with a sukhani who gave a bribe. And they started a list of sukhanis, with the object of securing that there was a fair distribution of jobs. They made the mistake of attempting to restrict the choice of the ships officers by sending down no more sukhanis than the number required and the leaders were accused in the criminal courts by one of the brokers' dalals (a boarding-house keeper). The attempt to combine thus met with opposition, and was soon abandoned; some men started to give bribes, and the scheme failed.

16. The Maldivis form a small class apart. They are employed only on deck, and are practically confined to one company. **The Maldivis.** And they alone appear to enjoy complete immunity from the exactions of the brokers and the ghat serangs. This is apparently due to the fact that they form a close corporation. They are usually taken on at Colombo or the Malabar ports, and brought to Calcutta virtually as passengers. They seldom stay long in Calcutta, and all those in Calcutta at any one time are known to each other. For example, at the time we made our enquiries, there were only three Maldivi serangs waiting for employment. It is clear that they owe their fortunate position partly to their scarcity, and partly to their co-operation. The only cess paid by the men is a nominal salami of one rupee paid by each seaman to serang.

17. The system on which the saloon crews are recruited is similar to that followed for the deck and engine-room crews. **Recruiting of saloon crews.** The British India Company keep their own private broker, who is a servant of the company and is known as the ghat butler; the other firms work through the licensed brokers. The men employed by the brokers to assist them in this part of the work are also known as ghat butlers. We were somewhat surprised to learn from one of the brokers that the man he employed had been convicted of kidnapping, and that he retained him "because no respectable man would undertake this work". The main part of his work appears to be getting the crew on board; it seems that, after the final medical inspection, the crew has little difficulty in finding its way ashore to the grogshops. The choice of the crew usually rests largely with the butler selected for the ship.

18. In lines other than the British India Company, a bribe is usually paid by the butler to the broker; this is not a large sum; fifty rupees is about the usual amount. The butler presumably takes care to recover this amount from his crew, but we were not able to secure satisfactory evidence of this. The saloon-boys pay a small bribe—about two or three rupees each—to the ghat butler when they sign on. This is a more or less voluntary commission; it is a trifling proportion of the pay they will receive, and is regarded more as insurance than anything else. One waiter told us that one reason for giving it was that otherwise he might not pass the doctor. He did not believe that it went to the doctor, but he feared that if he did not give it, the broker's ghat butler would say to the doctor "Don't take that boy; he is always falling sick," and the doctor, with many other candidates available, would prefer someone else. In the British India Company, while one or two rupees appears to be given by each of the saloon boys to the ghat butler, the butlers and cooks pay nothing for their jobs. This is largely due to the personal efforts of the present Victualling Superintendent. It was not always the case.

19. Efforts were made to corroborate the evidence regarding Calcutta conditions by the examination of witnesses in Bombay who were familiar with Calcutta. And similar efforts were made in Calcutta to obtain corroborative evidence regarding Bombay. Many of the witnesses examined in Bombay were able to speak with knowledge of Calcutta, and a number of them originally came from Bengal. On the other hand, very few of the Calcutta witnesses could give evidence regarding Bombay. A number of Bengali seamen can always be found in Bombay, but Bombay seamen do not stay in Calcutta. But the witnesses who were able to speak regarding both places were practically unanimous regarding the striking differences between the two cities in the matter of bribery. They differed regarding the causes of the contrast, but they did not differ regarding the fact. A serang in Calcutta contrasting the two systems said "If we had the Bombay conditions here, it would be excellent". He did not, of course, mean to commit himself to approval of the bribery in Bombay. And the Bombay seamen who knew Calcutta all stated that bribery was more extensive in Calcutta than in Bombay.

20. It may be useful, in conclusion, to set down the most likely causes of the contrast between Bombay and Calcutta, so far as they are disclosed by the evidence. One important factor is undoubtedly the close personal attachment between the serang and his men existing in Bombay. The organization of the Bombay men in comparatively small self-contained groups makes for co-operation and a kind of trade

unionism among the men, and provides a most effective check on extortion. This is absent in Calcutta. Another cause is to be found in the mentality of the men. As one officer put it, "Physically I consider a Calcutta crew better than a Bombay crew, but morally they have nothing like the same fibre". The Bombay crews will not submit so easily to pressure or intimidation as the Calcutta crews. The personality of the brokers differ in the two ports, and this doubtless produces its effects. And the amount of control exercised by the shipping office is all-important.

21. The Shipping Office must be held responsible, to some extent, for the present state of affairs in

Shipping offices.

Calcutta. In Bombay, the Shipping Master, who has no concern with the Port Office, does exercise personal control over recruitment. He himself supervises the procedure, examines complaints, and endeavours to act as an official protector of the seamen. In Calcutta, the functions of Port Officer and Shipping Master are combined, with the unfortunate result that the head of the office is compelled to delegate practically all the shipping office work to his deputies. The Deputy Shipping Master in charge of this work is not an officer of the Mercantile Marine and he is changed from time to time. This undoubtedly tends to make him rely more on the brokers for information than he otherwise would. We obtained the impression that the work was treated too much as routine work, and too little as work requiring constant personal vigilance and a keen anxiety to probe all complaints thoroughly. The result is that the brokers' power has increased unduly. The facts stated in the preceding paragraphs were not, of course, in the possession of the shipping officers, but they should have been.

22. We also found, by examination of the brokers' licenses, that within the last three years, Mr. Sen on

Brokers' licenses.

two occasions and Mr. Ghose on one occasion have been allowed to work on obsolete licenses. On one occasion, the period during which Mr. Sen carried on his trade unlicensed ran to more than four months. The current licenses of both the principal brokers have been antedated by the officers of the shipping office.

23. Reference has already been made to the Seamen's Union at Calcutta. Unlike the Bombay Union,

The Union.

this Union includes men of all three departments. The Union does not take an active part in recruitment.

A. G. CLOW.

CHAS. S. PENNY.

MAHAMMED DAUD.

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