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Philipp crew 'robbed' by crewing agent in Manila

The ITF has alleged that the crew of the Gibraltar-flagged container vessel Philipp (previously known as the Beluga Meditation) have now been robbed of the owed wages recovered for them following intervention by the ITF and the Gibraltar flag authority.

ITF inspector Tommy Molloy first exposed deliberate double book keeping on the vessel earlier this month (see www.itfglobal.org/press-area/index.cfm/pressdetail/6510/region/1/section/0/order/1). At the time, confronted with evidence of the USD230,000 underpayment, both Vega Friedrich Dauber GMBH & Co KG and its subsidiary, Vega Manila Crewmanagement Inc, agreed to make payment in Liverpool on 4th October. However, a representative of Vega Crewing arrived and took back the money, meaning that further action had to be taken. The crew finally got their money two weeks later. Now, however, eyewitnesses to their arrival in Manila reports that they were effectively ambushed as they were leaving the airport. They were bundled into two vans, taken to crewing agent Vega Crewing's office and the money taken from them under duress. Only one crew member, who had left the airport by a different exit, escaped.

"Someone told me yesterday that he had been in this business for more than 30 years and thought he had seen it all. He was surprised to discover that he still had the capacity to be shocked and appalled at the treatment meted out to some seafarers," commented ITF Inspector Tommy Molloy, following reports that seven of the crew appear to have been met by thugs at Manila airport, driven to the office and forced to hand back their wages yet again to Vega Crewing manager Vicente Fedelicio.

He continued: "This has been going on for a month now. We first discovered the double book keeping in September. When the owners, Vega Friedrich Dauber GMBH & Co KG, were faced with the evidence they agreed to repay the wages on 4th October in the Port of Liverpool."

"Within hours of the payout I returned to the vessel with port police officers and my suspicions that the money was to be taken off the crew were borne out. The crew had been sufficiently threatened by Vicente Fedelicio of Vega Crewing in the Philippines –

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who had travelled from Manila to Liverpool to be on board for the payment along with the German owner's representatives – to hand back the money, telling the police they had done so voluntarily because they did not want their wages.”

This was reported to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration and following its intervention the company was forced to make a repayment of the owed wages to the crew in Liverpool on 18th October. Payment was overseen by the ITF and witnessed by UK Port State Control (MCA) on behalf of the Gibraltar Register.

“The company has never denied the fraud,” said Molloy. “They’ve actually paid back the stolen wages twice now, simply on the basis of the evidence we have against them. Whether Vega Crewing has acted alone or under instructions by taking the money back yet again in Manila I don’t know. If it’s the former then we would expect Vega Reederei to take the appropriate action. If they don’t, then we will be looking for the Gibraltar Maritime Administration and others to take the necessary action against the German owner.”

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