

## ***IMPROVING MARITIME LABOR CONDITIONS***

Maritime, by its very nature, is one of the most international of all U.S. industries. Since its inception, the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO has been active in international forums in order to achieve one of our primary goals, which is to improve working and living conditions for civilian mariners.

One of the most important of those institutions is the International Labor Organization (ILO), the agency within the United Nations (UN) dedicated to improving labor conditions. The ILO is highly respected. In 1969, for example, it received the Nobel Peace Prize for “improving peace among classes, pursuing justice for workers and providing technical assistance to developing nations.” One hundred and eighty-five of the UN’s 192 member nations participate in its deliberations.

Unfortunately, there are many in Congress who believe that the United States should refrain from participating in any UN activity. Earlier this year, for example, a determined minority in the Senate was able to derail approval of an ILO convention that seeks to establish minimum standards in regards to the disabled. The convention is modeled after the widely-heralded law that former President George H. W. Bush submitted and a Democratic Congress approved. But even though the convention would have brought world standards in line with those in the United States, it was rejected for one reason and one reason only: the ILO is a UN agency.

The incident received widespread attention because former Senator Robert Dole, a disabled World War II veteran, was on the floor of the Senate in order to celebrate what many thought would be a sure thing: approval of the treaty. But to the dismay of many, the treaty failed to get the needed votes. News shows were filled with images of the disappointed war hero sitting in his wheelchair on the floor of the Senate not quite believing what had happened.

More than most, maritime workers have reason to regret this state of affairs. For years, the MTD, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils have championed a proposed ILO Convention that many are calling a “bill of rights for seafarers.” Provisions in the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) include:

- An employment agreement guaranteeing decent shipboard working and living conditions that would be signed by both the mariner and the shipowner (or its representative);
- Wording that mandates monthly payment in full and in accordance with the employment agreement and any applicable collective bargaining agreement;
- A 14-hour work limit within any 24-hour period, as well as a 72-hour limit within any seven-day period;
- A requirement that shipowners must pay to repatriate mariners in cases of illness, injury, shipwreck, insolvency the sale of the vessel;
- Specific requirements outlining livable accommodations including appropriate recreational facilities aboard a vessel;
- Access to prompt medical care when on board or in port, and
- Measures for effective enforcement and compliance of this Convention, including a certification system for labor standards.

The Convention tackles what has been a chronic problem in the international maritime industry: conditions aboard many flag-of-convenience (FOC) vessels and those of other substandard registries. The MTD, its affiliates and Port Maritime Councils have been fighting these often unsafe and demeaning conditions for decades. It has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in seeking to make this a reality.

But this is one story that has a happy ending.

To come into force, the MLC had to be ratified by at least 30 member nations (which occurred last year) and by flag-states whose total share in the world gross tonnage of ships equaled 33 percent (which happened in 2009). The MLC went into effect on August 20, 2013.

As is the case with the international bill of rights for the disabled, the international bill of rights for seafarers will not impose any noncompetitive obligations on American transportation services. U.S.-flag shipping companies already contribute their fair share of the tax load and meet stringent health, safety, labor and environmental standards.

However, still outstanding is ratification of the Seafarers' Identity Document Convention (Revised) (No. 185) which calls upon nations to use state-of-

the-art technology to verify the identity of mariners documented by their countries. Such documents would be audited every five years, and would eliminate the need for visas when taking shore leave.

While Canada has signed on, the United States still has not.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Maritime Trades Department will continue to work with its allies in the international maritime community and in international forums to improve conditions for civilian mariners; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MTD, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils continue to urge Congress to ratify both the Maritime Labor Convention and the Seafarers' Identity Document Convention (Revised) (No. 185).