

MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"



M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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UNIONS ASK MSC COMMANDER TO MODIFY RESTRICTIVE GANGWAY-UP POLICY

Three maritime labor unions representing civilian mariners (CivMars) aboard Military Sealift Command vessels are imploring the MSC Commander to revisit the "Gangway-Up" liberty restriction order that is affecting the well-being of CivMars. A letter sent to MSC Commander Admiral Michael A. Wettlaufer by the presidents of the M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU, took issue with the MSC's restriction-to-ship policy that was implemented on March 21 in an attempt to isolate mariners from COVID-19. The unions previously filed an association grievance saying that CivMars are being held to severe standards that are not applied to other MSC and Navy employees, including contractors. The association grievance is currently in arbitration.

The unions' letter to the MSC Commander noted that continued constraints on CivMars are ratcheting up the probability for decline of the physical and mental health of these mariners. The letter notes, "there is growing anger, frustration and despair throughout the fleet. People have a breaking point and many of these crewmembers are nearing it."

The letter to Admiral Wettlaufer referenced the death of a civilian mariner onboard an MSC dry cargo ammunition ship last month. "The recent tragedy aboard the USNS AMELIA EARHART speaks for itself. The actual cause of this mariner's actions may never be known, however, the ongoing and selective "Gangway-Up" restrictions may have, in some part, contributed to this unnecessary and senseless act. We are genuinely worried that if restrictions are not eased, the likelihood of shipboard emotional instability will increase. Further, the stress-related fatigue caused by the "Gangway-Up" restrictions could lead to safety and mission degradation and operational mishaps."

Last week the *Telex Times* reported on the recent release of the quarterly "Seafarers Happiness Index" that gauges seafarer satisfaction with life at sea. The report, culled from survey results taken from April to June 2020, noted that enhanced standards and demands brought on by the COVID-19 crisis has taken its toll on mariners worldwide. It states that, "Seafarers have reported feeling unsupported and stressed, and without respite, which is impacting work standards as well as the welfare of seafarers. Combined with the challenge of accessing medical services, the risk of an increase in incidents of self-harm and in the number of accidents is very real as stress impacts work, compromising safety at all levels."

Along with a protracted wait for reliefs due to the pandemic, the union presidents said that CivMars feel “unsupported and abandoned.” They called on the Commander for his immediate intervention. “We are asking you to reevaluate the “Gangway-Up” order and adopt a more appropriate and reasonable leave and liberty policy.”

The letter has been posted on the homepage of the M.E.B.A. website accessed at www.mebaunion.org.

ERIC WHITE TO TAKE OVER FOR LONGTIME ITF INSPECTOR TONY SASSO

M.E.B.A. is pleased to announce that the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) has appointed 8-year M.E.B.A. member and Chief Engineer Eric White to succeed longtime ITF Inspector Tony Sasso, who is set to retire at the end of September.

M.E.B.A. is a member organization of the ITF, a global union federation fighting for the rights, equality and justice for almost 20 million working men and women in the transport sector around the world. Primarily, ITF Inspectors help battle against substandard shipping to help raise up the wages and conditions of mariners worldwide. Over 98% of vessels visiting U.S. seaports fly a foreign-flag – many of those ships belong to Flag-of-Convenience registries designed to skirt regulations and taxes and evade safety statutes. Likened to floating sweatshops – a number of FOCs withhold pay and subject crews to shocking onboard conditions and an absence of quality food and medical care.

The COVID crisis has further complicated the seafaring experience as hundreds of thousands of mariners remain trapped aboard their vessels and at foreign ports because of pandemic travel restrictions. Even now, months after the ongoing cruise ship no-sail order, thousands of passenger vessel crewmembers remain stuck aboard ship off the Florida coast. Tony and ITF have been working hard to assist in the repatriation of mariners, a mission that Eric now joins.

Tony has done a wonderful job in that position for 32 years and dates back with the Union to 1982 following his graduation from the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School. He is a second-generation member who spent his first five years with the Union sailing on a variety of vessels as an engineer. His father A.P. Sasso, was a member for 35 years and formerly served as the Gulf Coast Vice President out of our New Orleans Union hall. Tony’s experience and hard work are greatly appreciated. However he is enthusiastic about Eric White’s appointment and is extremely impressed by his successor’s abilities and acumen and believes ITF made a terrific choice. Brother Sasso also pointed out that ITF’s decision must have been considerably difficult due to a number of exceptional candidates for the position.

Eric has sailed for a variety of shipping companies onboard all types of vessels, including both U.S. and foreign-flag cruise ships (for NCL) which helped him gain insight into some of the difficulties faced by international mariners. He was part of a rank-and-file contract negotiating team for the Union and has filled in at the Baltimore hall as a temporary dispatcher. He began work on his new job on July 20th and will operate out of Tampa. He’ll be responsible for covering 15 ports – a jurisdiction many times the average handled by other Inspectors. Tony has been working with him closely and is impressed by Brother White’s communication and organizational skills, quick learning and outstanding potential as a worthy successor. Congratulations Tony and Eric!

ITF REPORTS GOOD PROGRESS ON CRUISE SHIP MARINER REPATRIATION, BUT WARNS OF FURTHER SEAFARER CHALLENGES

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) reports that much progress has been made on whittling down the massive number of cruise ship mariners stranded aboard their vessels due to the pandemic, which had numbered as many as 250,000. While ITF is heartened that the problem in the cruise sector is improving, they point out that the crew change crisis continues in other sectors – particularly cargo shipping, where hundreds of thousands remain trapped at ports and onboard their ships long past their assignments.

Dave Heindel, Chair of the Seafarers' Section of the ITF, said, "Some seafarers have been overwhelmed by the situation, and some have tragically taken their own lives out of desperation...The answer here is simple: governments have to make practical exemptions to restrictions on seafarers' travel and transit so that we can see a return to functional crew changes. It is imperative that we get these hundreds of thousands of seafarers off their ships after their contracts have expired, just as we did in the cruise industry."

ITF's Johan Øyen noted, "We hope the global community will take note of the suffering of the seafarers left for months on board waiting to get home, and pay due respects to those seafarers. They are heroes of this pandemic."

CRUISE LINES FURTHER EXTEND SUSPENSION OF U.S. OPERATION

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), a trade association representing the global passenger vessel industry, announced a further voluntary suspension of cruise line operations at U.S. ports until October 31st at the earliest. The previous suspension would have lapsed on September 15 but the organization believes the extension is warranted as part of a prudent and safe approach toward restarting operations that further demonstrates the industry's commitment to public health.

"This is a difficult decision as we recognize the crushing impact that this pandemic has had on our community and every other industry," the Association noted.

A CLIA-sponsored economic study found that each day that U.S. cruise operations remain dormant "results in a loss of up to \$110 million in economic activity and 800 direct and indirect American jobs."

TTD PETITIONS DOT FOR MANDATORY FACEMASK POLICY

TTD, which represents 33 transportation-related unions including the M.E.B.A., has petitioned the Department of Transportation to issue rules to mandate the usage of masks or face coverings for those using public transport including on ferries, buses, planes and trains. TTD President Larry Willis called on Secretary Elaine Chao to issue the rules on an emergency basis that would enable their immediate implementation and forego a rulemaking process that could take months.

Frontline transportation workers "are faced with an impossible choice every day between risking their health and losing their livelihood," President Willis said. "Unfortunately, efforts to protect these employees from inherently hazardous workplaces and the threat of deadly communicable disease have been limited to a patchwork of state or local mandates, and a deeply inadequate federal response consisting of non-mandatory guidance."

President Willis cited statistics about the role of face coverings in the successful mitigation of COVID-19 in countries where masks are prevalent. He noted though, in this country, a recent Gallup poll found “only 44% of Americans reported always using a mask while outside the home, while 30% reported never doing so.” He offered the assistance of the TTD and its member unions in working with DOT “to protect the frontline workforce and the travelling public from COVID-19 infection.”

LATEST MSC EPF - USNS NEWPORT – READY FOR DELIVERY

The Military Sealift Command is set to take delivery of the USNS NEWPORT after the newly constructed Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF) vessel completed builder’s sea trials in the Gulf of Mexico. The vessel was built at Austal USA’s Mobile, AL facility and is set for delivery in a matter of weeks. This is the 12th EPF in the MSC fleet. The Spearhead-class EPFs have proven to be workhorse vessels and are deployed on high-profile missions around the world. EPF civilian mariner crews are represented by the M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU. The 13th EPF in the program USNS APALACHICOLA is under construction at the Austal yard and the 14th and last in the Spearhead-class series, USNS CODY, will follow. EPFs are shallow-draft, all-aluminum, commercial-based catamarans that are capable of intra-theater personnel and cargo transport, which provide combatant commanders high-speed sealift mobility.

FRC SET FOR SEPTEMBER

The previously postponed rank-and-file Financial Review Committee is being tentatively planned for September, following an M.E.B.A. District Executive Committee decision. The six-person FRC is annually elected in April to perform a review of Union expenses. However, the pandemic upset those plans and forced a postponement until a safer date could be determined. The election of the Committee has now been tentatively scheduled for the September membership meetings (Sept. 7-11) at the six Union halls (NY/NJ, Houston, Oakland, Norfolk, Tampa and Seattle). The DEC will allow a hybrid format permitting the Committee to perform their work at M.E.B.A. HQ or through online participation. The FRC meeting is tentatively scheduled from September 21-24. Members will then vote on the FRC’s findings at the October membership meetings.

UPDATE YOUR INFO WITH HQ

Be sure to keep the Union updated with your current contact information including mailing address. This can be achieved by using the address change form available on the M.E.B.A. website found at www.mebaunion.org under the “Members” tab or in the “Documents & Member Notices” section. Alternatively, you can send your updated information to Renee Bowman at HQ by mail, fax at (202) 638-5369, or e-mail at membership@mebaunion.org Since the M.E.B.A. Plans office in Baltimore and Headquarters databases are NOT linked, you must also forward a signed change of address form to the Plans Office if you wish to update your information with them (mservices@mebaplans.org).

SEPTEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS – (*All times are local*)

Monday, September 7 – Labor Day – Halls Closed – *No Meetings*

Tuesday, September 8 – Boston@1200; CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230; Seattle (Fife)@1300;

Wednesday, September 9 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;

Thursday, September 10 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;

Friday, September 11 – Honolulu@1100.

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