

SAFETY AND LOAD-LINE CONVENTIONS.

Load-line Rules.

As required by subsection (3) of section 208 of the Shipping and Seaman Act, the Department fixes load-lines for ships in accordance with the load-line tables from time to time used by the Imperial Board of Trade.

The Board of Trade has now provided for the survey and marking of ships for load-line purposes in accordance with the International Load-line Convention, 1930, which was signed unanimously and without reservation by the representatives of twenty-nine countries, including New Zealand. The following extract from the report of the delegation of the United Kingdom to the International Load-line Conference, dated the 5th July, 1930, may be of interest:—

“The convention will apply to practically the whole of the merchant ships of the world. It is the first international agreement which has been made fixing loading-limits for merchant ships, although there has been for some years a considerable measure of uniformity in the rules adopted by the principal maritime nations. The new convention is an improved and extended version of the rules that have prevailed hitherto. It will make the rules in the different countries completely uniform, and it has a far wider application than the old system ever had.

“The Conference contained technical and nautical representatives of all the principal maritime nations, and it is their considered opinion that the new rules are a marked improvement on anything which has gone before. In that opinion we concur, and we are satisfied that the new rules will raise the standard of safety of the merchant ship throughout the world.

“It has sometimes been suggested that any alteration of the original Plimsoll mark must be to the detriment of seamen, but this is based upon misapprehension. The Act of 1875, which first made it compulsory to place a load-line on British ships, enacted, ‘That the centre of the disc shall indicate the maximum load-line in salt water to which *the owner* intends to load the ship *for that voyage*,’ and left it to the owner to fix the load-line and vary it from voyage to voyage. No rules were then in existence to determine the right and safe point at which the load-line should be placed on different kinds of ships, and it was not until 1890 that it was made compulsory to place the load-line at a point prescribed by definite rules approved by the Government. The Act of 1890 made definite provision for the rules being modified as knowledge and experience were gained, and modifications were made from time to time, the last important modifications being made in 1906.

“Statements have been made that the alterations in the load-line rules made in 1906 made ships unsafe, and these statements were very carefully investigated by the Committees which examined the question of load-line in 1913–15 and 1927–29. It was found that there was no reason whatever to think that the alterations made in the load-lines had made ships less safe.

“The amount of cargo which any ship can carry safely across the ocean must depend on her size, strength, and other characteristics, and rules governing the maximum loading of ships must have regard to these points. The original rules which formed the basis of the rules adopted by the Government in 1890 were the expression of the best loading practice of those days, and very great improvements have been made in ship design, construction, and equipment since that time.

“A complete revision of the load-line rules was initiated in 1913, and this revision would probably have been brought in force and made the basis of an international agreement if it had not been for the war. A further very comprehensive revision was made by the committee of 1927–29, and the present convention is based on the work of this latter committee.

“The outstanding points to which attention should be drawn are the emphasis that is laid in the new convention on the protection of all deck openings and the safety of the crew, and the introduction, for the first time on British ships, of special load-lines for timber ships and tankers. The extreme importance of protecting all weather deck openings in a ship against the sea in bad weather is recognized by all seamen, and the rules on this subject are made more definite and more emphatic than they have ever been before.

“The experience of other nations has shown that under clearly defined conditions, ships carrying deck loads of timber, and tankers, can safely be allowed to load deeper than ordinary cargo-ships; but neither the extent of the deeper immersion nor the conditions under which it can be allowed had been settled internationally. This has now been done for the first time. The deeper immersion of tankers and timber ships is a new thing so far as British shipping is concerned, and we would have preferred that it should have commenced on a rather more moderate scale than that indicated in the convention until further experience had been gained on British ships. But we could not question the evidence brought forward by our foreign colleagues that their ships have for many years, with perfect safety, been allowed to load more deeply than is now permitted by the convention, and the limits now fixed in the convention are a compromise which was arrived at after very full discussion. In view of the conditions under which alone the deeper immersion is to be allowed, we think that compromise can safely be accepted.

“The convention establishes for the first time uniform loading-rules for the ships of all nations; it lays stress on the importance of protecting the openings in ships and safeguarding the crew; and it will lead, we believe, to a closer and more uniform enforcement of the loading-rules on all merchant ships throughout the world.”