

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

P.O. BOX 843, TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA 47808



Fall, 1989

Morton Bahr to Receive Debs Award



Morton Bahr

Morton Bahr, President of the Communications Workers of America, is the 1989 recipient of the Eugene V. Debs Award. The annual award banquet will be Saturday evening, November 4, in ISU's Hulman Center. At 4:00 p.m., a plaque will be dedicated in the Debs Home Memorial Gardens in honor of Joseph Beirne, who helped found the CWA in 1938, and served as its president until his death in 1974.

Morton Bahr was elected president of CWA in 1985, after having served as a regional executive for several years and having distinguished himself as an organizer. During this period he served as CWA's New York Director, and for District 1 he served as Assistant to the Vice President and beginning in 1969, as Vice President. This tenure was marked by the

historic 218-day strike against New York Telephone, in 1971, which paved the way for the establishment in 1974 of national bargaining with the Bell system, a long-sought goal of CWA.

The CWA has long been considered a progressive force in the labor movement, and Morton Bahr's leadership has helped sustain that reality. His leadership was crucial in the difficult negotiations following the breakup of Ma Bell, which resulted in having to coordinate negotiations with eight employers simultaneously. Among the significant contract gains in 1986 was the creation of the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development, a non-profit corporation jointly operated by the union and AT&T, which provides workers with job training inside AT&T and new careers outside of the company.

Bahr has carried his progressive stance beyond CWA ranks. He serves as a Vice President and member of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council and of its Industrial Union Department. He co-chairs the national "Jobs With Justice" campaign, a movement to regain basic workers' rights. He also is noted for bringing family issues to the top of the union's bargaining agenda, and he currently is active in Housing Now, a coalition of groups planning a march for affordable housing that will take place October 7 in Washington, D.C.

The Debs Foundation is pleased to add Morton Bahr to the list of outstanding Americans who have been honored with the Eugene V. Debs Award, and we trust that you will join us in this celebration. The presentation speaker will be Jack Sheinkman, Foundation President and President of ACTWU.

Oscar Edelman's Enduring Commitment

The Debs Foundation never had a truer friend or stauncher supporter. He was committed to helping preserve the Debs legacy, and demonstrated this commitment in numerous tangible ways. Until health prevented his traveling from Dayton to Terre Haute, he attended every award banquet and never missed a business meeting. He donated his extensive library of labor and radical books, and gave money to have the home's basement turned into an apartment for a live-in curator.

Oscar was living in a Dayton nursing home when he passed away, in November, 1987. His will made the Debs Foundation one of the main beneficiaries of his estate. Final settlement of the estate took a long time, but eventually came August 15, just when we needed to pay one-half down on the roof project. The amount was \$112,495. Of this amount, \$80,000 was sent immediately to the endowment fund, and we would love to be able to send \$20,000 more after all expenses of the roof project and the award banquet are paid.

No question about it, Oscar placed high priority on the Foundation's goals of preserving the Debs Home and building a solid endowment. We are deeply moved by this final evidence of commitment on the part of the Foundation's late dear friend, Oscar K. Edelman.

see BANQUET DAY SCHEDULE
and TICKET INFORMATION
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Slate Shingles: The High Cost of Historic Preservation

The diagnosis was not good, coming from the workmen who had gone on the roof for emergency repairs. We knew that several chunks of shingle had fallen off over the years, and high winds last March tore off a section of the ridge cap. The report was that the missing shingles, visible to the eye from ground level, were not as serious a problem as the extensive deterioration of the metal on the roof's many ridge caps and valleys. To delay a replacement roof for another winter would be to endanger the structural integrity of the building.

There is no room for complaint about the durability and quality of the roof Debs had installed 100 years ago. There may have been minor repairs over the years, but none since the Foundation bought the property in 1962. As a matter of fact, experts said, to attempt to replace the metal work without removing all the slate shingles would be folly, as old and brittle as the shingles were. We learned that slate shingles cost three times as much as good asphalt, but lasts at least three times as long. Besides the practical aspect, the Foundation's commitment to the historic preservation of this National Historic Landmark requires a concern for authenticity in maintenance and repair work. So by the time you read this, a completely new slate shingle roof will have been installed, including lead-coated copper for the ridge caps and valleys, at a total cost of \$25,000.

Laughrey Brothers, a Terre Haute company and the firm which vinyl-sided the house 25 years ago—which project was a compromise with authenticity for the sake of preservation—made us a good price and consulted with outside experts on the right slate to compare with the original. The new roof is heavy-duty Vermont slate, totaling 25 squares of shingles, weighing 750 to 800 pounds per square, so the new roof, as did the old one, weighs close to 19,000 pounds. Asphalt would have weighed approximately 5,000 pounds, Bill Hopton of Laughrey Brothers tells us. Each shingle is pre-drilled to be held on by two copper nails.

What a fitting preparation for the Home's 100th birthday to be able to put a new covering on top. A lot of men could use a similar treatment at half that age!



Stages in Roofing Work

On left, a section of 100-year-old slate; middle, a section of bare roof; and right, two roofers placing the sheathing for a sealer under the new shingles.

DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Fall

1989

Published By
The Eugene V. Debs Foundation
Box 843
Terre Haute, IN 47808

Foundation Officers:

Jack Sheinkman, *President*

Noel Beasley, *Executive Vice President*

Charles King, *Secretary*

Woodrow Creason, *Treasurer*

The *Debs Foundation Newsletter* will be 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.

Bryant Spann Memorial Prize Winners

This is the tenth anniversary of the Bryant Spann Memorial Prize for the best article or essay on a theme of Social Justice and of Social Criticism in the Debsian tradition. These are the winners of the 1989 Prize:

Robert Sherrill, "White-Collar Thuggery" (*The Nation*, November 28, 1988), a review-essay which discloses a wide-ranging and menacing pattern of abuse and criminal behavior by American business corporations.

Major Carlos Wilson, "America's Secret African War" (*On the Issues*, 1989), a review-essay which discloses a wide-United States in Morocco's savage war against the people of the Western Sahara.

Zip Counts, or Talking Numbers

Numbers can mean a lot, be they in a bank statement, budget report, or a membership list. The last Debs Foundation mailing went out to 664 persons. A "zip code count" indicates where they live, and assists in proper bundling of bulk mail (arranged by zip numbers, each bundle must have at least 10 pieces). Where do our members live? Fourteen states had at least ten members, including MA with 12, NJ-16, NY-62, PA-20, DC-24, MD-20, VA-12, OH-30, IN-217, MI-25, WI-31, IL-58, MO-19, and CA had 38. It is a heavier membership concentration when the first three

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New Brochure

Accompanying this newsletter is a copy of the Foundation's new flyer aimed at promoting visitation for the Home. Just off the press, and produced with financial support from a matching grant by the Indiana Tourism Development Division, we already are receiving requests from visitor and tourist information centers. If you personally have a practical outlet for a few, you may request copies by mail or phone.

The Debs Home: 100 Years of History

J. Robert Constantine

On April 1, 1890, Gene Debs wrote to his friend, James Whitcomb Riley, to invite Riley to come to Terre Haute for a visit. "The visit will do you good and we will enjoy ourselves together," Debs wrote and then he added, "We have lately moved into our new home." There was plenty of room for a visitor in the new home, which had three bedrooms and was located in one of Terre Haute's finest neighborhoods. Gene and Kate Debs' neighbors included Herman Hulman, at whose wholesale grocery firm Debs had worked as a young man, and Carl Stahl, whose textile factory was one of the city's largest employers.

From 1890 until his death in 1926 Debs was often absent from Terre Haute during his long lecture tours, his presidential campaigns, his involvement in strike actions, his imprisonment years, and the half-dozen years he spent in Girard, Kansas, on the editorial board of the *Appeal to Reason*, but in countless letters he expressed his longing to return "home," to 451 North 8th Street in Terre Haute. The "new home" of 1890, now a state and national historical landmark, has remarkably survived a century of controversy and close encounters with destruction. During Debs' lifetime the house was the subject of periodic controversy, in which one critic charged that it had been built by scab labor, another claimed that it was maintained by scab labor, and a third—a Catholic priest from Morgantown, West Virginia—wrote that it was a "mansion" in Terre Haute built with the fortune Debs amassed by "bleeding" money from poverty-stricken coal miners and other workers. An often-repeated charge was that Katherine Debs refused to permit working men (or their families) to enter the home. On one occasion the imported tile used in building the fireplace in the dining room of the house (it's still there) was cited as evidence of her upper-class taste and proof of the shallowness of Debs' working-class roots. When Debs died in 1926, his brother, Theodore, claimed (and continued to claim until his death in 1945) that Gene Debs' last will provided for the gift of the home to the Socialist Party of America (after Katherine Debs' death) and that an earlier will without that provision was the probated will. The dispute over the will was only the final step in the complete estrangement of Debs' brother and his wife. Whatever the case, the "new home" of 1890 was home for Debs until his death and for Kate Debs until her death in 1936.

The executors of Mrs. Debs' estate sold the house to Professor John R. Shannon, who was a member of the faculty at Indiana State Teachers College (now Indiana State University) and an admirer of Debs. His son, David Shannon, was a student in a Terre Haute high school at the time. As one of the nation's most respected historians, David Shannon later wrote the definitive *History of the Socialist Party in America* and other works dealing with Debs and Socialism. During the ten-year period in which Professor Shannon owned the house, he regularly opened its doors to students and others who were interested in Debs or as often as not, learned something of Debs for the first time on their tours of the home.

When Professor Shannon left Indiana State Teachers College in 1946 he sold the home to one of the school's fraternities and there began a period in which a neglect of maintenance combined with the normal degradation of fraternity life to put the house in serious jeopardy. The condition was aggravated after a decade when the house was sold to a "developer" who proceeded to carve it into four apartments and to "decorate" their interiors by, among other desecrations, lowering the ceilings, painting the cherry and oak woodwork in attractive shades of yellow, green, and pink, and covering the hardwood floors with non-descript tiles. (Tens of thousands of dollars were required to undo this interior decoration.)

Thus, in 1962 when the Debs Foundation was organized the "new home" of 1890 seemed destined to go the way all the other houses in the once-fine neighborhood had gone: the wrecking-ball would convert it into a parking lot. That it did not fulfill that destiny is a tribute to the Foundation and, of course, a matter of justifiable pride to the scores of men and women who have shared in the Foundation's work.



Debs
Home
1908

In the early years of the Debs Foundation the Debs home attracted the attention of both Indiana State University (which was rapidly expanding its campus) and the city government of Terre Haute. It was suggested (discreetly) that the University would physically move the home from its location to a site adjacent to the city's railroad station (which the wrecking ball has since demolished) as a way of memorializing Debs' long career in railroad affairs (and, incidentally, clearing the way for a vast parking lot on North 8th Street). A short time later it was proposed that the Debs home be moved to an area near the restored Dresser home in Terre Haute. Both these offers were, of course, declined and the Foundation moved forward with the work of restoring the home and, as a prudent measure, secured the passage of a law by the Indiana State Legislature which exempts the Debs home from the exercise of the power of eminent domain.

As this is written, the original tile roof of the Debs home is being replaced by a new tile roof (may it last 100 years!). It is an expensive project but it is a necessary one and, somehow, it seems to be a very fitting and proper way to celebrate 100 years of a house which watched thousands of people await Debs' return from Woodstock jail, from Atlanta prison, from presidential campaigns, and finally, from Lindlahr Sanatorium, where he died on October 20, 1926.

Joseph Beirne Honored with Bronze

A 4:00 p.m. dedication and unveiling ceremony will be conducted November 4 in the Memorial Gardens of the Debs Home for a plaque commemorating Joseph Beirne. The Beirne plaque will join those already placed honoring five other outstanding labor leaders: Samuel Gompers, Walter Reuther, Michael Quill, William Silvis and Jerry Wurf. The project for the memorial wall was begun in 1973, planning for at least 16 outstanding labor leaders to be memorialized there. Discussions are in progress which hopefully will lead to other plaques being added in the near future.

Those attending the evening banquet should plan to come early enough for the unveiling ceremony, before or after which they may tour the Home before proceeding the two blocks to the banquet site.



JOSEPH A. BEIRNE

1911 - 1974

PRESIDENT

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

1938 - 1974

JOSEPH BEIRNE HELPED FOUND THE CWA IN 1938, AND SERVED AS PRESIDENT UNTIL 1974, HELPING DEVELOP CWA INTO THE LARGEST COMMUNICATIONS UNION IN THE NATION.

IN 1949, WHEN THE CWA JOINED THE CIO, HE WAS APPOINTED TO THE CIO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE, AND WAS MADE CHAIRMAN IN 1952. HE BECAME CHAIRMAN OF THE AFL-CIO'S COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE IN 1955, AND OF ITS INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE IN 1969. HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE AFL-CIO'S EXECUTIVE COUNCIL. HE HELD PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENTS IN EVERY ADMINISTRATION SINCE THAT OF F.D. ROOSEVELT.

HIS CAREER WAS FILLED WITH NUMEROUS AWARDS FOR HIS COMMUNITY MINDED ACTIVITIES, AND IN 1975, HE WAS POSTHUMOUSLY ACCORDED THE AFL-CIO'S HIGHEST HONOR, THE PHILIP MURRAY-WILLIAM GREEN AWARD.

JOSEPH BEIRNE WAS ONE OF LABOR'S AND THE COUNTRY'S FOREMOST LEADERS IN WORKING FOR A BETTER AMERICA FOR ALL.

PRESENTED BY
COMMUNICATION WORKERS OF AMERICA
DISTRICT 4 - 1989

The Endowment Fund, How Big is Viable?

The Debs Foundation's Endowment Fund was in its inception visionary in scale and purpose. Such a fund provides a secure, dependable source of income for designated purposes. It was planned that the earnings from the fund—the principal cannot be spent, only income from the principal—would be used for the Foundation's special programs including care and maintenance of the Home. In recent years, the long-term goal has been for the earnings from the fund to be sufficient to underwrite the salary of a full-time Museum Director-Curator. With the addition of \$80,000 from the Edelman estate, the fund is now just over \$200,000. That's a lot of money, you may think, but is it really that much when you study its income-producing capability?

A crucial factor regarding the long-term viability of a fund is that its real dollar value must be maintained, that is, the principal must be allowed to grow with the rate of inflation. The original goal for the Debs Foundation's Endowment Fund was \$250,000. That was in 1963; the current equivalent value would be at least three times that figure. Stated in consumer language, given inflation and the erosion of buying power of the dollar, it takes three dollars today to go as far as one did in 1963. To safeguard against this erosion of the value of a fund, a rule of thumb is that at least one-half of annual earnings should be ploughed back or added to the base. Thus, a \$200,000 fund could be tapped annually for no more than \$7,000 to \$8,000 and remain viable.

So we are delighted and heartened by the \$80,000 addition to the Endowment Fund made possible by the gift from the late Oscar Edelman. But the fund still is not even one-half the amount it ought to be. Something for us to work on!

Fundamental Rights

This year the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is 40 years old, that states: "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment."

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digits of the zip code are the same for at least 10 members. Three-digit bundles went out to zip 021(Boston area) with 10, 100(New York)-32, 200(Washington, D.C.)-24, 460(Anderson, IN)-13, 462(Indianapolis)-42, 478(Terre Haute area)-20, 479(Lafayette, IN)-22, 532(Milwaukee)-11, and 606(Chicago)-25 members.

Only to Debs' home town did any five-digit bundles go, but there four of them: 47802-with 19, 47803-20, 47804-11, and 47807-25 members. Fourteen states in the midwest, northeast and California account for 584, or 88 percent of the total membership, but thirty-one other states have at least one but fewer than 10 members. Two Canadian provinces are represented, as is Australia. The state of Indiana accounts for 33 percent of the total and Terre Haute and its area accounts for 14 percent of all members. Thus, the Foundation's membership is regionally concentrated, but it truly is national and international in scope. Now you know it.

**EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION
ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET
November 4 TERRE HAUTE 1989**

**HONORING
MORTON BAHR**

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Dedication of Joseph Beirne Plaque
4:00 p.m., Debs Home Memorial Gardens

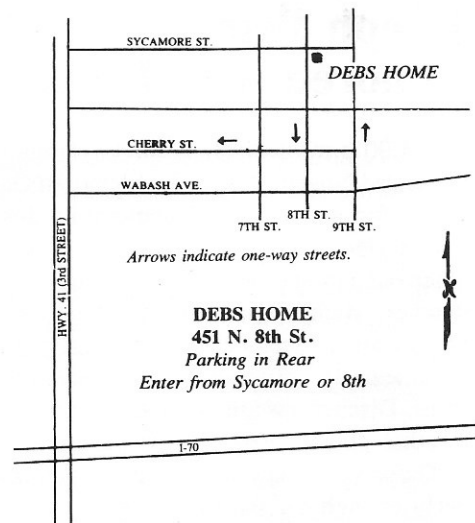
Awards Banquet in Hulman Center (enter west doors)

6:00 p.m., Social Hour and Reception (cash bar open)

7:00 p.m., Award Banquet honoring Morton Bahr
Presentation Speaker: Jack Sheinkman

On Saturday the Debs Home will be open from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

The fall business meeting will be Sunday, November 5,
at 9:00 a.m. at the Debs Home



NOTE

We are planning this year to provide a choice of entrees in order to accommodate those guests who do not eat red meat. If you prefer **Prime Rib**, you **need not indicate** a choice when you order tickets. If you **prefer fish**, **indicate this** (write it in) when you order your ticket, and **indicate it again at the door** the evening of the banquet.

Dinner Ticket Order
(\$20 per ticket)

Name _____

_____ x \$20 = \$_____

number of
tickets

amount
enclosed

Tickets must be paid in advance.
Please check one of the following options.

☐ Mail my tickets to the following address:

☐ Hold my tickets at the door, in the name of _____

Make checks payable to the Debs Foundation.
Mail to the Debs Foundation, Box 843, Terre Haute, IN 47808.
Inquiries may be directed to Charles King, 812-237-3443.

In Remembrance

Michael Harrington
Irving Stone
H.L. Mitchell
Clarence H. Sharp

Several persons who have been associated with Eugene Debs or the Debs Foundation in one way or another and who have been stalwarts in progressive and Socialist circles have passed away this year.

Michael Harrington was honored with the Eugene V. Debs Award in 1973, and he gave the first Shubert Seebree Lecture in 1982. His *The Other America* published in 1961, described the nation's "invisible poor" and so aroused the country's conscience that his work is credited with inspiring the War on Poverty. Born in St. Louis, Harrington passed away July 31, at age 61. We know that the sense of loss at his passing is shared by a host of Debs Foundation members, unionists, democratic socialists and many others who have been touched in some way by the work of this "long distance runner."

Irving Stone died in Los Angeles at age 86. A popular, prolific author who virtually invented the genre of the biographical novel and is said to have sold 30 million copies of his books, Stone is best known for *Lust for Life*, based on the story of Vincent van Gogh, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, about Michelangelo, and *Adversary in the House*, on Eugene V. Debs. A copy of *Adversary*, autographed by the author, is displayed in the Debs Home.

H.L. Mitchell, a founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, died August 1, at age 83. In "How I became a Socialist" Mitchell described how as a young man he was inspired by the ideas of Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas, which set him in the direction of a life's work leading and organizing poor tenant farmers—black and white—to improve their lives in the impoverished South. In respect for his many accomplishments, Mr. Mitchell had been given thoughtful consideration for the Eugene V. Debs Award. His departure came too soon.

We learned also of the death this year of **Clarence H. Sharp**, at the age of 97. Years ago Mr. Sharp produced a "Dream of Debs" pamphlet. Having resided in Minneapolis, a service in celebration of his life was conducted July 8 at First Unitarian Society, Minneapolis. The announcement described Clarence Sharp as "a social activist, an organizer, an educator who never strayed from his goal." It stated further: "He believed that men could shape their destiny, help make their history and work to advance mankind toward a more peaceful and secure life." What a fitting summary to Clarence Sharp's life, and also to these other recently departed followers of the Debsian tradition.

Membership Dues: The Eugene V. Debs Foundation

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 5.00 - Student Member | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 - Sustaining Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10.00 - Regular Member | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250.00 - Life Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00 - Supporting Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Amount

Enclose remittance. Make checks payable to the Debs Foundation.

The Debs Foundation

P.O. Box 843

Terre Haute, IN 47808

Your dues and contributions are tax deductible. The Foundation owns and maintains the Debs Home and offers several educational and cultural programs. We are a voluntary organization with no paid staff.

The Debs Tradition Appeals to all Ages

Eugene Debs (1855-1926) was very much a product of his times, any social historian likely would contend, but there was a quality of timelessness to the fundamental ideals around which his life centered. Principles of social justice and human rights, expressed in his advocacy of a shorter work week, child labor laws and women's right to vote, workers' right to a fair wage and to organize, and his anti-war stance, are just as relevant and urgent now as at any time in history. If the range of ages of the Debs Foundation's members is any indication, the Debs tradition still appeals to young and old.

On one end of the spectrum are the young. We have a number of college students who are members, and a few younger still, for example, young Ryan Debs Wenzler, a membership entered for Ryan by his father. On the other end of the age spectrum—of course, most of us consider ourselves "middle aged"—are several members in their ninties. Two of those left us last year, as was mentioned in the *Newsletter*, including Marguerite Debs Cooper at age 94 and Oscar Edelman at age 91. We have other "senior" members whose ages have been made known. Ben Kaufman, of New York, was born January 31, 1897, so Ben turned 93 this year. Wave A. Hunter, Delaware, Ohio, would be age 95 this year. There is also Ruth Norrick, of Gary, Indiana, still going strong, who as a young reporter for a Terre Haute paper conducted one of the last interviews given by Debs before his death.

And there is Martin H. Miller, age 97, of Indianapolis. Martin received the Debs Award in 1977, and attends every award banquet accompanied by his wife, Lillian. He has been a lobbyist in Indianapolis on a paid or voluntary basis for most of the time since the 1920's, in the early years for the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen—which he eventually headed as President—and in recent decades for older Americans. Miller was written up in a "Los Angeles Times" feature article, May 14, 1989. The article mentioned Martin's brief but significant association with Eugene Debs and his ties with the Debs Foundation, and carried a photo of Mr. Miller with Indiana's new Democratic Governor Evan Bayh, who is age 34.