

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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



FALL, 1991

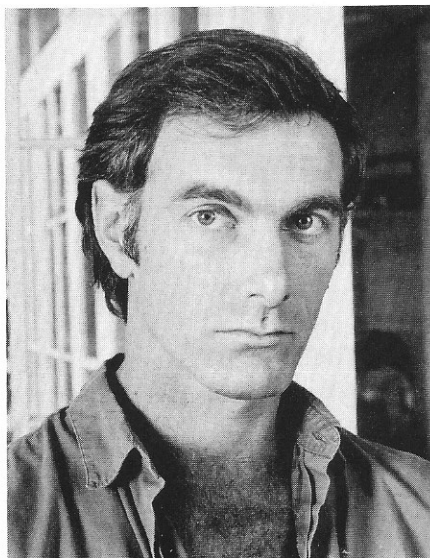
JOHN SAYLES

Champion of Outsiders and Underdogs

John Sayles, writer and filmmaker, is to be honored with this year's Eugene V. Debs Award. The award banquet will be November 2, in Terre Haute, and all members and the public are invited. We are delighted that Studs Terkel, who received the award in 1983, will be keynote speaker.

Sayles has written novels, short stories, one-act plays and screenplays. His latest novel is *Los Gusanos*, about Cuban emigres who fled to Miami after the Communist takeover. His latest movie is *City of Hope*, a story about race and politics in a decaying industrial town. His movie, *Eight Men Out* (1988), is a retelling of the 1919 Chicago Black Sox scandal. *Matewan* (1987), a movie you probably have seen and may wish to see again in video, is a historical saga about striking West Virginia coal miners in the 1920s. It is a movie characteristic of Sayles' work in the way it champions underdogs and outsiders, a quality which led to his selection for the Debs Award.

Being an independent makes Sayles an outsider to a Hollywood dominated by industry giants, and his low budget movies convey a form of social criticism not frequently found in corporate Hollywood productions. One movie critic has written: "Among contemporary filmmakers Sayles is unique in having a strong moral perspective, a genuine sense of concern over deceit and injustice." Of his novels, one wrote: "Sayles has always been a political-minded artist with a leftward lean... With his eye for detail, his political sensibility, and his sympathetic imagination, he could become an American Dickens." Sayles was featured in the "Show Business" page of the August 5, 1991 *Time*, and Episode 5 of the Arts and Entertainment network's "Naked Hollywood," a program which takes viewers behind the scenes in the filmmaking industry. Sayles' artistry has received critical acclaim in the entertainment and literary community for more than a decade. The foundation is pleased to honor him with the Eugene V. Debs Award.



JOHN SAYLES

Humanities Council Honors Constantine

J. Robert Constantine, "Bob" to many of us, has been designated recipient of the Indiana Humanities Council Scholar award, which is given to recognize outstanding achievement in increasing public understanding of our cultural heritage and values. The awards dinner will be held September 27, in Indianapolis, when special awards will be given to a number of individuals and organizations.

The basis for Constantine's recognition was his three-volume *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, published by the University of Illinois Press. *Letters* has received critical acclaim in such publications as *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Newsday*, and *Choice*.

Bob Constantine was a charter member of the Eugene V. Debs Foundation and he acted for many years as foundation Secretary. He is Professor Emeritus, Department of History, Indiana State University. That he is retired from teaching does not mean that he is idle. This summer he was busy preparing a one-volume edition of *Letters* which the University of Illinois Press will make available in paperback, and he is beginning work on a Foreword to a new edition of Ray Ginger's *The Bending Cross: The Life of Eugene V. Debs*. His vignettes on the history of Debs' life and on the foundation's early years appear regularly in the *Newsletter*. All of us who know Bob and his work feel that this recognition could not have come to a more deserving individual. Our congratulations!

November 2

Award Banquet

Schedule & Ticket Information Page 5

The Work Goes On

The goals of the Debs Foundation are much broader than to provide a historic museum for scholars and antique buffs. Debs' social criticism and the commitments of his life have relevance for the society and the world in which we live. This is why we are pleased with every visitor to the Debs Home, every request for a photo to be included in a school textbook, each new reference to or analysis of some facet of Debs' life, and each magazine or newsletter which picks up on one of the articles or announcements in the *Newsletter*. In the latter category, for instance, the July, 1991 issue of the New York Labor History Association's "Work History News" included information on the availability through the foundation of the reproduction of the 1904 Socialist Party campaign poster.

In early July, a few persons phoned the Debs Home inquiring about Eugene Debs height, calls inspired by a "test" prepared for the "Eugene V. Debs Memorial Kazoo Night," Tiger stadium, Detroit. Callers were given Debs' height - 6 feet, 2 inches - but not the second part of the question, namely, the difference in his height before and after a close haircut (the answer, suggested by Woody Creason: the thickness of a sunburn).

On July 4, the Debs show "hit the road" for Debs, Minnesota, a small community named after Gene Debs near the city of Bemidji. A group of "Debsians" pull off quite a holiday celebration and parade. Mike Bailey, museum curator, loaded Debs memorabilia (and a fishing rod) in his auto and attended the event. Mike reports that he was well received, had a great time, and returned with less memorabilia and more cash than when he left. We try to get the word out, as opportunities arise, whenever, and however we can.

Endowment Fund Status

The foundation's endowment fund balance as of December 31, 1990, was \$239,248. This represented growth or net income for the year of \$19,673, and was the third consecutive year in which no money had to be withdrawn to meet operational expenses or emergencies. Considering the high level of expenditures during this period, it is gratifying that we have not been forced to dip into reserves to meet on-going financial commitments.

A likely first impression is that this is a fairly large sum of money, the uses of which, of course, are circumscribed in By-Laws. It is sobering to consider, however, that this sum of money is less than the accumulated benefits of one worker's retirement program near the end of his or her career. Perhaps more relevant is to remember that a long term foundation goal is to have an endowment large enough to generate annual income to pay the base salary of a paid Museum Director-Curator. Given that approximately one-half a fund's annual income needs to remain in the account in order to compensate for inflation, our endowment is near one-half what it ought to be. The room for growth is obvious!

DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Fall

1991

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.

What The Reviewers Say

Two recent publications on Debs, both written by foundation charter members, have contributed to the scholarly literature on the life of this complex historic figure. One reviewer of J. Robert Constantine's *Letters of Eugene V. Debs* (1990) observed that "...they serve to endow the "facts" of his public career with the pulse of his personal feelings, ambitions, and expectations..." (*The New Republic*). Another observed that "Given its length, price and subject matter, this collection of Debs' letters is not likely to show up on many coffee tables. But it does belong in every serious research library, as it represents an invaluable resource for students of labor and radical and Progressive era history." (*The Nation*).

Edward K. Spann's *Brotherly Tomorrows* deals extensively with Debs, and has been widely and generally favorably reviewed in such journals as the *American Historical Review*, *Canadian Historical Review*, and the *London Times Literary Supplement*. Among reviewers comments were conclusions that "the book is a lively entertaining journey through a rich, if forgotten, set of American traditions," and that the book is a "fresh, bracing, thoroughly researched, and valuable contribution" which "depicts in admiring detail the tragic-heroic figure of Eugene Debs."

The concluding remarks of *The New Republic* review of *Letters* bears repeating here:

All along, however, Gene Debs reserved his most powerful invective and his most devastating eloquence for use against enemies at home, against Americans engaged in betraying American ideals for their own profit. His targets were corporate greed and brutality, injustice from the courts, corruption in the government, thievery in banking and finance, and abuse of the helpless all around. The greatest heritage that he left was his example of fearlessness and his conviction in opposing wrong. Nothing quite like him has turned up since.

100 Years Ago Debs in 1891

by J. Robert Constantine

In the early months of 1891, Gene Debs by then widely recognized as one of the leading labor writers and speakers of the nation, had begun to lose confidence in the idea that the interests of railroad workers could best be protected by a *federation* of all the railroad unions - the firemen, engineers, conductors, trainmen, etc. - in a structure similar to that of the rapidly growing American Federation of Labor. Since 1887 Debs had been strongly advocating such a federation in his editorials in *Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen Magazine* and in his many speeches around the country. In 1888 the BLF had endorsed the idea at its annual convention. Debs was named chairman of a committee charged with creating a formal alliance with the other brotherhoods and during the next three years a good part of Debs' interest and effort were channeled into the railroad federation movement. By 1890 it appeared to be the key to unity among the railroad brotherhoods in the future. In June 1889 a group of nine men, including Debs and representing the firemen, the brakemen and the switchmen had met in Chicago and drawn up a constitution for the Supreme Council of the United Orders of Railway Employees, the rather grand name given to the new federation's governing body. During the next two years (1889-1890) the Supreme Council successfully confronted management on behalf of component unions and won wage and workplace improvements without resorting to strikes, a development which led Debs to predict "a reign of good feeling between railroad employer and employee... when strikes shall forever disappear."

In 1891, however, Debs's optimism concerning the federation of the railroad brotherhoods sharply declined. During a strike on the Chicago and North Western line, the leaders of the switchmen's union accused the leaders of the trainmen's union of "treachery," of bringing "scab" labor into the strike to replace switchmen, and demanded the expulsion of the trainmen from the Supreme Council. Following an investigation by the Council the trainmen were expelled, leaving only the switchmen and the firemen unions in the federation, which failed in its efforts to recruit any of the brotherhoods and soon dissolved itself.

The failure of the Supreme Council was clearly a defeat for an idea which Debs had nurtured for four or five years and at the same time it was an important juncture in his career. In the January 1891 issue of the *BLF Magazine* he announced his intention to resign as editor of the *Magazine* and secretary-treasurer of the union, his resignation to take effect at the time of the BLF convention the following year. He gave as the reason for his resignation only a desire "to go into other business" (he launched the E.V. Debs Publishing Co. in Terre Haute), but in resisting the strong pressure to change his mind about the resignation during the year, Debs revealed that he had lost confidence in the concept of craft unionism among railroad workers and in the likelihood that a federation of craft union leaders would

ever become a united voice for all railroad workers in confrontations with management. The behavior of the trainmen's union leadership during the Chicago and North Western strike had been a great disappointment to him (in 1888 he had been called the "godfather" of the trainmen's union by its president, in recognition of his early work in organizing the union's locals and fashioning it into a national union) and in November 1891 he told E.E. Clark, the head of the Order of Railway Conductors, that he felt that the president of the trainmen's union had been guilty of "treason" and had acted like "Brutus" during the C and NW strike. To others he wrote that he now believed that craft unions "foster class prejudices and class selfishness" and he called the leaders of the engineers' and conductors' unions - who had refused to join the Supreme Council - "the aristocracy of labor." The "Grand Officers" of the brotherhoods, Debs said, "make federation impracticable and impossible."

When Debs announced his intention to resign in January, 1891, he noted that it had been his "life's desire to unify railroad employees and to eliminate the aristocracy of labor... and organize them all so all will be on an equality." The short-lived fulfillment of that desire, of course, came a few years later with the founding of the American Railway Union, a landmark in the history of American industrial unionism.

Citings

"The threat of global warming is real..."

The United Kingdom has committed itself to act... But action by this country alone will not even dent the problem. We produce only 3 percent of the world's [carbon dioxide]. The United States accounts for 23 percent. The world looks to them for decisive leadership on this issue as on others."

— British Prime Minister John Major at an international conference on the environment on July 8, 1991, one week before the Group of Seven economic summit meeting in London

In 1971, the oil industry estimated that phasing out lead from gasoline would cost \$7 billion a year until the task was completed. Actual costs were only \$150 million to \$500 million a year — less than 7 percent of the previous estimate.

— Science Magazine

Germany's Wackersdorf site, originally intended to house the country's nuclear reprocessing facility, will instead become home to the world's largest solar cell manufacturing plant, with construction expected to begin this fall.

— Photovoltaic Insider's Report

Desert Storm

Continued from Page 6

howled down in a storm of vituperation and cant. Everything was done to make us throw away sobriety of thought and calmness of judgment and to inflate all expressions with sensational epithets and turgid phrases. It cannot be denied that everything in regard to the a war has been treated in an exalted strain of sentiment and rhetoric very unfavorable to the truth.

At present the whole periodical press of the country seems to be occupied in tickling the national vanity to the utmost by representations about the war which are extravagant and fantastic. There will be a penalty to be paid for all this... Patriotism is being prostituted into a nervous intoxication which is fatal to an apprehension of truth. It builds around us a fool's paradise, and it will lead us into errors about our position and relations just like those which we have been ridiculing in the case of Spain...

Within a year it has become almost a doctrine with us that patriotism requires that we should hold our tongues... Let us be well assured that self-government is not a matter of flags and Fourth of July orations, nor yet of strife to get offices. Eternal vigilance is the price of that as of every other political good. The perpetuity of self-government depends on the sound political sense of the people, and sound political sense is a matter of habit and practice...

It is militarism which is eating up all the products of science and art, defeating the energy of the population and wasting its savings. It is militarism which forbids the people to give their attention to the problems of their own welfare and to give their strength to the education and comfort of their children...

Upon a little serious examination, the off-hand disposal of an important question of policy by the declaration that Americans can do anything proves to be only a silly piece of bombast... Our hands are quite full at home of problems by the solution of which the peace and happiness of the American people could be greatly increased...

There are people who are boasting of their patriotism, because they say that we have taken our place now amongst the nations of the earth by virtue of this war. My patriotism is of the kind which is outraged by the notion

that the United States never was a great nation until in a petty three months' campaign it knocked to pieces a poor, decrepit, bankrupt old state like Spain. To hold such an opinion as that is to abandon all American standards, to put shame and scorn on all that our ancestors tried to build up here, and to go over to the standards of which Spain is a representative.



Prize Winner Announced

The 1991 winner of the Bryant Spann Memorial Prize is Bonnie Stepenoff for her "Mother and Teacher as Missouri State Penitentiary Inmates: Goldman and O'Hare, 1917-20." This article is a revealing look into the inhuman prison conditions experienced by two early 20th Century women radicals and their protests against their treatment.

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addresses. It costs us 70 cents if you
don't. Besides, we don't want
to lose track of you!

The reproduction, in
full color, of the 1904
Debs Campaign Poster
is still available at the
introductory price of
\$15.00
postage & handling included

Membership Dues: The Eugene V. Debs Foundation

NAME _____
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CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

_____ Student Member - \$ 5.00 _____ Sustaining Member - \$100.00
_____ Regular Member - \$10.00 _____ Life Members - \$250.00
_____ Supporting Member - \$25.00 _____ Other _____

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.

**ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET
TERRE HAUTE**

November 2

1991

**Honoring
JOHN SAYLES**

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Afternoon

2:00 p.m.: *Matewan*, followed by "The Making of *Matewan*," with John Sayles, in Holmstedt Hall 102, ISU Campus. (The hall is one block west of 7th St., on right side of Chestnut Street. You may park south of Debs Home.)

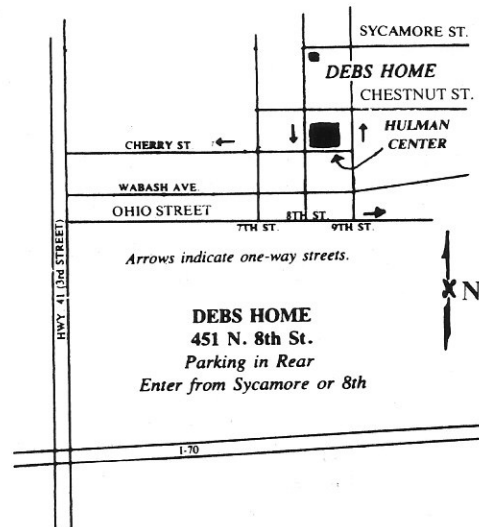
Evening

6:00 p.m.: Social Hour and Reception (cash bar), Hulman Center (park west of Hulman Center and enter west doors)

7:00 p.m.: Banquet Honoring John Sayles

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

The fall business meeting will be Sunday, November 3, at 9:00 a.m. at the Debs Home



NOTE

We offer a choice of entrees. 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
(\$25 per ticket)

Name _____

_____ x \$25 = \$ _____
number of amount
tickets enclosed

Tickets must be paid in advance. Your ticket serves also for admission to *Matewan*. Please check one of the following options. Tickets held at the door may be claimed at the showing of *Matewan* or at the entrance to the banquet hall.

☐ Mail my tickets to the following address:

☐ Hold 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.

DESERT STORM:

TRAGEDY OR ADVENTURE, PATRIOTISM IN PERSPECTIVE

It was a neat little war, a glorious victory, a smashing triumph of good over evil, and a vindication of the Reagan-Bush military policies. We welcomed the Desert Storm troops home with jubilant celebration and pinned medals on their leaders. Now that July 4 is behind us, and before Veteran's Day and, yes, the 1992 elections, we need to reflect soberly on what really was won, over just what enemy, why did it happen, who benefited, and how can similar conflicts be avoided? Two articles are abstracted here which hopefully will cause you serious reflection. Johnson is senior pastor, Second Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas. Sumner is considered a founding father of Sociology and was writing, as a matter of fact, in 1898, about another "neat" little war, the Spanish American War. This article is abstracted from, respectively, the February, 1991 church newsletter, *The Second Page*, and *War and Other Essays*, edited by Albert Galloway and published in 1911 by Yale University Press.

War: Tragedy or Adventure?

by Charles Foster Johnson

Never before in the interminable drama of human warfare have we been treated to such a front-row view of battle as we have in the Persian Gulf theatre of operations...

We are privy to a stunning video presentation of the allied air assault. We are in the pilot's seat. A voice taut and urgent with the danger of combat

comes over the speaker. It is the actual aerial communication of a fighter pilot in battle. He zeroes in on his enemy. He fixes the target in the crosshairs of his scope. The sheer technology of his weapon is impressive beyond words. His bombs are "smart." But the enemy resistance, though unsophisticated, is fierce. The explosion of anti-aircraft missiles fills the sky. He is scared. His voice tightens with fear and terror. He aims. He fires. He hits. He whoops for joy. He beats hell out of there.

All of this appears to us as an advanced video game. Engaging, entertaining, a diversion. We are so taken by the wizardry of the instrument that we all but forget that there is a young human being in that cockpit facing one of two grisly options: kill or be killed. Once again, technology obscures humanity.

We then are taken back to the air bases where the pilots land after their sorties. Everyone's in a festive mood. All smiles, hugs, high-fives. To us, they are frat boys on a basketball court rather than fliers in combat. They sock each other good-naturedly, tousle each other's hair. There is a flourish of happiness to be alive. The whole scene makes us forget that these young people are involved daily in experiences of death-dealing malice.

What is it about war that holds such fascination for us? Why does war give us an endless appetite for these kinds of images, however much they skew the truth? Why is our collective

imagination never so fiercely exercised as during a season of war? It is as if we are awakened from sleep and filled with curiosity far beyond our normal consumption. Walker Percy once noted, with his trademark irony, that the happiest he ever saw his uncle was the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. One makes similar observations of the national news media. Repeatedly — and in all earnestness — and without so much as a blush of embarrassment — news commentators remind us of the parallels between bombing procedures and video games, pilots trained by Nintendo.

That the Persian Gulf engagement is necessary does not mean it should be entertaining. Christianly, war at all times and in every place is tragic, and occasions our deepest remorse.

But I have the nauseating feeling that we are enjoying this one way too much.

Conquest of the United States by Spain

by William Graham Sumner

We boast that we are a self-governing people, and in this respect, particularly, we compare ourselves with pride with older nations... The war with Spain was precipitated upon us headlong, without reflection or deliberation, and without any due formulation of public opinion. Whenever a voice was raised in behalf of deliberation and the recognized maxims of statesmanship, it was

Continued on Page 4

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