



Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Maritime Jobs

As one of the nation's oldest labor unions, the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association has had a long history of union democracy. At its core, the union movement is a democratic movement. Workers, coming together, electing representatives and leaders to speak for them, is a fundamental part of what organized labor is all about. For many, their first real taste of elective democracy comes in their union hall not at the ballot box. And like any other democratic movement, labor has had its ups and downs. As we in the M.E.B.A. have learned, union democracy requires the active participation of everyone in the organization – members, applicants and officials – to succeed.

This issue of the *Marine Officer* highlights our union's efforts to foster democracy throughout its history. These efforts have been very successful. As one of the few remaining union officials who actively participated in the MAD (Members Advocating Democracy) Committee in the early '90s, I have seen what happens when the rule of law and oversight by the rank-and-file of a union breaks down. And I am proud to have been a part of a new wave of democracy that swept through the M.E.B.A., kept us afloat and rebuilt the union into what it is today.

Today, we are one of the most visible examples of union democracy, with a very active membership and multiple levels of oversight, such as the rank-and-file Financial Review Committee and the Labor Department's LMRDA requirements that promote transparency.

In a very visible working example of M.E.B.A.'s dedication to democracy, many of our members are discussing and debating the merits of the recently proposed Merchant Officers' Labor Agreement (MOLA) with the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots. This historic agreement, if approved by the membership, will solidify the

close working relationship we already have with the MM&P, and will demonstrate the unity and friendship between our two unions. As this agreement is not a merger, it did not require rank-and-file ratification by either organization, but we both recognize how important it is for us to have the full support of our memberships for agreements like this and have agreed to voluntarily submit the pact for ratification. There have been many misconceptions about the arrangement so I urge all of our members to check the "Hot Site" accessed from our homepage, get the agreement and read it carefully in its entirety. We received a significant amount of input from the membership at the January and February monthly meetings and in a comment period before the referendum was sent out.

All of the membership input was reviewed, and based on these comments, the MOLA agreement was revised to incorporate more membership participation in the administration of the alliance agreement.

Recently, I had the pleasure of joining our allies in the MM&P as well as many others in maritime labor at the Maritime Trades Department annual meeting in early March. One of the keynote speakers was the new Maritime Administrator, Sean Connaughton. In his short time on the job, Sean has already demonstrated that he knows how to get things done, and that he is committed to expanding the horizons for our industry. Sean has been a key partner with us as we work to return Americans to the LNG trades. Thanks to his efforts, MarAd was able to secure commitments from a number of LNG operators to use Americans onboard their LNG tankers. In his speech to the MTD, he also committed to applying this new model to our short-sea shipping program, which MarAd has rechristened "America's Marine Highway Initiative."

We at M.E.B.A. have long understood the value of being on the cutting edge of the maritime industry, and we are always open to prospects to enter new sectors of the industry that had previously been closed off to us. M.E.B.A. recently took another step forward when we signed a memorandum of understanding with Frontier Drilling. The MOU represents our entry into international oil exploration and could open the door for more ships and jobs in the oil and gas industry.

And while some of us in maritime labor are actively looking towards the future, others seem hopelessly mired in the past. I had the chance to meet briefly with the new president of the American Maritime Officers at the MTD meeting. The conversation was not very productive for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is my belief that the AMO cannot properly focus on issues outside of their own internal difficulties. Most of these problems stem from the non-democratic administration of their organization. In any event, I will not let AMO deter the M.E.B.A. from continuing to pursue an aggressive agenda of bringing new jobs and new opportunities to the union.

Union democracy is, like any other form of democracy, a symbiotic relationship between the representatives and the represented. It takes hard work on both sides of the equation, by union officials and by the rank-and-file, to keep our ship afloat and steaming on the right course. And thanks to the work done by our officials and by you, the membership, we have established an organization that has proven that it has the power to long endure.

FRATERNALLY,

Ron Davis
RON DAVIS