

Crews of Convenience from the South West Pacific: The "German" Sailors of Kiribati

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This article discusses the employment of Kiribati seafarers on German owned and flagged shipping. The authors examine the origins of the German shipping industry sponsored training and recruitment programs on the Kiribati atolls. The implications of the creation of a manorial "internal" labour market for German container shipping in the South West Pacific is assessed. The impact of labour participation in the international shipping industry on Kiribati's former fisherfolk is also examined. Research methods emphasise semi-structured interviews with relevant actors. The authors relate the Kiribati seafarers' experience to the general "flag of convenience" and "crews of convenience" phenomenon, arguably the central issue in the current industrial and social study of global merchant shipping.

Introduction

A relatively unexplored feature of the industrial labour market in the South West Pacific area is the recruitment of "crews of convenience" for international shipping in the micro-states. By the year 2000, about 73 percent of the world's seafarers consisted in personnel of third world origin recruited outside the "traditional" OECD seafaring countries such as the UK, Norway and Japan. This reflects the growing preponderance of "flag of convenience" (FOC) vessels, which has now risen to 46 percent of the world fleet, from a figure of 5.6 percent in 1950 (ISF, 2000; Lloyd's Register, 2000).

The island state of Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert and Ellice Islands) is perhaps a paradigm of this development in the international division of labour warranting some further analysis. It is not the only Pacific micro-state in which international shipping is now the major industry. The Marshall Islands is a leading "flag of convenience", offering maritime registry services to predominately US owned shipping. By contrast, Kiribati is a major source of "crews of convenience" for German shipowners, and thus of interest to industrial relations specialists.

Much of the academic and policy literature has focussed on the shortcomings of international regulation to maintain adequate labour standards for third world seafarers and

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the difficulties confronting the International Transport Federation (ITF) and its affiliates worldwide in improving wages and condition on these vessels through transnational collective bargaining (Harrigan, 1984). Case studies of widespread abuse on these ships have also been systematically reported, evoking parallels for today's Philippine and Indonesian seafarer with the Dickensian plight of the 19th century European and American seafarer: non payment of wages, forced contracts, inadequate food and living conditions, excessive hours and physical abuse by supervisors (Chapman, 1992; Couper, 1999). Departures from OECD standards noted by observers include a range of deficits. At the point of entry into employment, the third world FOC seafarer may be required to pay an "employment commission" to trade union officials as well as back log training fees to the private maritime schools which prepare recruits for international shipping. In addition, the ship-manning agent will require a fee from enlisted seafarers, who may be instructed not to divulge details of their contracts to ITF representatives. Contracts typically call for work on demand at sea and have no provision for overtime, work breaks and Sundays spent at sea. Moreover, contracts issued to Philippine and Indian recruited seamen may typically provide fines for "desertion", coupled with provisions for the withholding of wages until voyages end and the transfer of medical and travel costs to the contracting seafarer (Benze, 2000).

In Australia, the issue of "ships of shame" and "coffin ships haunting Australian waters" has been extensively publicised by the Hon. Peter Morris, former Minister for Transport in the Hawke/Keating Labour Government (House of Reps. Report, 1992 and Morris P, 2000). This paper does not seek to "refute" the general dimensions of the "flags of convenience" and "crews of convenience" problem, developed in the subsequent policy debate (see, ITF, 2000). Rather, its central purpose is to present a contrary example from the southwest Pacific to the picture of ocean-going sweatshops in the service of world seaborne trade.

It also seeks to present a previously unreported case in the literature on small islands and labour relations, which indicates the dynamics of change emanating from the global economy and the problems of generalisations regarding the preponderant role of informality and extended family working practices prevailing in small Pacific island settings (Baldacchino. 1999; Imbun, 1997).

In Fiji, Baldacchino (1999) found that small enterprises, with their high labour absorption potential, dominate manufacturing employment. Moreover, employment relations in the typical small firm continues to be tintured by family and kin ties. Both labour and management subscribe to a dominant cultural norm which emphasises consensus and tradition within a "unitary" perspective: "known as the 'Pacific way', this belief system is founded on the impression that the history of the region has been relatively harmonious and peaceful in nature" (1999: 110). Indeed, the small firm's global tendency towards unitarism and processual harmony is compounded by the Pacific ideology of communalism, social reciprocity and conflict avoidance.

By contrast, Imbun (1997) examines the attempt by an international mining company to create an industrial workforce from hitherto subsistence farmers in the PNG Highlands. In this case, the vigorous demand for industrial employment and the resultant access to cash and consumer goods by the villagers required political and communal intervention in order

to distribute scarce employment, opportunities. Moreover, the clash between the "Pacific Way" and the international mine owners conceptions of human resource management created tensions. Many mine workers remained essentially villagers, expecting to return to village life enriched with consumer goods, while only a minority became an industrial proletariat, reliant on waged employment and separated more or less permanently from the subsistence economy of the village clan (Imbun, 1997; Imbun and Morris, 1995). The Kiribati seafarers offer an example consistent with the Fijian and PNG experiences, but one in which the scale of international intervention is somewhat greater than rather ephemeral mining operations, though the "Pacific Way" continues to colour working life.

The research is based on semi-structured interviews with relevant actors, together with the analysis of published and unpublished documentary evidence.

German shipping and crews of convenience

Although the Whilhemine Empire was active as a commercial and colonial power in the Pacific prior to World War One with holdings which included German New Guinea, Samoa and the Marshall Islands, subsequent involvement has been minimal with the exception of the German shipping industry. The emergence in post war Germany of substantial global maritime enterprise re-kindled interest in South Pacific assets although in a way hardly foreseen by Prussian imperialists. Measured in the abstract and rather misleading traditional way of tonnage under the national flag, German shipping is ranked at position 15 representing 1.5 percent of the world total. Taking the "genuine link" concept or nationality of the real but often disguised "beneficial" owner into account (Nunez-Muller 1994; Memon 2000), German shipping moves to position seven with 3.5 percent of world tonnage ultimately in the hands of German citizens (Noell 2000). The difference between the two can be explained by the fact that most German-owned ships are registered under so-called Flags of Convenience (FOC) flying the flags of Liberia, Panama, the Marshall islands and other small states which offer open registry services for shipping (Holmer 2000; Charles 2000a). One of the advantages of FOCs from the ship operators' point of view is the use of cheap labour from so-called "labour supply countries". These include the Philippines, which supplies the world market with around 250,000 seafarers, followed by Indonesia with 83,500, Turkey with 80,000 and China with 76,000 as major suppliers of predominately semi-skilled personnel (Benze 2000). Avoiding these crowded labour markets and their quality problems, German shipowners through their trade and employer association have developed their own "manorial" labour market in Kiribati (ITF, 1999; ISF, 2000).

International German shipping is focussed on the liner trader in containers specializing in on-time delivery in worldwide logistics networks (Russell 2000; Williams 2000). A major employer of Kiribati seafarers for example, Columbus-Line is a long established German shipping company with 72 containerships and offices in Sydney and Auckland (Opatz 2000). Line 4 of their worldwide network serves Auckland, Sydney, Melbourne, the Pacific and the West Coast of North America (van den Berg 2000). While a Columbus ship operated with 35 to 50 crew-members in the 1960s, after containerisation those numbers

went down to 25 in the 1970s and is as low as 15 on some ships in the 1990s (Schönberg 2000). Advances in shipboard technology had encouraged broad banding of jobs and led to a further decline in staffing. Electricians merged with radio officers and on the so-called "bridge of the future" deck officers were merged with engine room officers to create a nautical-technical officer (Huth 2000; VDR, 1996). Along with de-staffing and job reclassification, on board German owned but FOC registered ships high cost German seamen were replaced in the remaining blue-collar jobs by Kiribati seafarers.

The fundamental explanation for the retirement of the German blue-collar seafarers rests in labour costs. Crewing costs are part of a number of costs in international shipping. One of these costs is a fixed set of costs such as port fees, bunker costs and channel charges (for example, the St Lawrence Seaway, Rio de la Plata, Panama Canal); and there are costs that can only be marginally altered by the individual shipping company such as ship building, credits from the international financial markets, freight rates, fuel costs and regular maintenance as required by the classification societies responsible for insurance and seaworthiness standards (Davenport 2000; Williams, 2000). One area where shipowners see their ability to influence costs are wages and ship registration. Besides the economics of cheap FOC registration, crewing levels and crewing costs also offer a choice of flexibilities (ITF, 2000). In 1997 crewing costs for typical German container ships were reported as follows (D-EIS 1998: 59, Opatz 2000; Strothmann, 2000):

Annual wage costs for a German container ship (1997)

Registration	Crewing	Cost (in German Marks)
German Register*	24 Germans, no foreign seafarers	2,700,000
German Second Register [GIS] (allows non-German wages)**	5 Germans (mostly officers) and 19 foreign seafarers most ratings/blue-collar	1,400,000
FOC	0 Germans and 28 foreign seafarers	700,000

* Demands German flag, German crews and German wages with German collective agreements, operates under German law.

** The GIS was introduced in 1989 as an additional list to the German register that allows the use of foreign seafarers at non-German wages. It is used by German shipowners that employ Kiribati ratings. It is a hybrid between the traditional national flag form of registration and regulation and the FOC.

In short, a typical German container shipping company such as Columbus Line faces several costs for their shipping operations but crewing is one of the areas where shipping companies have some strategic choices. Wage costs are least favourable to such firms when their ships are registered under the German flag with an all German crew on German wage levels. As Table 1 shows, wage levels are the lowest when a container ship is

registered under a FOC such as Panama, Liberia or Malta. Yet there is a middle way between an expensive German crew and total out-flagging to an FOC with a total foreign crew and its risk management and quality problems from the shipowners' perspective. The 1989 German International Shipping Register (GIS) provides the framework for a novel constitutional arrangement. Columbus Line uses foreign ratings and pays local non-German wages yet still retains a quality "German identity" in some measure. While German shipping companies have used such seafarers on their FOC ships since 1989, they now have a second alternative, the GIS. Even though FOCs might be cheaper, many German shipping companies seek to employ German officers and foreign ratings because cheap labour is not the only factor in their labour cost calculations. With a substantial investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in expensive containerships, German shipowners tend to favour German officers and especially German masters for employment on their expensive investments (Steiter 2000, Noell 2000). In short, the typical German ocean transport unit of the 1990s is a modern and technological advanced container ship under second register (GIS) or under FOC register, but with a mixed crew of German officers and foreign ratings, noticeably the Kiribati seafarers (Geftken, 2000).

Apart from technological changes and containerisation during the 1970s, the exchange of German ratings for foreign ratings on board of German owned but FOC or GIS registered ships created the most significant change in the employment relations of the German merchant marine. Today a typical Columbus-Line container ship operates with a crew of 22 seafarers, nine mostly German officers and 13 ratings from Kiribati (Werdenbach-Jarklowski 2000; Zeiss, 2000; Lemburg, 2000). According to Weiss (2000) currently 140 ships have Kiribati seafarers on board including non-German vessels as shipowners develop a maritime labour market in the tiny Pacific state consisting of 33 islands and coral atolls with a total landmass of 726 square kilometres (Reher, 2000; KVB, 1997).

Commercial pressures in an industry unusually exposed to globalisation have forced German shipowners in the post World War II period to explore avenues that reduced wage costs. German shipping moved into the lucrative market of container shipping which demanded modern and highly efficient ships able to meet deadlines inside logistic chains organised by cartels called "conferences" in maritime parlance. Unlike bulk carriers that transport iron ore, crude oil, wheat and the like often travelling on individual voyages or "tramping" without fixed timetables, modern container ships carry expensive goods on fixed routes with fixed time schedules. Such "quality" demands encouraged German shipping to find a middle way between cheap labour on FOCs ships by running their ships under the German Second Register or under FOCs but with a mixed crew of German officers and foreign ratings subject to German training standards and employee selection. As a consequence, a symbiotic relationship has developed between German shipowners and the natives of Kiribati.

Kiribati seafarers and the maritime training centre

Kiribati offered a window of opportunity to German shipowners. Interest in the islands of Kiribati dates back to 1960s when Kiribati was still under British rule as the colony of

"Gilbert and Ellice Islands" (Murphy 2000). British colonial administration over the islands had begun in 1892 with Gilbert Island as a port of call between Fiji and Honolulu and was later extended to the Ellice Islands in 1916. By 1952 the strategic advantage of the islands declined because of shipping route changes and schedules, which bypassed their shores. There were further reverses in its post European history. Complete independence on 12 July 1979 coincided with the exhaustion of phosphate deposits, the only natural resource of the islands. Without natural resources, poor coral soil, a tiny population of 86,000, salty air, limited agriculture, only a few exports of coconut oil, only cottage manufacturing, long distances to markets, few tourists, and limited revenue through the sale of fishing licences to Japan, Kiribati's labour market was well stocked with underemployed fisher folk and its politicians were supportive of the new sources of revenue and investment which the German shipowners promised (Franken, 2000).

The German maritime training facility on Kiribati dates from the colonial period. In 1966 the "Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony Merchant Marine Training School" was set up by the Hamburg-Sud Line as a school under the auspices of the local education administration. With substantial private investment coming from German shipowners, the school has never been a project of the German government as a third world aid program (Schönberg, 2000). Its development is the result of private initiatives collectively supported by German shipowners to train Kiribati locals as seafarers to be employed on German ships. The maritime training company originally enjoyed British Colonial Office support. With a first intake of 45 students in 1967, annual student numbers by the early 1970s expanded to an average annual intake of around 220 students, now stabilised at around 100 per annum per 15-month course (Weiss, 2000; Steiter, 2000). In short German demand for cheap but well trained labour, the decline of revenue through phosphate mining and ability of Kiribati's local labour market to supply sufficient numbers of future international seafarers already familiarized with basic boat-work as subsistence fishermen created an ideal environment for the creation of a training school on a relatively remote island. The Kiribati labour supply enabled German shipowners to create a low cost internal labour market schooled in German marine protocols and free of the quality problems associated with the usual low cost international sources of maritime labour in the Philippines and Indonesia.

The Kiribati seamen first received their training on an old Polish passenger cargo ship supplied by the original British partners, but facilities were progressively expanded after the formal establishment of an exclusive German crewing agency in the islands, the South Pacific Marine Service (SPMS), which in the 1970s and 1980s progressively expanded both on shore and shipboard training facilities organised by the Kiribati Maritime Training Centre (MTC) (Werdenbach-Jarklowski, 2000). To some extent, the South Pacific "gastarbeiter" have been touched by the problems of cultural and social apartheid shared by their equivalents on shore in the home country (Benze, 2000). However, the Pacific islanders "ideology of communalism, social reciprocity and conflict avoidance" (Baldacchino, 1999) has not proved entirely dysfunctional as far as adaptation to German patterns of social mobility are concerned.

Over the years Kiribati seafarers starting as "ratings" (blue collar seafarers) have moved upward into middle level positions with some receiving further training to become "white collar" officers. According to Zaat (2000) between two percent and five percent of all

Kiribati seafarers are officers and some have moved on to non-German employers working in global shipping. Although the Kiribati MTC does not offer officer-training facilities, candidates who are initially successful in preparatory distance learning courses have been funded by SMPS to attend advanced maritime colleges in Fiji, Great Britain and New Zealand (Reher, 2000). According to SMPS' managing director, "we give them a loan for the school, which they have to pay back after completion, there is a condition to work for us after the degree; and when they finish they are still cheaper than Polish or German officers". (Weiss, 2000).

The MTC has prospered on the basis of both shipowner and worker requirements. The number of available traineeships are funded by German shipowners and calibrated to SPMS demand, which can fluctuate markedly, as for example, in the period when the addition of sixty four vessels of the former East German deep sea fleet to the mercantile marine placed high additional pressures on Kiribati human resources. On the worker side, applicants far exceed the number of places available, lessening pressure on the SPMS to consider alternative sources of labour supply or to take seriously Kiribati government and German feminist pressures to extend the training scheme to women (Schönberg, 2000).

In a global industry where formal quality standards in training are viewed as the most effective remedy against ship strikings, cargo losses and environmental disasters of the Exxon Valdez type, the MTC has so far kept abreast of requirements. The main instrument of global quality control is the Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers (STCWs) promulgated by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) of the United Nations and policed by Port State Control (PSC) in the various member states (Spiliotis, G. 2000). The IMO is due to compile by 2002 a definitive "white list" of owners and flags where STCWs standards have been met, thus simplifying inspection procedures in ports by PSC and facilitating insurance cover. Although the members of the International Shipping Federation currently debate whether the Philippines, the biggest supply country for ratings, will meet the STCWs standards, Kiribati's MTC has received undertakings that its trainees will be validated by the 2002 STCWs standards inspectorate (Weiss, 2000; Kiehne, G 2000; Le Clercq, F 2000). Notwithstanding international recognition, old hands nonetheless regret the dilution of Teutonic trainers with locals "we used to run the school but increasingly locals are used as trainers and we see some decline in standards" (Schonberg, 2000; McKay 2000).

Unlike Baldaccinio's (1999) stationary Fijian cottage industry workers, Kiribati seafarers in the employ of the SPMS travel outside their islands, usually for the first time in their lives. Returning from overseas trips they import electronic goods such as refrigerators, VCRs, TVs, and motorbikes (Zaat, 2000). Like Imbun's (1997) Papua New Guinean gold miners, most Kiribati seamen do not view their employment as a lifetime commitment but rather as a way to acquire western consumer goods preparatory to a return to village life, though a minority of Kiribati officer candidates have committed themselves to western style career advancement. Many Kiribati seamen are aspirant small businessmen, saving wages to buy minibuses and the inventories for small shops (Franken, 2000). In Kerr's (1973) well known typology of the development of an industrial workforce through stages of recruitment, commitment to the industrial way of life, advancement through upskilling and maintenance of the industrial way of life through exclusive reliance on wages and pensions for economic

support, we would need to locate such workers in the uncommitted stage: working more or less regularly in industry but nonetheless envisaging a return to land, tribe and village.

Typically in the seafaring villages of Kiribati, entrepreneurial inexperience has created an oversupply of ex seafarer driven minibus operations and other small business ventures. Yet the communal value system still prevails over advancing industrialism and the attitudes and models gleaned from the islands only visual media, imported videos. On the one hand there is a need to operate a small enterprise such as minibus service along commercial lines in an economic system based on capitalism. On the other hand, there has been an island tradition of "bubuti" that demands the sharing of all goods that one person or a family possesses. To reject any request by kinfolk to "borrow" something – like a minibus – is considered to be extremely anti social and impolite and should not be done (Franken, 2000).

In contrast to their former island life based on "bubuti" and local lagoon fishing, since the arrival of German shipping employment opportunities, Kiribati seafarers spend a considerable time away from their traditional surroundings. Traditionally those assignments or employment contracts between SPMS and the Kiribati's seafarers' union "Kiribati Islands Overseas Seamen's Union" (KIOSU) had a duration of 12 months, but in 1999 the length was increased to 13 months (Charles 2000b), perhaps a small indicator of the growing encroachment of industrial life. That the path to the industrial life is not smooth is also demonstrated by the islanders relative naivety or inexperience of the illnesses of "advanced civilizations". A small number of Kiribati seamen have been jailed for drug trafficking in foreign ports, opportunities for enrichment and turpitude which did not exist before Kiribati's fisher folk became wage labourers on German ships (Zaat, 2000; Zeiss, D. 2000).

Wages and conditions

The wages and conditions of the seafarers are negotiated through collective agreements between the SPMS and the ITF in conjunction with its local affiliate, KIOSU. Denominated in US dollars, these wages are income tax free, providing the domestic market with its major source of foreign exchange and, replacing that now exhausted engine of the Kiribati economy, the phosphate deposits (Weiss, 2000). The involvement of the ITF and its well established and relatively powerful Australian affiliate, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), reflects the current policy of first world maritime unions to come to terms with "crews of convenience", by attempting to compromise and stabilise the wholesale exodus of jobs to third world countries. Measures of solidarity and the collective standardisation of wages and conditions, it is hoped, may inhibit further adjustments in the direction of greater job loss for OECD seamen (Charles, 2000b).

In recent rounds of collective bargaining for the Kiribati ships the ITF affiliated German Seafarers' Union has confined its representations to the German officers on these vessels, leaving negotiations for the ratings in the hands of Australasian based ITF representatives and MUA officials (Charles, 2000b). About the only personnel on the Kiribati ships not covered by union membership and collective agreement are the middle ranking and junior

Polish officers who are paid on wage schedules agreed between the German shipowners and the Polish crewing agency, Polaris, which functions as a monopoly state run maritime labour exchange for Polish seafarers, further institutionalising the marine division of labour, and offering further flexibilities to German shipping entrepreneurs.

In many respects the basic structure of the ITF negotiated terms and conditions for Kiribati ratings parallel the terms for first world seafarers. Food and accommodation of a mutually agreed standard is provided. In addition, overtime payments for routine duties during "captured time" at sea, where opportunities for meaningful leisure are limited, enable substantive increments on basic rates. Nonetheless, the wages paid allow labour costs of between 28 percent and 53 percent lower compared to German costs on the available estimates, providing a substantial incentive for German shipowners to continue to hire Kiribati's ratings (Meyer, 2000; Mueller, 2000).

Further, despite the involvement of professional ITF negotiators, the current wage levels for Kiribati ratings remain below the ITF premium standard or "Blue Certificate" for international "crews of convenience" (Holmer, 2000). According to the ITF, the difference is accounted for by the employers' insistence on avoiding "transfer costs", which include the costs now borne by Kiribati employees of air travel from the remote islands to join ships at the start of employment in ports in Germany, America and Australasia (Charles, 2000b). Despite quality concerns, the SPMS has threatened to use Indonesian or Filipino ratings or establish new alternative maritime training centres in the Solomon Islands and elsewhere if sub Blue Certificate wages are not conceded. The ITF has elected not to challenge this position, given the priority of the local KIOSU to retain its members' foothold in international shipping and the labour market monopoly exercised by SPMS (Weiss, 2000).

Conclusion

On the negative side of the Kiribati project along with the cultural tensions, German blue collar ratings have lost their jobs as German shipowners replace them with Kiribati ratings once contracts are completed. Yet, while there are almost no German ratings left, the German crewing agency SPMS has become the biggest employer in the island state. The establishment of a maritime training school on Kiribati has assisted an international division of labour in shipping under which German ratings lost employment while at the same time an industrial working class has appeared for the first time in the history of these islands.

In contrast to the well publicized and weakly resourced "low quality" FOC entrepreneurs, the group of German shipowners sponsoring SPMS continues to invest significant sums into their Kiribati training school which measures up to current international standards. At the same time, the class and cultural apartheid which the advent of the Kiribati "gastarbeiter" introduced into the German mercantile marine has been ameliorated as Kiribati ratings move into officer's positions. Given that roughly 40 years ago the Kiribati atolls were becoming a "ghost" phosphate mine in industrial terms, the arrival of German shipping and investment in Kiribati has been a relatively successful example in the "trickle down" transfer of knowledge in respect of the increasingly sophisticated ocean transport industry with all

its possibilities for multiplier and partnership effects in tourism, marine administration and ship repair. Indeed, the maritime economy with its intimate connections to "globalisation" may offer more sustainable skill and employee development opportunities than those available to the PNG miners described by Imbun, dependent on limited lifespan mineral extraction projects.

Yet German shipping in Kiribati has been intrusive in comparison to the relatively autonomous and traditional cottage manufacturing industry studied in Fiji by Baldacchino (1997). Islanders have become workers on large German cargo ships spending months and even years away from the islands, disconnected from their environment and families. They return with new consumer goods never seen in the island and norms of individual possession which conflict with the traditional "bubuti" system of commune usage. Previously unknown differences in wealth have appeared in Kiribati's society. Eating and living habits have changed to such an extent that some of the atolls are polluted with rubbish and sewage, mirroring familiar tendencies towards private affluence and inequality in more established "market" societies.

Furthermore as recent wage negotiations have shown, Kiribati's economy has become more and more hostage to a giant single employer from Germany, the SPMS. Even though German shipping is highly profitable and successful on an international scale, employers have managed to pay below ITF premium wages by successfully rejecting the bill for so-called "transfer costs". With an alliance between Kiribati's government for whom the influx of revenue is a priority and SPMS's interest in low wages, "concession bargaining" has tended to be the outcome. However, the close nexus between the high technology and high investment container ocean transport trade and "quality" operations ensures that a floor is placed on training conditions and remuneration for the Kiribati crewed vessels, whose seafarers avoid the Dickensian conditions of "crews of convenience" on "ships of shame".

In a real sense, the Kiribati seafarers and their dependant home communities are an unusually well defined if miniature icon of globalisation. As elsewhere, the spread of international and cross civilization markets has brought new affluences and life chances but also new inequalities in its train. High tech industry, physically epitomized in this case by the largely computerized transportation system of the modern containership, demonstrates an often underemphasized and continuing reliance on relatively low skilled labour to provide simple cleaning and maintenance functions. It is unlikely that the command hierarchy of shipboard control and the imperatives of competitive markets alone would drive strong programs for improving the wages and conditions of those on the periphery and at the bottom of the job hierarchy. The Kiribati case indicates that trade union intervention and formal negotiating processes have benefited the returns for nonsupervisory seafarers, otherwise reliant on ambiguous employer conceptions of benevolence, coloured as they are by concerns about human resource efficiency and low labour costs.

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