



Hot on the 'Tito' trail

Fourteen crewing websites bear similarities to sites that have sparked a worldwide alert from a seafarers' union, a *Fairplay* investigation has found. Now just who is this 'Tito Cordoba'?



By Greg Miller
Americas Editor

The warning light is back on for crewing cyber-scams. A *Fairplay* investigation found at least 14 crewing websites that bear registration similarities to those that have sparked a worldwide alert from the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

The ITF labelled such websites in July as "complete frauds" that prey upon

unwary seafarers.

Fairplay embarked upon its own investigation after the ITF sounded the alarm. This inquiry found one man's name popping up again and again: 'Tito Cordoba'.

Despite years of warnings and denunciations on internet crewing scams, the issue remains as pressing as ever. As of today, little or no progress has been made in enforcing standards, so such sites continue to dupe victims with impunity.

According to the ITF's warning – which is published on its website – the website *Jobsoncruises.com* appears "to be a front for a known criminal

operation, *Sea Cruise Enterprises*," while two previously known addresses – *Seacruiseent.com* and *Caledonianoffshore.com* – are "also known to be active".

Researching public documents filed with domain registrar Network Solutions and other available data, *Fairplay* not only found a common thread for the three sites in the ITF warning, but also 11 other sites circumstantially tied together by common mailing addresses, common or adjacent IP addresses or inter-related registrations. And the name 'Tito,' or 'Tito



PHILIP Mark Croshaw, former resident of the Isle of Sark, Channel Islands, and now believed to be resident in Cyprus, is a much-sought man – by *Fairplay*, at least.

If we could find him, and we did try, we would ask him about his role in the operation of websites claiming to offer jobs in the cruise shipping and offshore industries.

But there are also hundreds and possibly even several thousands of people touched by what the ITF alleges is a fraud, in countries ranging from Uganda to the Philippines and from Hungary to Saudi Arabia, who would doubtless like to ask Croshaw



Croshaw – shadowy figure linked to the controversial websites

 **Philippines**
Alert in press

 **Cocos Isles**
Web registration link

NEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES
Great Boom In the Offshore Petroleum Industry!

Now you can work on an oil platform earning big US Dollars Overseas!

Position:	Salary:
Oil Worker	£35,000 (per year)
Restaurant (Highly)	£32,750 (per year)
Service Personnel	£32,250 (per year)

Other Positions: Welders, Administration Personnel, Heavy Maintenance, Hotel & Catering Personnel, Electricians, Mechanics, etc. (Work schedule is 22 hours per day)

Applications between 20-40 years old with or without previous experience.

- Tax Free Salaries
- Work Schedule: 21 days on* / 14 days off
- Effective work days: 219 days per year

For more information, SIGN IN our web page:
<http://www.cocosisles.com/>

websites for

Tangled web of websites

The following websites either have the mailing same address and phone number, the same server company, interconnected registration data, and/or mentions of 'Tito' or 'Tito Cordoba'. Note below their concurrent Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, which I-DIRECT CEO Michael Beiertz suggests has no significance.



Website	IP address
IDIRECT.cc	64.239.82.09
Cooljobsite.com	64.239.82.10
Jobsoncruises.com	64.239.82.10
Internationaljobpublishers.com	64.239.82.10
Internationalmaritimelink.com	64.239.82.10
Internationaljoblink.com	200.46.59.170
Airlinejoblink.com	200.46.59.170
Modelingjobs.com	200.46.59.170
Cruisejoblink.com	200.46.59.171
Oiljoblink.com	200.46.59.172
Hoteljoblink.com	200.46.59.172
Modeljoblink.com	200.46.59.172
Seacruiseent.com	200.46.59.173
Caledonianoffshore.com	200.46.59.174



(Note: All registration data cited here, as well as that in the main article, was downloaded and copied in the week of 19 July directly from the official registrar for the dot-com domains, Network Solutions and the registrar of the "CC" domain, ICANN. Such registration data could potentially have been 'updated' since this article was written)



This Aeropost warehouse serves as the Miami address for several websites. From here, mail is forwarded on to Latin America

long and cost about \$40 a volume – or can be purchased online in a “package” for \$99.99. Having ordered one of the last remaining copies of *International Oil Companies & Contractors* from Amazon.com, *Fairplay* can confirm that the books do indeed exist.

International Jobs Publishers openly ties itself to a site called Cruisejoblink.com. According to a 5 April 2001 press release, Cruisejoblink is a “new online recruitment system” providing companies “immediate access to thousands of qualified applicants.”

Cruisejoblink is just one of a suite of websites focused on job searches in many other sectors (oil, hotel, airline, modelling) – all collected under the umbrella site Internationaljoblink.com. Cruisejoblink lists its CEO as Michael Beiertz.

Fairplay attempted to contact International Jobs Publishers at its Panama telephone number but was told that the company had moved and there was no forwarding information. According to the woman answering the phone, one of the two current residents of that particular Panama office is a company called I-DIRECT – and I-DIRECT happens to be on our list as well.

The I-DIRECT connection

The Panama-based I-DIRECT is emphatically not related to the US-

based company I-Direct Technologies in Reston, Virginia, whose website is *Idirect.net*. The website of Panama’s I-DIRECT is *Idirect.cc* (The ‘dot-cc’ domain is a universal registry sold to investors by the Cocos Islands, a remote Indian Ocean atoll, population 650).

As it turns out, Panama’s I-DIRECT does business with at least one major player in the international cruise recruiting sector. In fact, had you gone to go to your computer and typed in ‘www.idirect.cc’ before 19 July, you’d have actually been confronted with the logo of CTI, a well-known and respected global recruitment agency in Miami.

CTI president Bob Upchurch confirmed that his company has a contract with I-DIRECT to develop a new database and added that CTI first came across I-DIRECT during the annual *Seatrade* cruise convention, where the Panama-based company had a booth in 2002 and 2003.

Upchurch told *Fairplay* he had been impressed with the quality of work provided by I-DIRECT programmers to date. But he also said he had not been aware that the CTI logo had been posted by I-DIRECT.

After CTI executives broached the logo issue with the Panamanian company on 19 July, I-DIRECT immediately disabled its website (it is no longer functional).

Upchurch's top contact at I-DIRECT is its CEO, Michael Beiertz – the same man listed as CEO of Cruisejoblink in the circa-2001 press release cited above.

Beiertz' firm denial

Last week, *Fairplay* reached Beiertz by telephone. We asked him about the apparent connections between his database company and various crewing websites that the ITF has declared fraudulent.

"There is absolutely no connection," Beiertz responded. International Jobs Publishers, he said, "used to be here, in the same office, but I have nothing to do with them."

Beiertz also insisted he had been listed as CEO of Cruisejoblink only because "as a favour to them, I used to do some work as a legal representative of the company."

When *Fairplay* asked Beiertz if he knew someone by the name of Tito Cordoba, Beiertz confirmed that Cordoba had worked for International Jobs Publishers and that he believed Cordoba still worked for that company,



The Bank of Boston building in Panama City. From an office on the 13th floor, Tito Cordoba placed an advert for Jobsoncruises

"but I wouldn't know, because I have nothing to do with them."

He said he hasn't worked together with International Jobs Publishers "for years"

Asked whether Cordoba worked with

I-DIRECT, Beiertz was emphatic: "No."

Which brings us to a signed advertising contract shown to *Fairplay* by a publishing industry source co-operating with our inquiry. *Fairplay* saw documented proof that in the last six months, ads had been placed for a cruise ship job in a local Guyana newspaper on behalf of I-DIRECT.

The ad is for Jobsoncruises.com, the same site the ITF has declared on its website to be "a complete fraud."

More questions for Beiertz

The advertising contract was signed by 'Tito Cordoba', who identified himself in writing as the general manager of I-DIRECT.

The physical address for I-DIRECT provided with the order is the very same address given to Upchurch for his database project – an office on the 13th floor of the Bank of Boston Building on Calle Elvira Mendez in Panama City.

Understandably, *Fairplay* had a few more questions for Beiertz. Here's his written response to our follow-up query:

"I don't know what you are trying to

Varied warnings that job sites might not be what they seem

'No business of any kind'

Barbados Daily Nation, 11 July, 2004

The Sunday Sun has discovered that the company behind the advertisements – Caledonian Offshore Ltd, has been accused of fraud and is unlikely to return money sent to them by Barbadians. . . . And the Ministry of Labour is warning that "No business of any kind should be conducted with that company."

'No address'

St Lucia Online

Caledonian claims in its own brochures that it operates under Liberian law. Yet it gives no address in that country.

'Phony company'

Jamaica Observer, 14 June, 2004

The Canadian High Commission [in Jamaica] and the labour ministry are warning Jamaicans looking for jobs overseas to be wary of a phony company that is promising lucrative jobs on offshore oil projects, luring its victims with salaries of up to J\$23,000 (\$380) per day.

"It's an international criminal activity, a fraud, and we want to make sure that when [local newspapers] get the ad, they won't place it," said Robert Farrell, commercial counsellor for the high commission.

Police query 'credibility'

Monitor (Uganda), 4 May, 2004

Police are seeking to establish the credibility of a firm that has invited Ugandans to apply for 5,000 jobs on a cruise ship. "In the past we have had companies come here promising jobs and have conned people," police spokesman, Asuman Mugenyi, told *Businessweek*.

"Ugandans should be very careful . . . [and] should establish the authenticity of the whole scheme otherwise they might be conned," said a senior official of the ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

The same scheme was also allegedly pulled off in other countries like India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Burma, Jordan and Morocco.

POEA 'is warning' job seekers

Mindanao Times, 23 November 2001

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) is warning jobseekers for overseas jobs regarding the proliferation of job invitations from a Canadian-based firm.

Francis Domingo, chief of POEA-Mindanao Area, is cautioning the public not to fall prey to this *modus operandi* [of Caledonian Offshore].

Wanted oil rig workers salary \$430/day

Tinig ng Marino April-March 2002

The job offer was made by one Philip M Croshaw, president of Caledonian Offshore.

'Job doesn't exist'

ITF News Online, 19 May 2004

The ITF is repeating warnings to job applicants not to pay to secure a job that they will almost certainly never see. The federation spoke out after Uganda's *The Monitor* newspaper reported an advert for jobs for "5000 Ugandans on cruise ships".

"The rule is, if you have to pay to get a dream job, the job doesn't exist," said Stephen Cotton, Secretary of the ITF's Special Seafarers' Department.

The ITF has gone on record to state that the following 'recruitment agencies' exist to run cruise ship employment frauds: Sea Cruise Enterprises, Red Flower Cruise Line, Letus/Fleet Recruitment Office, Al Najat Marine Shipping, and Caledonian Offshore – "a known criminal operation now targeting Central America and using a postal address, adverts and a seemingly plausible but totally fraudulent website at www.caledonianoffshore.com."



Photo: Mailboxes Etc.



Left: Two allegedly fraudulent websites use UPS-owned Mailboxes Etc. outlets in Toronto to receive applicants' cheques

Above right: A fax linking Tito Cordoba with I-DIRECT

at this office. They left four months ago.”

Clearly, ‘Tito’ is going to be a hard man to reach on the phone. However, he does seem to have more than a few computer skills at his disposal, so we’ve since tried to reach him at his various email addresses. We are confident that ‘Tito’ shares our view that there is a logical explanation for this tangled web, and when we receive a reply to our emails, we will publish it in *Fairplay*. **F**

imply, but I can only tell you that...even if our company happens to have adjacent IP addresses to these companies [see ‘Tangled web’, p18], so what? UNDER NO CONDITION will I-DIRECT or myself be part of an article [about an issue] which we have nothing to do with.”

At this point in its investigation, *Fairplay* passed all the material from its research on the website registration data to both the ITF union representatives and CTI executives.

In response, CTI’s Upchurch made the following statement: “I-DIRECT has been hired to create and implement a complete recruiting database solution to help consolidate and streamline our international operations. CTI’s association and communication with I-DIRECT has been strictly limited to achieving this goal.”

CTI also underscored that its own site, www.cti-usa.com, offers employment-at-sea services “free of charge.”

Where’s Tito?

So who and where exactly is ‘Tito Cordoba’ – the man whose name keeps popping up in the registration data for these websites? What specifically is his role in the internet sites, the publishing operation, the database venture?

On 16 July, *Fairplay* called the Panama offices of International Jobs Publishers and asked if Tito Cordoba was there.

The person answering the phone said: “He stepped out.”

A different person answered the phone on 19 July. At first this person

said that, yes, Tito was reachable at this number and that he was the “president of International Jobs Publishers”.

After speaking to a supervisor, however, the story changed: “Actually, Tito is not the president of International Jobs Publishers. That company is no longer

ITF delighted

TOWARDS the end of our investigation into job websites, *Fairplay* approached David Cockcroft, general secretary of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), for comment.

“*Fairplay* has done an excellent job,” said Cockcroft. “This is investigative reporting at its best. *Fairplay* has found out more in the last few weeks than several police forces have in the last five years.

“It makes you wonder though where the cruise industry, governments and police have been, and why it’s been left to a magazine and a trade union organisation to try and take down these criminals,” he added.

The people running these recruitment operations are “peddlers in misery, cold and calculating crooks who target the world’s poorest people, people who are doing their best to find an honest job”, Cockcroft declared.

“There are very few people who come out of this sordid mess with any credit,” he added. “Just *Fairplay*, the prospective job seekers who passed on their doubts and vital pieces of information to how these scams are run and those of us who have tried to sound warnings and galvanise the law into action.

“I hope that all those who have turned a blind eye or knowingly aided the perpetrators – whether they’re lawyers, the police and governments or the mailing services they used – will think about what they have been a part of,” he added.

There is no doubt, declared Cockcroft, that one of the keys to the success of these rackets has been their use of Canadian addresses and Swedish postal services. Many of those victims



Cockcroft: “There are very few people who come out of this sordid mess with any credit”

sent off their money believing that the operation had to be legitimate because “these kinds of rackets would not be tolerated in those countries,” he added.

Cockcroft would now like to see the police forces of Panama and of the countries where the many victims came from finally wake up and prosecute.

“Thanks to the information discovered by *Fairplay*, we will now be able to write to the Panama Maritime Authority and the Ministry of Justice, demanding they take the action they should have initiated years ago,” Cockcroft explained.

What the ILO says

INTERNATIONAL Labour Organization conventions are undoubtedly the best way to generate international conformity in seafarer employment laws, but the weakness is that so few countries ratify them.

There are two ILO conventions covering the recruitment of seamen, but just 40 countries, including Panama, ratified the first (Convention 9 – Placing of Seamen Convention 1920). Only nine have ratified the second (Convention 179 – Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers Convention, 1996).

Yet more than 180 countries belong to the organisation, most with seaboard and therefore with a direct interest in commercial shipping.

An ILO spokesman advised *Fairplay* that the 1920 convention was drafted when it was the norm for employment to be orchestrated through government organisations, but the 1996 convention takes greater account of the greater use of commercial agencies (see box).

Fairplay approached J Michael Crye, president of the International Council of Cruise Lines (ICCL) for his reaction to cruise job offers through websites.

Crye explained that rules laid out in international conventions, as well as the laws of each source country for mariners, are carefully drafted so they will protect the rights of both mariners and employers.

The cruise industry is concerned about the existence of cruise crew scamming sites, Crye said: “They serve to tarnish a very legitimate industry’s image.

“At least one of the ICCL member lines is actively recruiting in the US market, where much of the labour pool of hospitality staff has not experienced life at sea.

“These types of scams make the effort to find and employ qualified and enthusiastic employees that much harder,” he said. And he emphasised that the ICCL’s member lines that have been victimised by these sites have reported the incidents to authorities and co-operated fully with investigators.

It is certainly apparent that doubtful recruitment practices are prevalent and that the growth in internet recruitment schemes has added to the problems that potential applicants face.

Are governments really interested in greater uniformity of maritime recruitment laws, or does their general failure to ratify the ILO conventions, particularly Convention 179, indicate that they are just not concerned in protecting the interests of potential seafarers from fraudulent practices?

Fairplay believes that all governments should get off their collective bottoms and do the right thing by signing up to Convention 179. **F**

ILO’s regulations

Convention 9

Placing of Seamen Convention 1920

Article 2

1. The business of finding employment for seamen shall not be carried on by any person, company, or other agency, as a commercial enterprise for pecuniary gain; nor shall any fees be charged directly or indirectly by any person, company or other agency, for finding employment for seamen on any ship.
2. The law of each country shall provide punishment for any violation of the provisions of this Article.

Ratified by 40 countries, including Panama (six have since denounced and then ratified Convention 179)

Convention 179

Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers Convention, 1996

Article 2

2. Where private recruitment and placement services have been or are to be established, they shall be operated within the territory of a Member only in conformity with a system of licensing or certification or other form of regulation. This system shall be established, maintained, modified or changed only after consultation with representative organizations of shipowners and seafarers. Undue proliferation of such private recruitment and placement services shall not be encouraged.

Article 4

1. A Member shall, by means of national laws or applicable regulations:
 - (a) ensure that no fees or other charges for recruitment or for providing employment to seafarers are borne directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, by the seafarer; for this purpose, costs of the national statutory medical examination, certificates, a personal travel document and the national seafarer’s book shall not be deemed to be “fees or other charges for recruitment”.

Ratified by 9 countries

The innocent tell their stories

VICTIMS of fraud are often reluctant to reveal their identity, either out of a sense of shame or inadequacy – and sometimes because they are worried about possible reprisals.

But by its very nature, the internet appears to loosen people’s tongues and facilitates expressions of anger.

Fairplay has compiled comments from people saying they paid money to Caledonian Offshore but have not received a job. Both samples are from the bona fide website www.oilcareers.com. **F**

‘Some Captain Ron’

Can’t believe there so many bad people on face of Earth!!!

I was to send money to the Caledonian Offshore, to show how interested I am in a job on an oil platform, but then I saw on the net that this offshore company was a fraud. Later I saw offshore guides of some captain Ron, and he also ask me to order his professional writer service to write my resumé, for that he wants \$95, (another fraud?). I’m only trying to work.

Posted 4 March 2004

‘That was over a year ago’

I am the fuels accountant for a Defence Contractor. I was helping one of my employees with a little problem he was having with Caledonian Offshore Ltd. I read the letter he had received from the ‘company’, which stated he had been registered since he paid the \$189.00. That was over a year ago. Initially, I thought he had done something wrong in the difficult registration process. But, after my own research and seeing your stories ... it’s unfortunately a scam.

Posted 15 March 2004