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Report to MCCC Chapter Leaders
From Phil Mahler, Tom Parsons, MCCC Representatives on the
MTA Board of Directors

MTA Board October 22-23, 2004

The MTA Board of Directors met on Friday evening October 22, and Saturday October 23, in Natick.

FRIDAY EVENING

Friday evening the Board was joined by local presidents and guests for a special session on the strategic direction of the MTA. Maureen Bourbeau of STCC joined the event.

Dr. Elaine Bernard, Executive Director, Labor and Worklife Program, Harvard Law School, gave an excellent presentation on the state of unions in this country (sad for the last 30 years and getting sadder every day), and on organizing our members (i.e. getting them involved in the union).

Some thoughts that came from the discussion at my table, and from Elaine's presentation, around making the MTA (and the MCCC!) a stronger union.

- The founding persons are gone. The MCCC was founded by activists in the mid-70s. These folks had an emotional attachment to the MCCC, and the MTA. These folks are also retiring now, and most are no longer on the full-time rolls.
- Relevance – newer members, especially, need to see the relevance of unions to their lives.
- Our society is a very anti-union one.
- Protect the Legacy: We've worked hard to get good wages for teachers, pensions, good health care. This is all in danger.
- Our members often say with all their work they have no time. Our K-12 counterparts say the same thing. They are feeling MCAS pressures and all the pressures that our society has heaped upon them in the last decade.
- A thought I had: Just wait. When junior members get old enough to worry about job security and pensions, they'll appreciate the union. Of course that will take 20 years...

Elaine made some good points.

- The MTA is structured to service members. So members think that's what it is – a service.
- They want more services with no dues increases.
- Demands for the union to do more translate into more demands on officers and staff. But there is little or no available time to these folks. They are out straight now.
- Developing a strategy is about making choices. One needs to look at sacred cows.
- Unions are victims of their own success. We have made teaching a good place to work, so now, a time when folks are losing jobs, pensions, health care... unions and the good jobs they try to protect, are under attack.
- Strategy may impact structure. Leadership doesn't like that.



Increasing union capacity:

- Member centered, because the staff and officers can't do more.
 - Inclusive strategic planning. Include governance, management, staff
 - Priority must be on developing leaders at all levels
 - FT staff cannot be perceived as "the union".
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- Elaine invited us to think about "why did you get active"? Probably not at a meeting (if so, get a life, she said!). Probably over some crisis, you "did union". We need "union moments" to organize. People get involved because of some important event in which they participate.
 - How we do things is more important than what we do.
 - Personalize – the personal touch; people need to be asked to participate. Even crises won't get people moving.
 - Union leaders can show their members how to collectively effect change – even on non-contract items.
 - Make union meetings interesting – guests, location, food...
 - "Each one bring one"; union activists shouldn't do it alone, but bring along others to grow for the organization.
 - Members won't react to alarmism forever. Yes our jobs are under major attack more than ever, but that alone won't move people for long. They will do it for the organization, if they like the organization.

After the Strategic Direction meeting, the board met from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Ann Clark discussed the Hancock case. This is a case before the Massachusetts SJC which charges that the state has not met its constitutional requirements to educate its citizens.

It was reported that Fall River has the state's first "critically underperforming" school. Under the law, the teachers there can be fired with 5 days notice, without showing just cause. The school system in a major south shore town is falling apart; classes up from 16 or so to 30, students sitting on radiators. 0% raises.

The Education Management Audit Council (EMAC) is associated with the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) (check out <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/eqa/>). EMAC wants to link teacher jobs to student performance. But in Brockton those students speak 42 languages and a very high percentage have been in the U.S. less than three years. Imagine comparing them to the teachers in a homogeneous suburban town. (And some of our local candidates for state representative and senator resent that we might send more money to an urban school district. Go figure.)

SATURDAY

In Executive Session the Board heard the auditor's report for FY 2004. Revenues are down largely because membership is down, but overall, despite a very tight financial situation, the MTA is being well-managed.

Former MTA President, and now retired Board member, Steve Gorrie asked us to consider joining Health Care For All (<http://www.hcfama.org/>). Steve is a director of this MTA-endorsed organization dedicated to achieving what it says – health care for every citizen of the commonwealth.

In a legislative update director of MTA Governmental Services Joanne Blum reported that the legislature is considering coming back into session to override the governor's mean-spirited veto of our contract funding bill, among others.

The Springfield school system, like the rest of the city, is in crisis. MTA President Kathy Boudreau, Vice President Anne Waas, and Executive Director Ed Sullivan, have been making numerous visits to that system, and in fact have visited every one of the more than 40 schools there. The city is being run by a legislatively created council dominated by the governor, who recommends pay and benefit cuts for all city workers, including our colleagues in the K-12 schools – this at the same time he wants a tax cut. Make no mistake about it, Romney wants to downsize your job – and he's succeeding. Tim Collins, long time president of the Springfield local, thanked the Board and others who attended a rally in Springfield a few weeks ago on their behalf.

Ed Sullivan reported that MTA phone banks are generally working well, though some help is needed on the Cape and Southeast, in particular.

The NEA has been actively working for Kerry in the swing states. President Reg Weaver has taken his message to our colleagues and others in those states, about how important to our children it is to elect a president that truly supports children, as well as educators!

The Board approved a motion to make recommendations about a statewide rally this fiscal year.

The Board approved a motion to sunset the communications committee, as being redundant and no longer necessary.

The Board approved a resolution that providing MTA support and assistance to the Springfield Education Association during the current crisis be a top priority.

Written by Phil Mahler