

S.C.M.P.

29 Jan. 1983

Approval for \$13m school to train in-service seamen

By T.S. KOO

A special \$13 million training school is to be established in September for Hongkong's in-service seamen, who face the possibility next year of losing their jobs when new international seafaring standards are introduced.

The green light for the school was given yesterday to the Hongkong Merchant Navy training board.

The board has been fighting to prepare seamen for the new Standard of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers Convention (STCW) requirements.

The director of the Technical Education and Industrial Training Department, Mr Morris Morgan, yesterday morning told training board members that the Vocational Training Council was prepared to allocate the necessary funds for the setting up of the school.

It was learned that the VTC decision was unanimously reached among its executive members in a meeting held three days earlier.

The chairman of the training board, Mr Frank Chao, who had threatened to resign



Mr Chao

if the funds were not forthcoming, said after yesterday's meeting:

"Everything looks good. We asked for a plate of food and we were given one."

Mr Chao said they would advertise next week to recruit 13 key staff members, including a principal, whose title would be centre manager.

In the next few days a consultant architect would be appointed to look at a building in the former Army bar-

racks in Little Sai Wan, which would be converted to accommodate the school.

A sub-committee would also decide on what equipment to buy, and tenders for them would be put out in the next few months, Mr Chao said.

The VTC will negotiate with the relevant Government departments for the transfer of the school site from the Government, which should be completed in two months.

The school was due to open in September, Mr Chao said, and the first seamen would be enrolled soon after.

It was planned that the school would run eight free courses a year, with each taking 240 seamen for a training period of six weeks.

According to Mr Chao, major shipping companies were prepared to provide leave with pay and travelling expenses for their seamen so they could take the course, although this was not obligatory.

Mr Chao said the Government had promised to meet the immediate costs for the school, which was designed as a temporary measure for the next few years to bring seamen up to the new STCW standards.

"But this is a positive step towards having a permanent school," he said.

The three-year period would give the school time and experience to set up a permanent institution to train not only in-service seamen but also new blood for the industry, Mr Chao said.

The STCW takes effect when 25 countries, owning a total of 50 per cent of world tonnage, have ratified the agreement.

Mr Chao said it was now only short of one nation, which was committed to signing before the end of March.

With the normal one-year grace, the convention would then take force by March next year.

Mr Chao admitted that problems still existed as the school was a "bit late and small" to handle all the seamen who required training.

But he was confident that the problem could be solved in due course.

He said the convention foresaw the difficulty in re-training all seafarers in such a short period, but the STCW rules, complicated as they were, provided certain leeway.

According to Mr Chao, seamen working at sea when the STCW rules became effective would be considered competent, while those who were not up to standard would have to receive training when they returned to shore on completion of their working contract.