

May 2020

DELIVERING THE GOODS

A Newsletter by the Maritime Labor Alliance

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Lost At Sea

Transportation workers are indispensable – they keep the world moving on land, air and sea. However, like many other essential workers, their efforts are not always recognized. One group of transportation workers remains particularly out of sight and is often forgotten. They are the 1.6 million plus seafarers who operate the 50,000 cargo vessels that ply the world's oceans. Merchant ships and the men and women who crew them are responsible for the transportation of approximately 95% of the world's trade in product and commodities. Without seafarers, trade would grind to a halt and the global supply chain would be broken. Food, fuel, goods, products and essential supplies would not be delivered to our communities.

To accomplish the global task of ocean transportation, every month approximately 100,000 seafarers must travel to and from their ships as crews change out. Many of these crew members have been working aboard ship for eleven months or more. Most can only return home or to return to work by air. Their homes are most frequently continents away from the ports served by their ships. The COVID-19 pandemic has put the health of many thousands of seafarers at risk. Seafarers are at risk not only for their health on the job and getting to and from their jobs, but also because they are increasingly forgotten and held hostage aboard their vessels. At this time many hundreds of seafarers are unable to be relieved and repatriated due to international and national travel restrictions. Many are confined aboard idle ships at anchor in distant ports and are without pay. In the most extreme cases, they also are in grave danger exposed to COVID-19 aboard their vessels, without adequate medical care and confined by life-threatening quarantines. Too often seafarers are being abandoned by their employers and their governments, unable to leave their jobs, in grave risk for their health and unable to return home to their families.

We support and salute the efforts of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), and the United Nations through the work of the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) to bring attention to this crisis and bring these seafarers home. The governments of all port states and all marine employers must follow WHO guidelines for managing COVID-19 cases aboard ships and act to facilitate international crew changes and, in cases involving quarantined vessels and ill seafarers ensure that medical treatment and hospital care are made available. We urge the United States government to support all international efforts to facilitate the health, safety and repatriation rights of seafarers!

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U.S. citizen seafarers aboard U.S-flag vessels must not be forgotten. We urge the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD), the Department of Transportation, the United States Navy, and the U.S. Coast Guard to vigorously support the efforts of and require all marine employers to provide healthy working conditions, including immediate access to medical treatment if positive for COVID-19, safe crew-change procedures and the repatriation of U.S. mariners from foreign ports. If necessary, the intervention of the U.S. State Department and/or the use of government charter flights must be made available to change out crews aboard U.S. vessels that do not return to U.S. ports. The crews aboard these vessels are directly responsible for provisioning our military overseas. They serve our nation in times of peace and war. They must not be forgotten and lost at sea.

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(File photo: Civilian mariners aboard the USNS Mercy on a Pre-COVID-19 Military Sealift Command mission)



The Maritime Labor Alliance consists of five leading maritime labor unions: American Radio Association (ARA), Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific (IBU), International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (M.E.B.A.), and International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P). Together, we represent maritime workers employed in every sector of the industry. Members of MLA unions have served the country on the docks and at sea in peace and war from 1875 to today.