

## **Unlicensed crewmen need help in order to advance**

In his response to the October 2005 article "Help Wanted," Alan Horoschak hit on a topic in December's Mail Bag ("Does anyone really want to be a mariner anymore?") that I have been voicing since its inception. STCW '95 has laid the groundwork for the repeal of the Jones Act in that it puts all of the IMO-nation mariners on a level "paperwork" playing field.

Fortunately, there was no legislation introduced during the last session of Congress for the reform or repeal of the Jones Act. However, President Bush did temporarily repeal sections of the Act in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the name of national (energy) security, although I fail to understand how a foreign tanker could transport fuel from one U.S. port to another when a U.S.-flag could not. Can someone explain this one to me?

When the U.S. is faced with another energy crisis, we could be in trouble as far as our Jones Act-related jobs are concerned. When a shortage of qualified, certified, U.S. mariners starts affecting the profit margin of the major U.S. oil producers, we will see the pressure increase on Congress. When lobbyists start pressuring Congress that the only way to fill open positions aboard U.S. domestic workboats is to reform or repeal the Jones Act, they will listen. There are STCW '95-certified mariners all over the world that would be glad to do your job for one-third of the pay you are making now. There are certain foreign-flag vessels currently working the U.S. domestic oilfield that, through a loophole created in the Jones Act, are calling at foreign-flag rigs working in U.S. waters that are considered a "foreign port." The next step that I foresee is to allow foreign crew aboard U.S.-flag vessels. After that, foreign vessels would be permitted to operate in the U.S. coast-wise trade on a broader scope.

The current process of advancement for mariners has doubled and tripled the time it takes a mariner to move up the ladder to officer. The days required

remain virtually the same, but attending the approved schools and getting through the assessment phase have lengthened the process dramatically. I often see young mariners get discouraged because there is not a qualified assessor onboard the vessel they are serving. Others are intimidated by officers that act as if they are afraid they might lose their jobs if they train them.

I urge all officers, both deck and engineer, to help and encourage unlicensed crewmembers in advancing their ratings and to help recruit new people into the industry. Officers need to become approved assessors. Tell your employer that you want to take the assessor training class. Contact your congressional representatives and urge them to vote against any legislation calling for negative Jones Act reform. We must help ourselves if we expect to maintain our positions and incomes as U.S. mariners.

To answer the headline of Mr. Horoschak's Mail Bag letter: Yes, there are people that want to be mariners. Do you want to help see that they are Americans?

**Capt. Jim Allee**  
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## **The sad truth for mariners**

I heard a story recently about a man that lost his license for six months. He was working for a little company that was working for the Army Corp of Engineers, laying rock. The vessel had to operate in shallow waters in order to get to the job site and, as you might guess, the vessel eventually went hard aground. And, as you would know it, the court punished the wheelman for going aground. Who else could they punish? The Corps of Engineers and certainly the Coast Guard were not at fault.

No, it was solely the fault of the wheelman, after all he had a choice of not doing the job, quitting his job, or arguing with his superiors about whether this was what a prudent seaman would do. These uncooperative mariners give the "powers to be" a reason to let some foreign national or less experienced wheelman come in to do

the pilot's job. The offending wheelman can always go on welfare. I suspect there is already a plan for requiring sounding training. And now that he's on welfare the man will have the time to take it.

Never mind that it takes two people to put a sound transducer on the head of the barge and most boats have only one deckhand per watch. Never mind that when the boat takes too much time to get to the job site there can be consequences. Never mind that there is now a five-to-one ratio of people leaving the industry versus those coming in. Never mind that most of the experienced people leaving the industry are doing so because they don't feel valued, don't feel they have the support of company officials, and don't feel that they have the power to do what is right.

However, instead of gearing management toward a more people-oriented style, companies pay low wages and have few processes in place that allow boat personnel to address issues with managers. People-centered management teams have been proven to increase the production and retention of employees in six out of seven cases. Personnel at these companies are more experienced and thus have fewer accidents. Instead, the solution for many companies is to create a more hostile and demanding environment and then require wheelmen to twirl more plates with less. What we need is not more training, coercion or power tactics, but the freedom to be professional seamen.

**David Breland**  
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**WB**

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