

Unlike land-based programs that attempted to offer more expensive long-term pension plans, the association avoided such policies, favouring instead a schedule of one-time payments in case of shipwreck, accident, or disabling injury.¹⁹ The program improved on its land-based counterparts such as Henry Ford's "Five Dollar Day" by spreading the costs across a cohesive membership of vessel owners, with the association administering the program instead of individual fleets, thus helping to build unity.

Strikes, Fragmentation, and Solidarity

Great Lakes shipping, as in other industrial sectors, faced a growing tide of worker unrest at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the conflict between the seamen's union and the longshoremen, efforts to organize vessel fleets intensified. Between 1901 and 1908 three major strikes by unions took place against the Lake Carriers' Association and its member fleets. Yet, these strikes deepened divisions between unions, between categories of sailors, and weaken the unionization effort as a whole. Pressed to find new answers, the owners adopted new measures and stronger leadership to resist labour's efforts. Coupled with a sharp economic downturn, the actions of unions and owners set the stage for the 1909 strike and its outcome.

The first of these strikes began in January 1901 coinciding with the announcement by owners of the initial Beneficial Plan. The engineers of the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association demanded greater staffing for steamers and greater definition of skill levels on ships.²⁰ The owners refused to negotiate, stating that to do so would give the engineers *de facto* recognition. That they would not do. Independent from both the sailors or the longshoremen, the engineers received nor requested assistance from neither union.²¹ Targeting the vulnerable passenger and package freight companies that could not afford a strike, the Lake Carriers' relented by mid-May and permitted individual companies to negotiate.²² Though ostensibly a victory for labour, it presented no official recognition by owners, nor did it foster inter-union cooperation. The owners withdrew the Beneficial Plan and debated how to create greater unity.

The second strike against the Lake Carriers' Association came from

19 Marr, 160. For discussions of land-based plans see Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 245; Brandes, 105-106.

20 "He Will Get Better Wages," *CPD*, 23 January 1901; "Engineers Are Ordered Out," *CPD*, 24 January 1901.

21 "Engineers Stand Pat," *DNT*, 1 March 1901; "Left for Erie," *CPD*, 7 March 1901; "They Will Keep Their Hands Off," *CPD*, 10 March 1901; "Longshoremen Cannot Strike" *MC*, 11 March 1901.

22 "Stopped Work on the Vessels," *CPD*, 1 March 1901; "Striking Engineers are Firm," *CPD*, 2 March 1901; "Engineers' Strike Notes," *Muskegon Chronicle (MC)*, 9 March 1901; "Talk With Owners," *DNT*, 25 April 1901; "Men Will Start to Work," *CPD*, 27 April 1901; "Engineers Go To Work," *DNT*, 14 May 1901; "To Unionize Lake Labor," *The Marine Record* 24:20 (14 November 1901), 15.