

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE





Leo Barnes trainee cadet
at T. S. Mekhala (1953)



Leo Barnes the seaman
on board the ship (1955)

On the thirteenth of August 2001, when the morning sun dawned, the legendary Indian seafarer, Dr. Leo Barnes breathed his last, having succumbed to a massive heart attack. The medical fraternity had long predicted his ultimate end, but nobody ever thought that it would come so soon and so unexpectedly. Alas! the petitions to heaven by the sons of sea for his good health and long life were not granted by God almighty in his divine wisdom. Well, in the words of Dr. Leo Barnes 'the innings were well played and now, it was time to retire'. He, in his last few days, heroically fought and suffered, his long debilitating illness of diabetes, amputation of the right leg, followed by dialysis and the cardiac problems till his last precious breath. In spite of this morbid illness, his mind was alert all the while and in full control of situations that concerned all matters of business and administration, attending meetings and participating actively in decision making both at national and international fora, fighting and campaigning not only the cause of Indian seamen, but also that of the seamen of Asia-Pacific region. The last three years of illness was exasperating, but he fought like a true warrior, a diehard man, who never wanted to give up hope. He was highly charged with a single minded drive and devotion to help his downtrodden seafaring brethren. His spirit was indomitable and nobody could ever doubt nor stop his firm convictions. The 45,000 seamen of India have now, regrettably lost their champion, their godfather who fought for them tirelessly ever since he entered the scene of the trade union movement in 1961. It was ironic, but true, the man who loved the sea and water, died on land, but, nevertheless, got a watery grave on that fateful day at Mumbai with its annual, episodic, incessant rain flooding the streets and halting men and transport on their tracks. Even the rains poured the tears of sorrow as if the heavens were crying at the loss of its beloved son of 'Lord Varuna'.

The school drop-out lad, without a goal or purpose joined the sea as a rating in the engine room and made his first voyage on the ship T.S.Mekhala in 1954. In 1950s the working conditions were very bad for Indian seafarers. This state of affairs with poor quality of life was unbearable to this young man with vision. A born leader, with an intense zeal and drive, he took up the cause of seamen to fight against discrimination, atrocities and exploitation. Unable to tolerate these inhuman condition, he amassed his fellow ratings and resisted the sick system on board the ship that existed in 1950s. As recounted in his memoirs when Leo Barnes joined the sea:

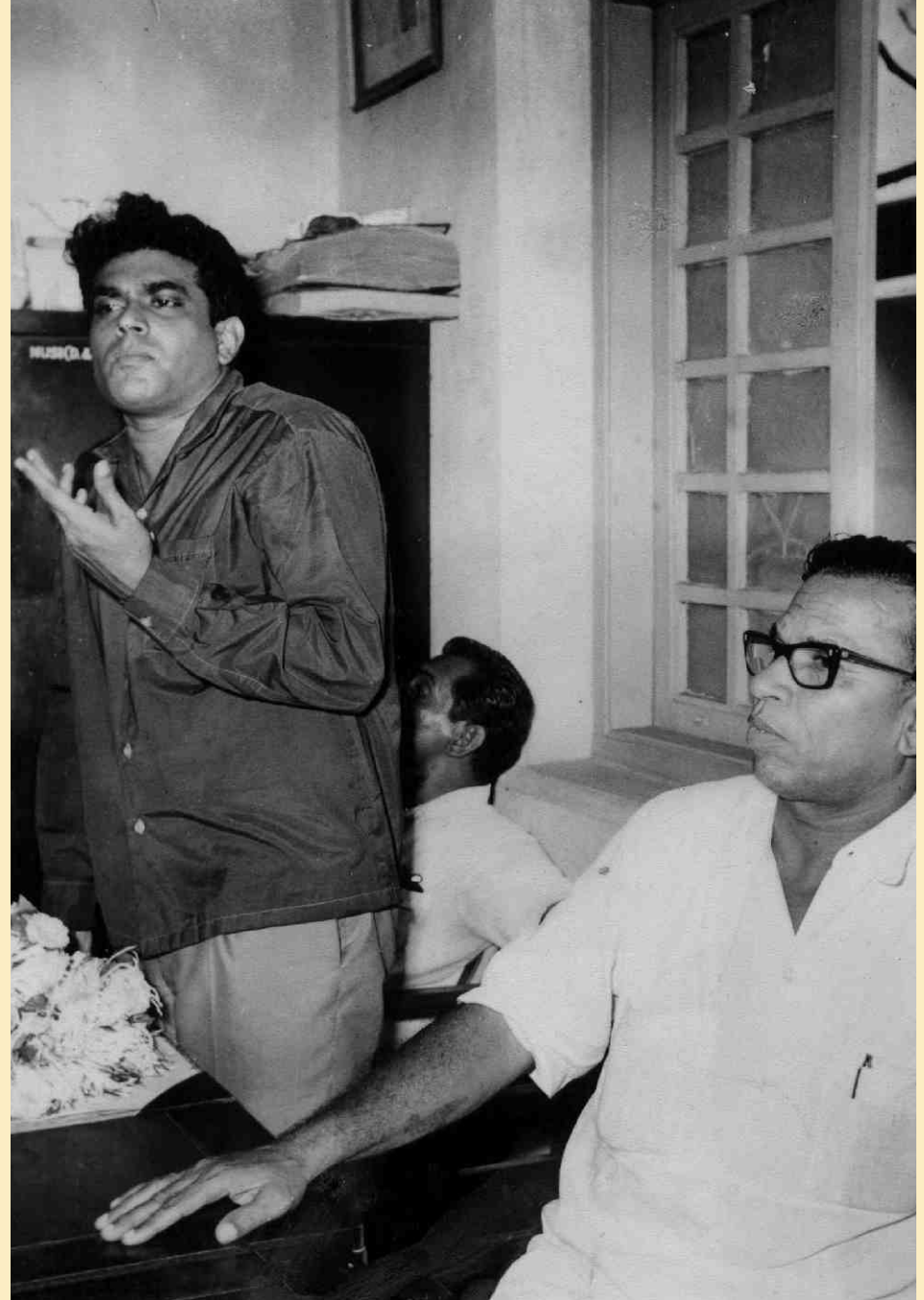


Dr. Leo Barnes receiving Varuna award from
Honorable Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Maharashtra (1993)

"The pay and working conditions for Indian seafarers were very bad. Conditions for us were decided almost entirely by the British shipping companies, which took no consideration whatsoever about trade union point of view. Compensation for overtime and other compensatory payments were non-existent. I could not stand by and accept the injustices we Indians were made to suffer. Fortunately for me, when I did speak up, my Indian crew mates stood behind me. The awful conditions for seafarers was something that caused me to grow increasingly frustrated and angered," remembers Leo Barnes...(Barnes 1996)p158-9) ?

The yester years of seafarers union, though had made a small beginning in 1896, was nothing but a dormant, fractionalized organization, sizzling in petty politics of regionalism, language and political leanings, along with acute paucity of funds and lack of adequate membership. But, in this hopeless environment enters an insignificant seaman who believed in true trade unionism and the unity among the workers, devoid of any party politics. Leo Barnes believed in collective effort and negotiations to get the best deal for his seamen across the table without resorting to violence or any other drastic measures with the employers and the government, all the time avoiding the loss of revenue to the concerned parties. Indeed he was lauded for this constructive approach imbued in his working strategy.

Initially, Leo Barnes was apprehensive of joining NUSI, a weakling union which had no strong base or foundation or contribution towards the trade union movement. However, in retrospect, he could not tolerate the inhuman conditions the seamen ratings were subjected to on board the ship



Leo Barnes' maiden address for NUSI in the year 1961.



Young Leo Barnes welcomed to NUSI
fold by Sarvashree.L.K.Pujari, M.L.A (1960)

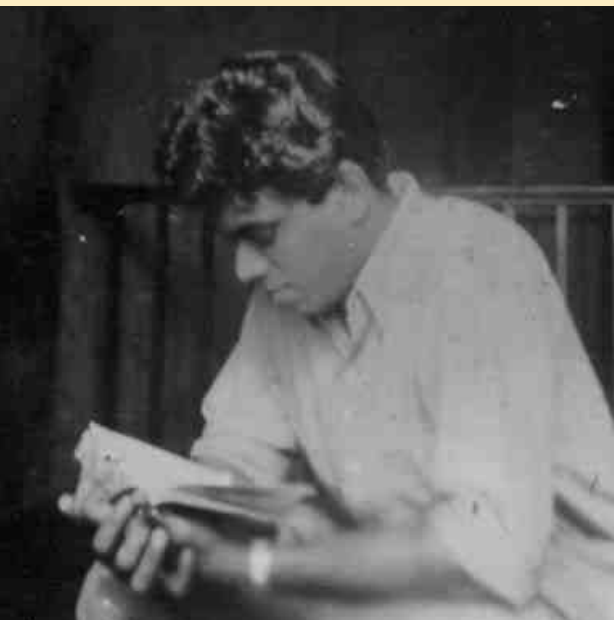
and threw his lot and opted to be in the Union, to work for his seafaring brethren.

Having joined the union, he had no steps to retract from this chosen path thereafter. Gradually, he took the reins of this unstable chariot, riding on a pot-holed rough road, all the while moulding its varied parts and fragments into a composite machinery with tact and shrewd stewardship. The hither to, so far disgruntled elements, both leaders and seamen were brought under one umbrella, tightly reining the warring heads to pursue a common goal. This, indeed was an exceptional feat by Dr. Leo Barnes exhibiting ***'leadership par excellence'***. Dr Barnes achieved a 'Herculean' task of forging solidarity among union members even as he consolidated his position as its General Secretary within a short span of four years, a position he held for more than 35 years, till his death. The Seafarers in recognition for his leadership, combined with compassion have commemorated his Birthday the '6th November as the Seafarers Unity Day'

He believed that knowledge was strength and to have a command on situations and people with whom he had to interact and negotiate, he wanted to improve his skills and proficiency in trade unionism and education. In this pursuit he did a four-month intensive course for 'Asian Trade Unionists,' conducted by the Asian Trade Union College of ICFTU at Calcutta in August 1960. He, further underwent training in Labor Relations and Trade Unionism at TISS, Mumbai, and the ultimate crowning glory came when he could avail of the prestigious Harvard University Trade Union Fellowship of Asian – American Free Labor Institute,

in 1973. This immensely boosted his confidence and self esteem. Now, he could face his detractors straight in their eyes with true trade union spirit and zeal.

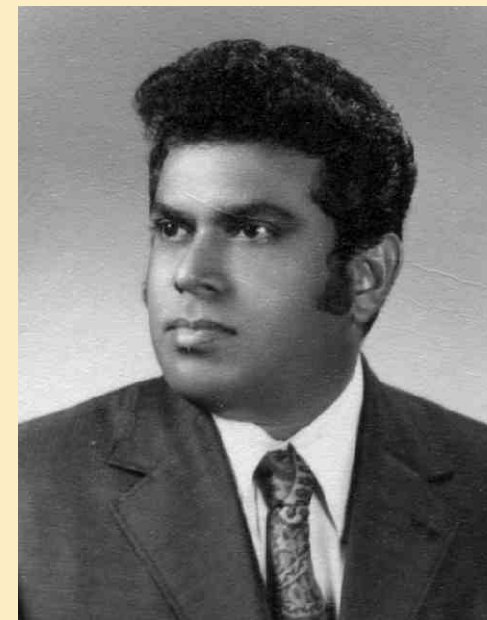
Apart from gaining in knowledge and depth about trade union movement he pursued his studies simultaneously. He was a voracious and avid reader and he really felt the major missing peg in his life, was his incomplete education. Thus, in the academic realm thereafter Dr Barnes has climbed the lofty rocks with besieged forts. From crag to crag he leapt and from peak to peak he scaled, the ascent being as perilous as the heights forbidding, till he clamored up the very towering pinnacle of academics. He passed his matriculation in 1958 after joining seafaring profession. Thereafter, graduated from Pune University and obtained his B.A degree in 1967. There was no stopping, now that he has come so far in the pursuit of academics. He wanted to be a legal man, to know about legal implications of negotiations to get the best deal for his men. He completed his LL. B in 1970 and further progressed, and was awarded LL. M in 1974. This man, who was driven with a passion to attain education could not stand still, till he saw its ultimate academic culmination in being awarded a Ph. D in Labor Law for his research work on ***“Evolution and scope of Mercantile Marine Laws relating to Seamen in India”*** in 1980. The latter three degrees were conferred on him by Bombay University. He was now considered as the walking encyclopedia of



Leo Barnes catching up with education as a seaman (SSC, 1958)



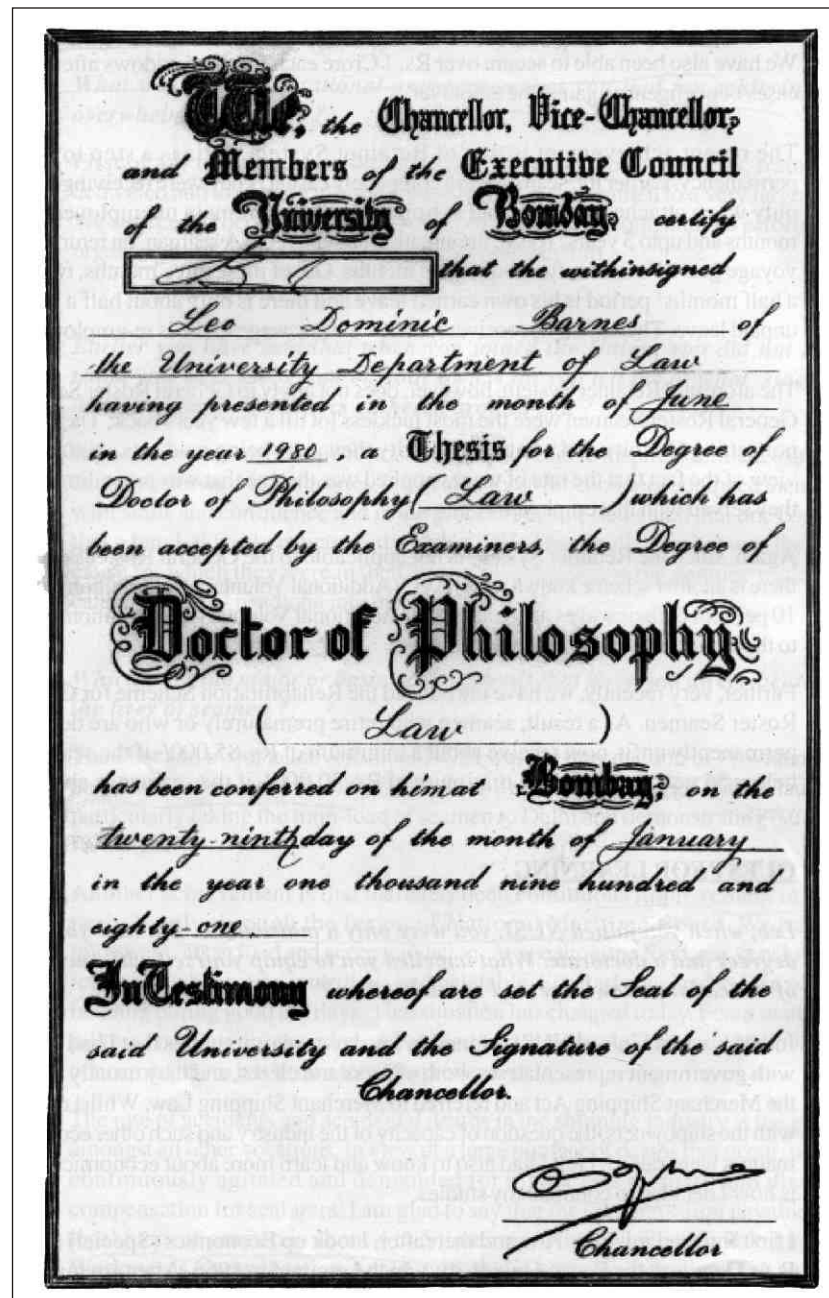
Leo Barnes, the carefree seaman with seamen colleagues (1950s)



Leo Barnes – The Harvard Alumni (1973)

Merchant Marine Labour Law for which he was lauded and respected by one and all, specially the Government personnel and ship owners. These educational accomplishments have revealed the traits of diligence, perseverance, dedication, the qualities which have stood by him in good stead in piloting the ship of the NUSI, which he had taken charge of in midstream, even as it was rolling and pitching very badly, to reach the shores without mishap and jubilation, with successful voyage through the past 35 years.

Dr Leo Barnes, knew what it was to achieve. He never rested on his laurels but worked endlessly and tirelessly for his beloved NUSI, side tracking his personal and family life. He made no distinction between his office and home, and, these two were completely enmeshed into one unit, namely, **Leo Barnes**. With his superior organizational ability and sheer hard work, in no time he reached the top position of General Secretary in 1968. He distinguished himself as a scholar and yet, a man driven by passion to fight for the cause of a trade union movement. In this pursuit he shunned the baits laid down by the politicians to affiliate this apolitical union with different political parties. He believed that 'if once caught in the political web, then it is a different ball game, dancing to the pied piper tunes of the men in power'. This desire to steer clear away from political hooks indeed helped him, where in, he could negotiate with all Government babus along with the ship owners for the best bargains for his seamen. He made this union apolitical and independent and that was appreciated in all circles. It is, one of its kind in India and a strong union too, to boot. Indeed, now he was a man to be reckoned with by all employers, Government, and other infiltrating unions. Dr. Leo Barnes bore the mantle and carried the entire burden of running the NUSI on his regal, broad shoulders and secured enormous benefits for his seamen. He was now the '**Uncrowned King**' of the seafarers with a towering personality and command over his men and the ships, be it national or international.



Doctorate Degree certificate from
University of Bombay (1980)



The government in recognition to his service to the shipping, made him the Justice of Peace in 1969 and Special Executive Magistrate in 1975. Added to this recognition he was awarded the '**Varuna Award**' for his outstanding contribution to the Shipping Industry in 1993. On the international front, he was no match to other trade union leaders in shipping. His commitment and dedication hurled him into international arena and has been honored by bequeathing membership to several statutory and advisory bodies connected with shipping affairs both at home and abroad.

Dr. Leo Barnes shaking hands with Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Maharashtra, at the 'Varuna Award' ceremony (1993).

In no time he got acknowledged by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) as their executive member, and also represented ITF as Asian spokesman for seafarers at ILO and IMO. He was awarded Gold medal by ITF for his contribution to International shipping (1998). Till his last dying days he was active in International shipping arena and the last meeting that he attended at Seoul, Korea was in 2001 May, just prior to his death as the Chairman of the Asia-Pacific Seafarer's section of the ITF.



Dr. Leo Barnes addressing the august gathering at the ILO meet

Thus, here is the man who helped Indian seafarers from the murky disturbed waters of exploitation, to clear waters of self sufficiency and wellbeing, so that they could proudly hold their heads up as Indian seafarers. And no seaman who has ever been touched by him or came in contact with him will ever forget his grace, benevolence and compassion till their dying days.

Recognition of one's achievement and good work is seldom acknowledged during one's life time. In case of Dr Leo Barnes who has a record of yeomen services to the Indian seafaring community which he has steered through the rough waters to safe shores with exceptional skill and ingenuity, timely appreciation and acknowledgement of his great deeds of courage and intellectual resourcefulness have come his way in some form or the other during his life time. This was expressed with overwhelming deep emotion and love by seamen towards their leader on his sixtieth birthday and then on the 61st birthday. At these celebrations, a large purse of Rs. 2,22,22,222 was presented to him alongside a Gold Plaque and a souvenir released, recording the multifarious activities, the highlights of his remarkable career, the attributes of character of the undoubtable trade union leader who has few equals in the field.

As observed by many of his admirers 'His advocacy at any promotional action is most ideal. He resorts to adroit sophism, which is honed by his background in law to have the desired effect, when well- reasoned arguments fail in negotiations. He never loses his balance even when he is called upon to solve or come to grips with problems galore. *'This trait of problem solving was remarkable'*. In fact, more complex the issues, more did his neurons get activated and better was his grasp of the intricacies and the puzzling nature of the issues. No challenge was too great for him to cope with and would always reiterate *'This will also pass off!'* *'All problems are transitory and there is a solution for*



'ITF Gold Badge Certificate'



39th ITF Congress, New Delhi, November 1998

In deep appreciation of the dedicated and distinguished service which has been given to the cause of transport workers internationally, in defence and furtherance of the interests of those workers, and for the preservation of trade union freedoms and rights,

*The ITF EXECUTIVE BOARD
has, by unanimous decision, nominated*

Leo Barnes

*for the award in public of the ITF Gold badge,
the highest mark of respect and honour which it can bestow
on behalf of the ITF's affiliated membership in all
continents of our world.*

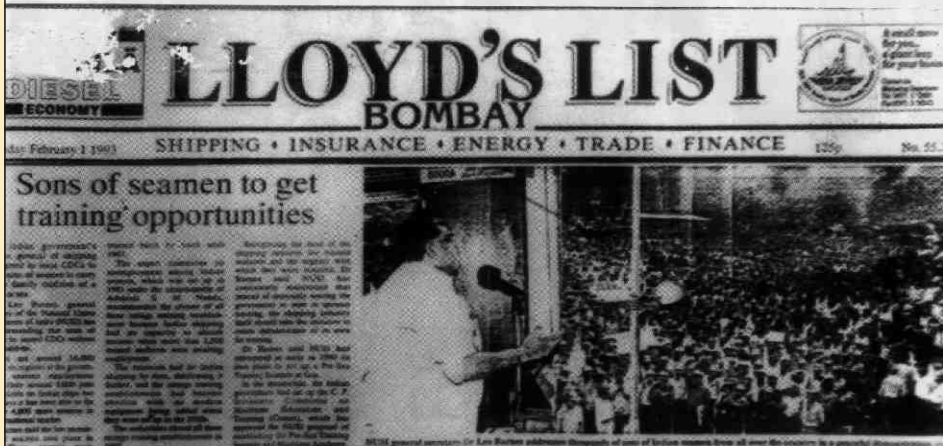
*This award is given as a token of the sincere gratitude
felt by transport workers of the world for the consistent loyalty
and untiring devotion which has been shown by the recipient to
the International Transport Worker's Federation
and its constituent unions.*

The award
'ITF Gold Badge Certificate'
for
Dr. Leo Barnes for his
yeomen service to
seamen(1998)



Felicitation by seamen (1993)

14th December, 1992



Mammoth Assembly - Momentous Decision - Memorable Event

Participation of Dr. Leo Barnes at Lloyd's meet at Hong Kong (1993)

every problem! This attitude towards issues and life in general showed an immense emotional maturity and clear thinking while handling men and matters, that which were entwined with intricacies and devious intensions in public life.

Dr. Barnes had attained international status among world trade union leaders and enjoyed an unblemished reputation as a true friend and guide of the mercantile marine sailors round the globe. He has been successful in getting into the committees of maritime nations, merchant navy ratings, and the Indian seafaring community. The Indian seamen are currently proud of this station on the International platform. *'His elevation provided the necessary horse power for Indian seamen to gallop along and be articulate even on foreign ships! The seeds of assertiveness and self confidence in the seamen was indeed sown by Dr Barnes. The labour class ratings, the insignificant men at sea, could now hold their heads high, untrampled by any form of discrimination and marginalization any where in the world.*

Being a trade unionist is not an easy task or a bed of roses. He had to be on his guard while taking number of calculated risks for suitable bargains/negotiations for his seamen. Leo Barnes did resort to strikes from time to time when things were not working out to a desirable outcome. But his strikes were always productive with positive outcome and as a wise leader he would always have a line of retreat which he evidently would not disclose to anyone, thus, giving a face saving for his adversaries. This was the success story of his strikes. When he wanted to hit a bargain, he would strategically ask for high stakes, knowing very well the mentality of ship owners and the Government and would graciously settle for at least half the

deal. Undoubtedly, he has won the deal on principle from no negotiation and dead lock to productive outcome for his seamen. *'Any way, half a loaf is better than no loaf!!'* that is what he would reiterate. These gains he knew would eventually have a multiplying, snowballing effect in enhancing the status of seamen. As a strategy, he always preferred to have lightning strikes where the government and ship owners were least prepared and had to act fast, if not, the loss of revenue was more than the hike in wages and better conditions he would be expecting or asking for. This strategy also worked, 'Like a lion striking on his prey unawares!' Once he established his credibility and appropriateness of his demands, instilling grueling tensions, he would smoothen off by pretending to comply, carry out the negotiations across the table in peaceful manner. This non threatening approach consecutively put the adversaries at ease, and appreciated his genuine concern with the problems and issues. This endeared him to all and won the confidence of Ship owners and the Government. He believed in collective bargaining with employers and Government. The combined strength of these one time weakling Union (fragmented Unions) has led to winning the triple benefits of pension, gratuity and provident fund. This is the only and the first instance of any section of labour to enjoy this boon. The beneficiaries have acknowledged the stupendous and strenuous attempts made by Dr. Barnes to get this unprecedented bounty for his fellowmen.

Dr. Barnes a self made man, who fashioned his own fate, hides a soft heart under a tough exterior, it belies the fact that while dealing with matters of profound importance



Dr. Leo Barnes (second from the left) and Mr. Yacob Serang (extreme left) of NUSI, at the ILO Meet as Indian Representatives of Indian seafarers.



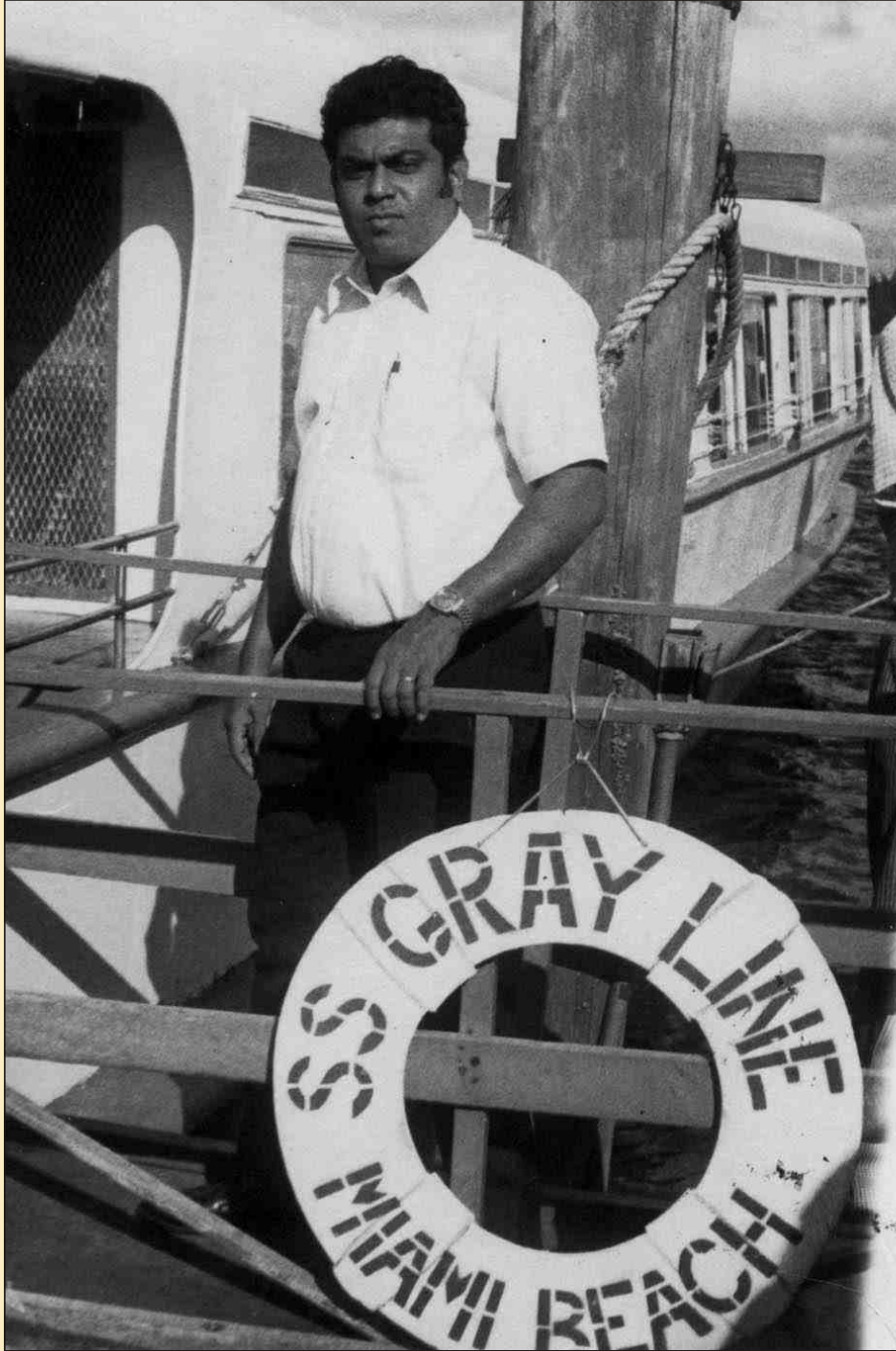
ITF Meet of Asian Seafarer's Regional Committee



National Maritime Board members, Mumbai



which can worsen situations, he is made of sterner stuff. Who would have ever thought that a lad without a care in the world, given to playfulness and even sometimes truancy, living in an atmosphere of abandon, and circumstances hardly to be conducive to any development of character building along the straight grooves, will one day become a mature personality with a bent of individuality of his own and conduct the destiny of thousands, by his example and faultless leadership?. But those who knew him intimately as a boy and as a teenager of course, would have vouched that behind that happy-go-lucky attitude was a shrewd and determined individual, who wanted to succeed, with a brain on alert for 24 hours, apt to calculate his next move and always aspiring for higher goals, had undoubtedly predicted that if only persevered, he would one day become a profound scholar and turn out to be a leader of men. This prognostication has not been falsified in his case!



Visit on board the ship at Miami as the young General secretary of NUSI.(1967)

Leo's crusading zeal, missionary ardor are linked to pragmatism. He will not overreach himself in any enterprise that has an adverse bearing on seafarers or other industrial workers interest, for; he has thrown heart and soul in the service of the working class, especially the seamen. He always supported any industrial workers mass action in protest against any foreign hand interference in internal affairs of the country by asking his men to join the strikes in order to show solidarity.

He believed in press and media coverage, not with a view towards self aggrandizement but, to project the image of his union and highlight its activities and achievements. He wanted to be connected with his members and their problems, with an intention to keep his people informed and the world as to what is happening in his small seafaring world. To publicize these events and incidences of achievements he started in 1970 a '**NUSI News Letter**', a monthly publication which was distributed to all its members. He believed in an informed group of workers for solidarity and support to any union activity. Workers were never side lined by him. He had respect for them and in turn, they gave him their unconditional support, adulation and looked up to him as if he was their saviour.

When Leo takes the platform, both at national and international fora, though persuasive in style of communication, would yet, occasionally resort to be stentorian and vehement in putting across his ideas. The delegates would dare not make light of issues that he was addressing. They promptly would give due weightage to what he speaks on these public platforms. There is



Dr. Leo Barnes participant at International forum



Dr. Leo Barnes at ITF Meet

nothing frivolous in his utterances which are poignant with profound meaning loaded with doses of commonsense and practical suggestions along with solutions. He would not leave a stone unturned when he was convinced that the seamen should get their due'. He was, thus, known to the shipping world as the spokesman for the seamen, especially for the Asia Pacific region. In the ILO sessions too, relating to maritime matters, Dr. Barnes plays a great role not only as the spokesman of the Indian seamen, but also for the seafaring community as such, around the world. All sessions convened by international organizations on maritime matters have felt the impact of Leo's eloquent exposition of relevant information for better recognition of seamen and the improvement of conditions of this category of workers anywhere in the world. At UNCTAD (United Nations Conference of Trade and Development) Meets and business sessions when deliberated on mercantile marine matters, Dr. Barnes leaves his imprint and influences their discussions by his peroration and persuasiveness. He is held in high esteem where ever he goes and which ever party or section – employer, Management, Government agencies, international bodies- he interacts and has something to do with, as a representative of Indian Seafarers.

As a seaman he had traveled the world, but in his new role as a seamen's spokesman he has girdled the globe at regular intervals. In



Leo Barnes at National Maritime Board Meet



Leo Barnes at ITF Meet

fact, such was his schedule of tours abroad it could be safely said that he was away half the year- round. So frequent were these trips not only he had lost counts but also got immune to the effects of jetlag and other snags of travelling. No one at least in the trade union sphere in India has travelled abroad as often as Dr. Leo Barnes. His friends fondly called him ***'the globe trotter.'***

With regard to employer – employee relationship he was quite cryptic and felt that 'The needs of the workers are not understood or given weight to, by employers, who more than their employees need to be educated in this respect'. Their wages, good working conditions, the provision of certain amenities, health, environment and opportunities for extra mural activities, personal touch, and humane considerations in day to day dealings would create an atmosphere for happy relations, apart from enhancing greater productivity in industrial units and better output of work in offices. Fair share of wages, linked to the cost of living is of utmost importance and job satisfaction will be ensured only when frictions of any kind, for any reason, should not be allowed to break out, which can be guaranteed only when the terms of services are favorable. 'Here in India,' he points out; 'the tendency, unfortunately, is to make more profits by industrialists and businessmen, unlike in the west where the profit margin is not as wide as in this country, and to pocket it and secure the lions share is a common practice, where as, the employees are conveniently forgotten. Just with subsistence allowance the working class cannot pull its weight.'(Barnes, 1996)

Dr. Leo Barnes, unlike many other trade union leaders does not keep himself aloof from the crowd. He is a good mixer and

is endowed with a flexible mind and congenial personality predisposition that vibes well with any group of people. His spectrum of interaction was wide and he could feel the pulse and mood of the people be they lowly seamen, or the elitist of ship-owners or the top government bureaucrats. In fact, he had an extended horizon with clear vision, great understanding of men and human affairs.

He was depicted as a man of 'Self restraint when it is needed most, which was the hallmark of his character. He did not like to kid back and forth. He never wished nor did horsing around a subject. Iron self will was yet another attribute he possessed. However, he did not require any stimulus to start off any useful productive talk and purposeful dialogue. In debates dialectical phonology was his forte. Even in a cacophonous atmosphere, which a collection of seamen with real or imagined grievances can produce at will, Dr. Barnes showed no irritation. He would navigate smoothly in the ocean of heads. Chiseling and skullduggery was again foreign to his nature. Integrity, courage of conviction, outspokenness is some of the other characteristics of Dr. Barnes. In spite of his eminence he did not put on airs. He lived a simple life, no ostentation, no sophistication, no luxury worth the name. (Barnes, 1993)

He is never happier than when with his people asking for his advice or his favour or help. He is good company any where at any time. Dr. Barnes has grown with the Union and the Union has grown with him. They are inseparable one unit. His home was union and union was home. His brains alert for any eventualities even in the dead of night. He was there for his men and their problems. No time, or tide, or distance made



Dr. Leo Barnes with the eminent trade unionist Mrs. Maniben Kara, President, Western Railway Employees Union.



Dr. Leo Barnes with Mr. Art Fisher, Secretary General, Seafarers Section, ITF London (extreme right), with Capt. Malcolm Robinson (center) Manager Personnel, of Mobil Shipping company

any barrier for communication and when specially directions were sought to help the seamen in troubled waters of organizational management on board the ship. Leo was considered as an ornament to the Union world, a champion of the underdog and a devoted and dedicated worker himself. He considered union as his family and its members often as his helpless children.

Was Leo Barnes all compassionate, all generous, and an exceptional leader and were there no weaknesses in him? Of course yes! there was always a streak of mischief in him. He would like to see people on the defensive and he could be on the offensive, often playing cat and mouse strategies. There is no gainsaying the fact that he loved to create pressures and enjoyed the resultant tension. Probably, that was his way to incite, invoke and provoke his opponents to ultimately achieve enhancement and improvement in the service conditions of Indian seamen.

With Leo Barnes heading the seafarer's side, no situation or problem was insurmountable. Like a good chess player, he always knew when he could make a move backward in order to achieve a bigger, forward move at a later stage. If the adversaries could not win him



Dr Leo Barnes in the august company of distinguished trade Unionists Honorable Minister Shri Rajani Patel (President Indo Soviet cultural Society), Mr. Manohar Kotwal and Mr. T.S. Kulkarni of Port and Dock Workers Union (1976)

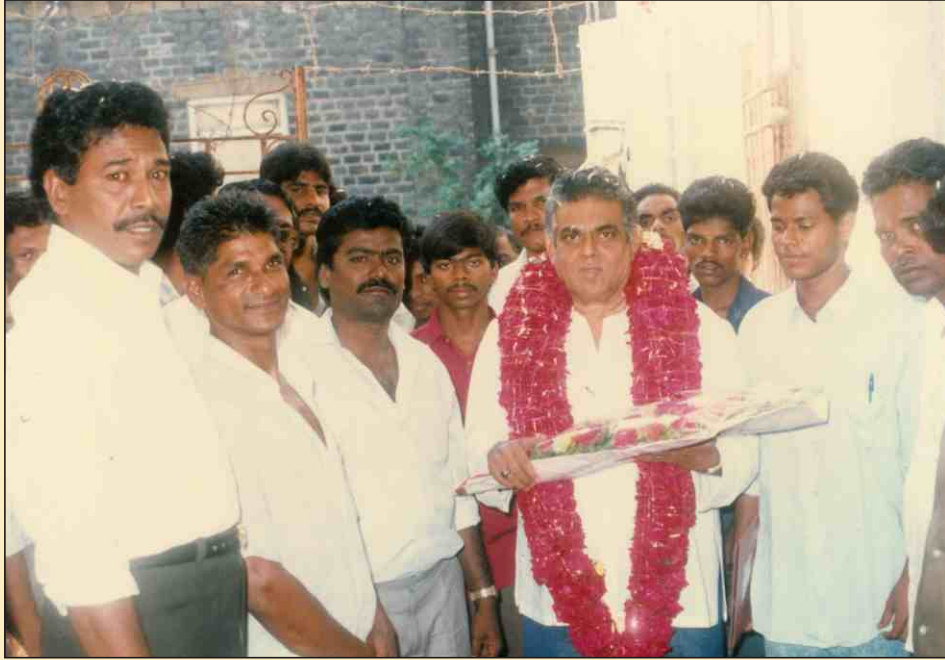


Dr. Leo Barnes addressing the meeting at Chennai (1978)



Dr. Leo Barnes with NUSI staff along with Capt. Kirti Guha from Wallem Ship Management

over by persuasion, they would resort to other methods trying to capitalize his weaknesses for wining and dining. But, this man a shrewd judge of character knew 'nothing came free'. 'There is a prize for every thing,' he would state, and quickly would assess the motive behind such favors. It was also recorded and greatly humoured around the shipping circle, that the ship-owners would invite him for dining and other frivolous pass time, which he would graciously accept, but, not loosing his goal. At the very moment he would have given directives to stop sailing the ships of the company much to the distaste of the ship owners who were ready to win him at any cost. Hence, basically, they knew he could not be bought. Ship owners with their superior business tactics could not win him over when it came to the question of his seafarer's betterment. He would always reiterate in his conversation a famous British saying 'There are no permanent friends but only permanent interests' in business dealings and relationships. Well he was a skeptic and it would take



Dr. Leo Barnes being welcomed at Chennai NUSI staff.



Dr. Leo Barnes with seamen at Cuddalore

a long time to win his confidence. He would be respectful but he could also be very harsh and often ruthless, if he found the people were playing fool with seamen's welfare as well as his intelligencia. In short he was a tough guy to deal with.

He was indeed a multifaceted man. Language acquisition was his forte. Can anyone believe that even the ITF top brass at one time depended on him for drafting their conference deliberations? To add to the chagrin of the so called tightlipped British he would not hesitate even correcting their grammar much to the dislike of some. He felt that a national union leader specially belonging to India should be in the know of at least a few languages. He was fluent in Hindi, Marathi, Konkani, Tamil, Tullu, Gujarati and even Malayalam but of course master in English. His vast reading enabled him to acquire this competence in languages, especially English. He could put to shame any scholar of English with his vast vocabulary and grammar. This proficiency in language was a boon to him since the people of various regions felt at home with him, conversing in their own mother tongue which helped his followers to identify with him as their true leader.

His major achievement was the introduction of Provident Fund and gratuity scheme for seamen in 1964 after a struggle and demonstration before the Parliament House at New Delhi. Another achievement is the continuous improvement of wages periodically, through the forum of National Maritime Board, a tripartite Body. With his involvement there was a tremendous change in the welfare amenities on board the ship like food, accommodation and many others. Further to it, he fought against discrimination

in treatment between officers and ratings on board the ship. And, ultimately, he was successful in getting retainership for seamen in 1999 just prior to his death, in spite of them belonging to the contractual casual labour class employee category. This retainer system is a step towards permanency. Earlier seamen were treated as contractual casual workers. They were paid wages for just the employed period and thereafter, were unemployed for more than a period of 9 months or so, even up to three years. Today, with this agreement the seaman get a retainer fees for about three months after he signs off. This is considered as earned leave. Thereafter, he receives half of his basic wages till he is employed. However, this retainer system is not applicable to the General Roster seamen. For them, an additional scheme was implimented, known as Additional Voluntary Contribution (AVC) from ship owners to their provident fund accounts which would be given to them at the time of signing off from Article period.

The rate of accidents whether due to technical or human error always has had been on the higher side in shipping industry. He continuously agitated and demanded for higher rate of death and disability compensation for seafarers. The compensation that he has fought for the legal heirs, is far greater than any other labour industry, procuring 4 to 5 times more than what is payable under the Workmen's Compensation Act. In foreign companies too, the amount of compensation was Rs18 lakhs and above. He was successful in getting more than Rs. 1 crore for the three widows after filing negligence against the employer M/S Bergesen for gas explosion and death of three seamen in `1995. This feat was indeed beyond any workers



Dr.Leo Barnes with seamen at Nagapatnam



Dr.Leo Barnes with Mrs.Alu Dastoor , MLA



Dr. Leo Barnes addressing the crew at M. V. Chidambaram, Chennai (1981)



Dr. Leo Barnes addressing seamen

imagination and union leader's aspiration. Besides providing a very good social security system and hike in salaries for Indian seafarers, he ventured into the welfare schemes for seafarers. In this pursuit and with foresight he established an old age home, holiday homes, trade union training centers, a technical training institute, a maritime academy, technical schools in Maharashtra and Goa, a hospital at Goa and a wellness centre at Panvel. In addition, Rehabilitation scheme for general roster seamen has been introduced. Those seamen below the age of 55 years, who retire prematurely, declared unfit, were entitled to receive Rs. 85,000 and for those seamen above the age of 55 years Rs. 30,000. Indeed this is the parting gift for seamen who were unfit and disabled. He created a huge fund under the ITF-NUSI Trust and most of these welfare schemes are being supported by this Trust.

The later part of his life as a General Secretary of the prominent Union, which he brought to eminence, the power dynamics changed. He knew what it is to achieve and left no stone unturned to get to this position. He wanted to be on the winning side of the bargaining. He felt the lacuna in his qualification that which could undermine his ability as a resourceful leader and was determined to overcome it. After he qualified himself the tables turned, he was the one who was calling the shots at those very same persons who thought he was a small fry and just an ordinary trade unionist. He started challenging Ship owners and Government officials when ever they quoted the law. He would give them the correct interpretation of the Merchant Marine Act, which he would interpret in order to be advantageous

to the seamen and not to the ship-owners or Government. He not only challenged, but when detected some aberrations in the law, facilitated and pushed hard in amending many sections of Merchant Shipping Act for the benefit of seamen. Dr. Nagendra Singh from International Court of Justice complemented him at his Ph.D viva saying that he was '**The walking Encyclopedia of Merchant Marine Labour Law**' which was indeed put to action by Dr. Leo Barnes thereafter.

Ever since Leo Barnes and NUSI came together, the union got ignited and there were exciting milestones at regular intervals bringing varied achievements, progress and significant developments, all for the benefit of seamen.

Seamen who had meekly accepted their fate of not having any social security benefits took a bold step and demonstrated before the House of Parliament in December, 1963. In 1964, they introduced both Provident Fund and Gratuity scheme, a statutory benefit,



Dr. Leo Barnes addressing the Trade Unionists Meet. Seated along with him are Mr. T.S. Narayan (extreme left) of Indian National Shipowners Association, Mr. S.R. Kulkarni, President, All India Dock and Port Workers Federation, Mr. S.K. Shetye General Secretary, Bombay Port Trust Employees Union and Mr. K.E. Sukhia, General Secretary, Maritime Union of India (1982)



Dr. Leo Barnes Inaugurating the school 'Shri Karwa Balkalyan' Kendra (1989), Mumbai.



Dr. Leo Barnes with the seamen at Seamen's Hostel

after bargaining with Government and the ship owners. Leo Barnes himself rates 1965 as the most significant year in his career because he successfully shattered the complacency of all interest groups in Indian Shipping by bringing the shipping activity in the entire port of Bombay to a screeching halt on 5th May, 1965 over an economic demand which the ship-owners were adamantly refusing to concede, even after having sufficient reasons for justification. The year 1966 saw seamen getting Overseas Allowance Devaluation Supplement (OADS) to off-set the loss arising out of devaluation of the rupee in June, 1966. Initially, this neutralization concept was bitterly opposed by ship-owners which nevertheless, had to be conceded to, with Union pressure.

In May, 1973, NUSI invoked the assistance of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) at its meeting in Singapore for securing ILO recommended minimum wages for Indian Seamen. As a result of this step taken by NUSI, seeking ITF assistance, the latter called upon the International Shipping Federation (ISF), a ship-owners' body, to agree to pay the ILO minimum wages. At the ITF/ISF meeting in London in August 1973, the foreign ship-owners readily agreed to pay ILO wages to Indian seamen serving on their vessels but Indian shipowners expressed their inability to do so on socio-economic considerations. Since it was not possible to allow two sets of wages for seamen signing the same Articles of Agreement and to ensure parity in wages, Leo Barnes suggested that the differential wages between the ILO wage rate and the Indian NMB wage rate to be funded in India by foreign ship-owners, for those seamen serving on foreign flag vessels. After protracted negotiations, ISF/ITF

reached an understanding in November, 1973, under which the aforesaid differential wages were funded in India with effect from 1st January, 1974.

It was a victory for Leo Barnes without whose guidance, strategy and leadership NUSI could not have secured more than Rs. 16 crores of the funding to begin with. The said ISF/ITF understanding was terminated in 1978 but that was only the beginning of accumulation of funds for the benefit of seamen under one heading or the other. Only a truly ingenious brain like that of Leo Barnes could extract such contributions from as tough employers as ship-owners. Leo Barnes not only knew how and where to accumulate the said funds but also how to utilize these funds in the best possible manner for the most beneficial purpose of seamen.

The unprecedented recession that shook the shipping industry all over the world for nearly one and a half decade, left Indian seamen gasping for employment. It was a testing time. Something had to be done. And, except for Dr. Leo Barnes, the saviour and the protector of Indian seamen that he was, everyone else was shrugging their shoulders. He went into action to invoke ITF assistance and evolved the international principle of Total Crew Cost (TCC) concept. As and when he probed the international employment market under the said TCC concept, the name "Dr. Leo Barnes" did the trick. He was thus able to secure more than 5,000 jobs for Indian seamen on foreign flag vessels.

During his stewardship of the National Union of Seafarers of India, Dr. Leo Barnes had represented the Indian seafarers, the Asian seafarers and seafarers of the world at various international conferences, meetings and conventions of the



Dr. Leo Barnes felicitated by NUSI staff on being elected as the General Secretary in 1967.

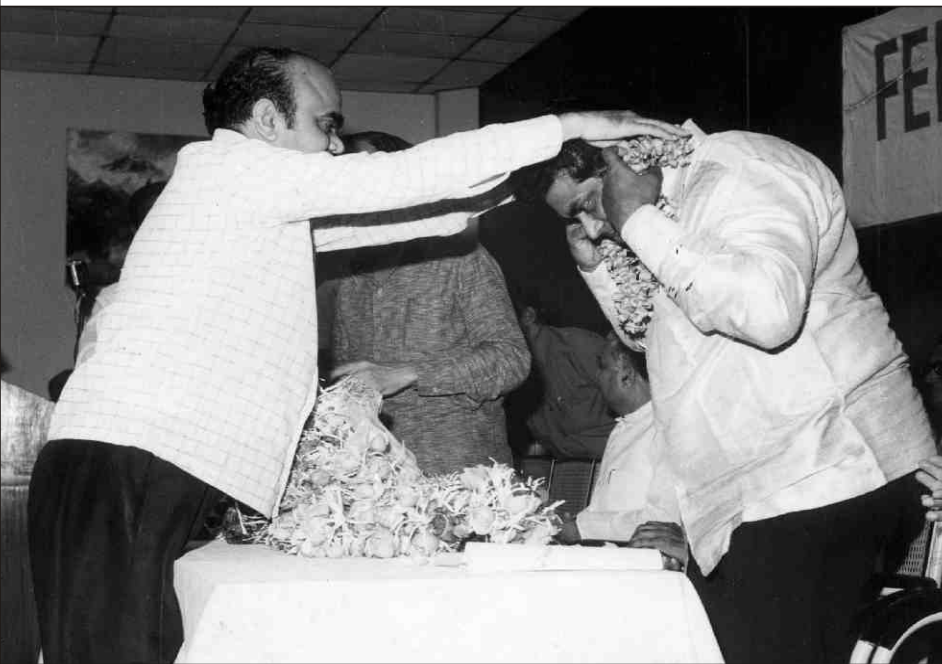


Felicitations to Dr. Leo Barnes by Mr. Manohar Kotwal and Mr. I.B. Sayeed (1976), Ex General Secretary, NUSI

ITF, ICFTU, ILO, IMO, UNCTAD, ESCAP and so on. What had won him wide acclaim from all quarters, wherever he had participated was the manner in which he put forth his views, rebuts the arguments against his opinions and successfully breaks the impasse in all such gatherings, where, it is difficult even to expect people to budge an inch from their strong positions. The most remarkable aspect of his negotiation technique was that while always protecting and promoting the interests of Indian seamen, he would simultaneously safeguard the national interests ensuring enough jobs for Indian seamen and specially his union members.

Dr. Leo Barnes was the first Indian to have been elected to the Executive Committee of the ITF in 1983 at its 34th Congress held at Madrid, Spain. Again, Dr. Barnes brought honour to India when he was elected Vice-President of the Preparatory Technical Maritime Conference of the ILO at Geneva in May, 1986.

Dr. Leo Barnes has not been any less active on home grounds. In fact, he would be passionate when it came to protecting the rights of seamen. He was pro-active and constructive while safeguarding their interests. He was a visionary and he was promoting the welfare of his brethren. The NUSI Resort for Destitute Seamen comprising of 105 – bed, a Home for the Aged and Trade Union Training Centre-



Felicitation by Mr T. S Kulkarni, President- All India Dock and Port workers Union (1976)



Dr. Leo Barnes being felicitated by Director General of Shipping at Mumbai.



Delegates at ITF Conference, Tokyo (Centre seated is Mrs. Blanche Barnes, Observer at the Meet)



Dr. Leo Barnes with Mr. K. E. Sukhia, General Secretary, Maritime Union of India



Dr. Leo Barnes awarding a trophy in his daughter's name late Ms. Seema Barnes at Jamnabai Narsee school, Mumbai

cum-Holiday Home at Lonavala is the monument of his compassion for the destitute seamen. In addition, the academic part he secretly nurtured, manifested when he started NUSI Maritime Academy at Goa, the Technical Training Institute in Engineering for seamen at Cotton Green, Mumbai and he sponsored many other schools too. Health was also his primary concern. He wanted easy access treatment facility for seamen at a concessional rate and started NUSI Hospital at Goa. Not only this mega venture, but even he wanted a rehabilitation programme for the HIV/AIDS victims in seafaring population for which he started another treatment centre at Panvel. Alas! his dreams came to an end with his death and the hospital for HIV/ AIDS was converted thereafter as wellness centre for nature cure for corporates and general public and not for his cherished seamen brothers.

The services rendered by Dr. Leo Barnes enhanced organizational strength, ensured social upliftment and brought about economic development of Indian seamen and thus, contributing enormously to their welfare. For this yeomen service, he was recognized by Indian shipping which bestowed on him the highest award, namely the **"VARUNA AWARD"** on 5th April, 1993.

Dr. Leo Barnes indeed was a very successful man. One of the reasons was that, he had a supportive family and a happy home. The family too, had crusaded along with him to fight the cause of seafarers. His wife Blanche herself specialized in clinical Psychology conducted research and published her Ph.D thesis on 'Mental health of seafarers'. She being an academician and a clinician developed 'Human Resource modules for seafarers for their revalidation courses and also



NUSI Maritime Academy, Goa.



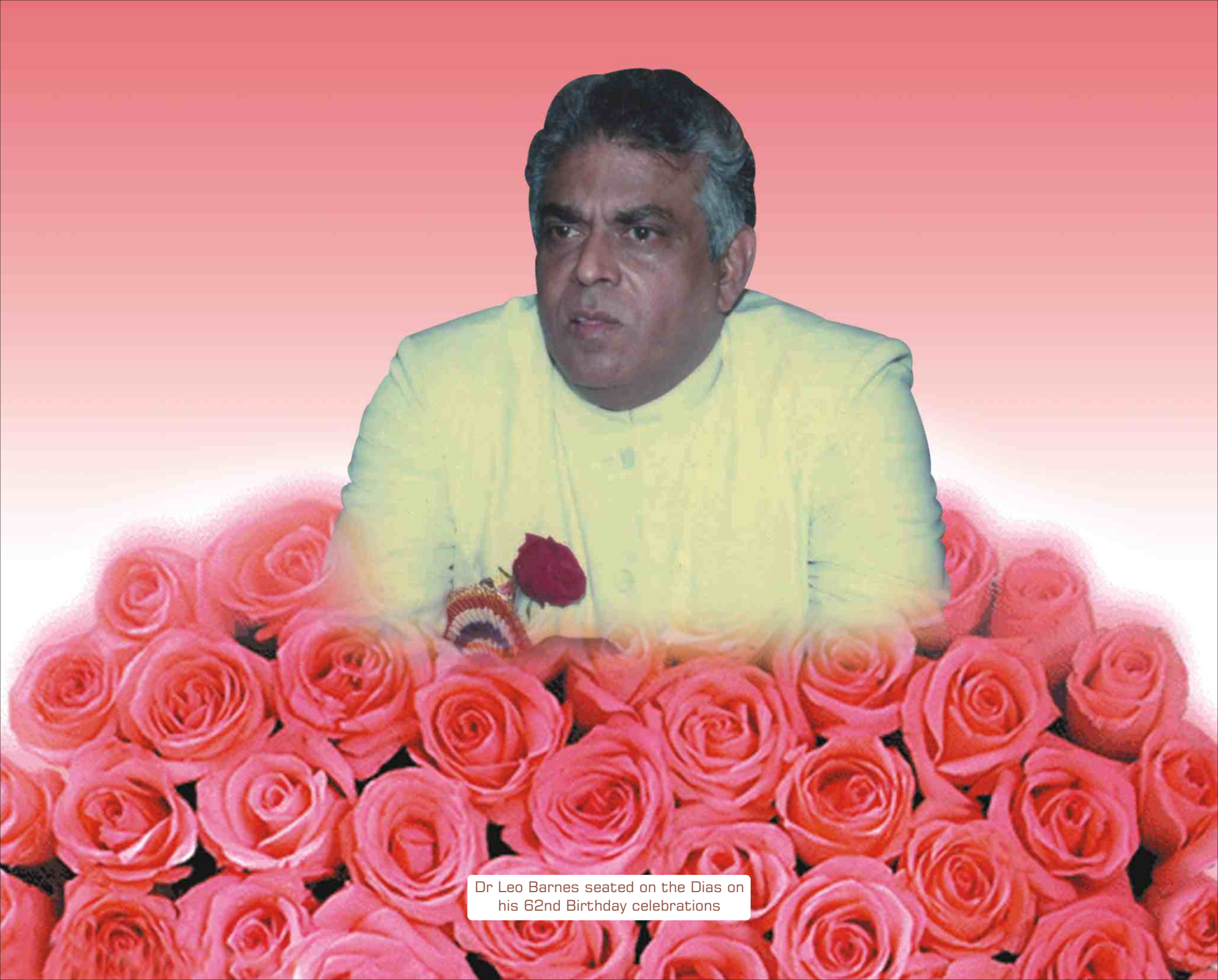
Trade Union Training Centre, Lonavala



NUSI Hospital, Goa



'NUSI Resort' and 'Home for the Destitute Seamen', Lonavala.



Dr Leo Barnes seated on the Dias on his 62nd Birthday celebrations

modules on 'Management of Stress for seafarers'. In addition she was given the Visiting Academician Fellowship from Seafarer's International Research Centre, Department of Maritime Studies, University of Wales, Cardiff. Their daughters Vidya and Arti have actively revolved round their father's mission and have conducted medical and counselling camps for seafarers and their families, the former having specialized in Psychology and the latter in Medicine and Community Health. Though Dr. Leo Barnes is no more, his legacy will be continued by his family through the Foundation that he had created for Seafarers. This foundation sponsors the higher education of seafarers' children, conducts health camps, counselling services and other welfare activities. The annual disbursement of scholarship amount is to the tune of Rs. 30 to 35 lacs, which is incidentally, the main objective of the Foundation. ***This will be an ongoing activity for generations to come and Dr. Leo Barnes will be remembered fondly and with gratitude by all seamen and their families. he will be a living legend in the hearts of Seamen and their families and not just a man of history who improved and traversed the world of seafarer's globally.***



Inauguration of Dr. Leo Barnes Foundation office at Samudraseema in October, 1998.