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Unity - Justice - Democracy

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Dear President Hughes,

The Longshore Workers' Coalition has heard that you have called the ILA Executive Board Officers and top officers of the SAGDC and ACD to a meeting between the ILA and the United States Maritime Alliance to discuss the establishment of early negotiations for the Deep-Sea Master Contract on Wednesday October 8 at the Seaview Golf Resort outside Atlantic City.

As co-chairs of the LWC, we are gravely concerned about this meeting. In our opinion it is unwise to convene with the employers regarding deep-sea negotiations without having first solicited from the members, locals and port-wide ILA bodies a full list of issues that must be addressed as well as a contract campaign strategy.

Early negotiations without consulting the membership on issues and bargaining strategy will not result in the strongest possible contract that our union deserves. Are early negotiations even wise in this current economic climate?

On October 3, 2008 you told the Journal of Commerce, "The first step in the contract process will be to ask ILA locals to compile demands and elect delegates to the union's wage-scale committee, which will develop proposals for a new contract." What happened to that first step?

In February we sent you an open letter to give you the opportunity to discuss with the membership the resolutions passed by the ILA Convention and the action we need to take to enforce those resolutions.

We asked in that letter to share "...the ILA plans to educate and mobilize our membership for upcoming master contract negotiations. No early settlement or extension should be signed without the ratification of the ILA membership and without fully securing an end to the tiers, improved safety and improved organizing language. This contract should contain no concessions." We have yet to receive a response.

The lack of response to our letter, and the closed door meeting with the USMX are worrisome developments. Our 2004 contract negotiations were greatly weakened by a lack of oversight and involvement from the ILA membership and we do not want to see this flawed process repeated.

We await the details of this meeting with the USMX and we expect the ILA leadership to involve the membership in the development of a bargaining plan for our deep-sea contract negotiations.

In solidarity,

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