

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

P.O. BOX 9454, TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA 47808



FALL 2009

## The 2009 Debs Award Banquet

The 2009 Debs Award recipient will be Ron Gettelfinger. Giving the keynote/presentation speech will be Michael Sullivan, President of the Sheet Metal Workers and President of the Debs Foundation. Ron Gettelfinger has been very much in the national spotlight in recent months as President of the union most adversely impacted by the worldwide economic downturn, especially threatening the health and economic welfare of the UAW and its retirees, as well as the U.S.-based auto industry. The threat has been heightened by the political posturing of a hard core of mainly Southern congressmen who would delight in the total demise of the Detroit-based Big Three auto companies. These politicians assume that the total shutdown of Big-Three factories would mean more foreign-owned factories in their home state. They assume also, of course, that these factories would remain non-union forever. Gettelfinger has been reasonably successful, although fighting against overwhelming odds, to protect the wages and benefits of UAW members, active and retired. Gettelfinger was first elected President of the UAW at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Convention in 2002. He



Ron Gettelfinger

was elected to a second term as president at the UAW's 34<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention.

Before being elected to the union's top leadership post in 2002, he had served as elected director of UAW Region 3, which represents UAW members in Indiana and Kentucky, and in 1998, he was elected a UAW Vice President. A member of UAW Local 862 since 1964, Gettelfinger is proud to be called a chassis line repairman. The workers at Ford's Louisville Assembly plant elected him to represent them as committeeperson, then bargaining chair and then president.

Ron's has been a progressive, activist voice on a number of social issues. He is an outspoken advocate for national single-payer health

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## Remembering John Laska

John Laska passed away recently at age 90. He had been in failing health for a number of years and may have had to miss one annual award banquet for health reasons. Otherwise, there was no more regular and enthusiastic attendee at these annual events.

John was born in New York to Polish immigrants. He served in the U.S. army in Europe during World War II, serving in an aerial reconnaissance unit. Training in art institutes in New York prepared him for a professional career not only as an art teacher, but also a creator of works of art. The Debs Foundation benefited from his designing of plaques for the Eugene V. Debs Award and the Theodore Debs Distinguished Service Award and, most importantly, from his painting of the third floor murals which chronicle the life of Debs. Few visitors to the Debs Home leave without commenting on how impressive these murals are, and many people even call the murals the biggest highlight of their museum tour.

Laska had a special way with students, guiding them to develop their own expressive abilities through art. Of this I can attest from personal observation when

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FALL BUSINESS MEETING • Sunday, October 4, 2009 at the Debs Home

## Member Response

The response has been encouraging after the membership read the discussion of the foundation's financial situation in the minutes of the spring business meeting. There was no avalanche of large contributions. After all, there was no call for immediate action to avoid bankruptcy. What did happen is that several who had not yet paid 2009 dues did so, indicating payment at a higher level. One person took out a \$250 life membership, and one life member made a contribution of \$500. All these helpful responses are greatly appreciated. They remind us all of the importance of what this historical society is doing to preserve and perpetuate the legacy of the life of an outstanding early labor and political party leader.

## Call Your Senator

Indiana residents have been bombarded with radio and T.V. commercials requesting that you call Senator Bayh and tell him we don't want Obama to destroy "the best health care system in the world." He and the congressional democrats want to force on us a "Canadian" or "European," socialistic system of health care.

I sent Senator Bayh an email, but I wrote that we cannot afford not to fundamentally reform health care. Furthermore, it is a lie to call these other systems "failed." Personally, I know persons in Germany and in Canada, and these people are happy with their health care. They are amazed that any modern industrial nation doesn't have a comparable system, where availability is based on need, not on ability to pay. I also wrote that health care legislation that does not include minimally a public option is not worthy of being called reform. Rather, call it a victory for the special interests profiting from the present health care system.

We can't suppress the false information being spread about the health care reform proposed by Obama, but I am concerned by the lack of an active fact-check by a critical, responsible press.

Please remember also that Congress responds to pressure. We progressives need to out-do the pressure being placed on our elected representatives by well-financed activists who say no to change. So, write or call your members in Congress and let them know that we progressives say "YES" to Health Care Reform, to regulation of financial institutions, and to dealing with climate change. C.K.

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## 2009 Banquet ...Continued

care that would make health care accessible and affordable for every man, woman, and child in the United States. It also would, of course, remove from the Big-3 of the auto industry the heavy "legacy" costs of retir-

## DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

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Foundation Officers:

Michael Sullivan, *President*

Noel Beasley, *Executive Vice President*

Charles King, *Secretary*

Mick Love, *Treasurer*

The *Debs Foundation Newsletter* is published twice yearly for distribution to members and friends of the Foundation. The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a non-profit, private organization which maintains the home of Eugene and Kate Debs as a museum and shrine to labor, and carries on educational and informational programs which aim to honor and promote the goals for which Debs struggled: industrial unionism, social justice, and peace. For those wishing to become members, an application form is provided elsewhere in this issue.

ees' health care so the Big-3 could more successfully compete with the foreign-owned auto factories.

In January 2006, he called for a "Marshall Plan" to renew America's industrial base through incentives to manufacture energy-saving advanced technology vehicles and their key components in the United States. Under Gettelfinger's leadership, the UAW has continued its fight for fair trade agreements that include provisions for workers' rights and environmental provisions; and the union has loudly criticized the corporate global chase for the lowest wage which creates a race to the bottom that no workers, in any country, can win. Ron is a graduate of Indiana University. He and his wife, Judy, are the proud parents of two adult children and also have four grandchildren.

We know that you will want to join us this October in honoring this highly worthy recipient of the Eugene V. Debs Award.

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## Laska Remembered ...Continued

our son, Timothy, was his student in a middle school art class. I confess that I was no good at art, hated it, when I was that age. Tim never pursued art further, but his experience in John's class was a constructive developmental impact and confidence builder. Many of John's students did go on to become art teachers and professional artists.

The Laska family had suggested that memorial contributions could be made to the Debs Foundation. To date, four contributions totaling \$220 have been received. John's passing means that the number of surviving charter members of the Debs Foundation can be counted on one hand. He will be greatly missed by many.



### A Stamp for Debs

Your support is essential to have first class postage stamps issued for Eugene V. Debs and Mother Jones. These two were among the most influential early advocates of improved working conditions and agitating and educating for social justice for all.

The postal service is persuaded to issue a stamp not by eloquent appeal but by the number of supporting letters received, so it is a simple matter. Just state briefly whom you want to be honored by a first class stamp and why you consider that person worthy. Be sure to give your name, address, and date. Address to: Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee, Stamp Dept., U.S. Postal Service, 1735 North Lynn St., Rm 5013, Arlington, VA 22209-6432.

### Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, The Great War, and the Right to Dissent

by Ernest Freeberg

Not for decades has a new book on Eugene Debs focused with such clarity on the contribution Debs made to American

society, especially in the area of our First Amendment rights. It is Ernest Freeberg's thesis that Debs' remarkable charisma, his impassioned speeches, and his insightful critique of American society forced the nation to rethink the limits of dissent.

In 1918 Debs was convicted under the recently minted Espionage Act for questioning the U.S. entry into World War I. Before this, free speech protections were more a matter of custom than of high legal principle, thus easily dispensed with during wartime. Freeberg shows that in the end it was Debs' popularity, not a knockdown legal argument, that compelled politicians, the mainstream media, and eventually federal judges to reconsider the government's power to jail dissidents. Freeberg's analysis of all this is exciting and revealing. Published by Harvard University Press, the book can be purchased from your local bookseller or from Harvard University Press, c/o Trilateral LLC Customer Service, 100 Maple Ridge Rd, Cumberland, RI 02864.

This form is provided for new members or for late payment of 2009 dues. The 2010 Dues Notice will be included in the December Membership mailing.

NOTE: Please check here if this is a:

RENEWAL

NEW MEMBERSHIP

ADDRESS CHANGE

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_



**Membership Dues: The Eugene V. Debs Foundation**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 5.00 Student Member      \_\_\_\_\_ \$100.00 Sustaining Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 Regular Member      \_\_\_\_\_ \$250.00 Life Members

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25.00 Supporting Member      \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Enclose remittance. Make checks payable to the Debs Foundation.  
The Debs Foundation • P.O. Box 9454 • Terre Haute, IN 47808-0843

We are a not-for-profit organization, so your dues and contributions are tax deductible. The Foundation owns and maintains the Debs Home and offers several educational and cultural programs.

