

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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



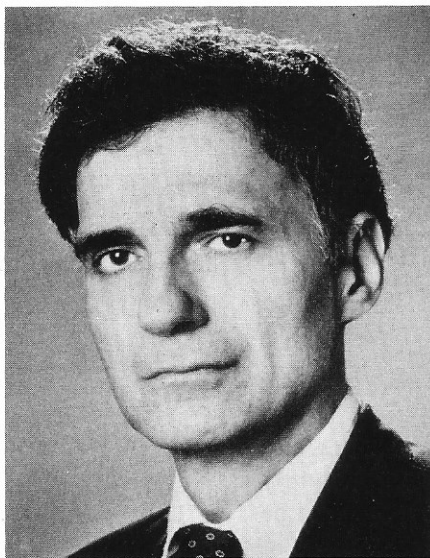
FALL, 1992

## RALPH NADER

*Social Critic, Political Activist*

Ralph Nader has been called America's most famous and most effective social critic, an assessment putting this contemporary crusader very much in the tradition of turn-of-the-century social critic and citizen rights advocate, Eugene V. Debs. Nader is to be honored guest at this year's award banquet. An additional feature of the occasion is that the presentation or keynote speaker will be Victor Navatsky, prominent journalist and editor of *The Nation* magazine. *The Nation* has traditionally been an effective outlet for provocative and insightful commentary on issues of national and international importance.

Nader first hit the national scene with the publication of *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965), a book which took the Corvair off the road and made Nader enemy number one for General Motors brass. It no doubt was much too simple to refer to his early concerns as with "seat belts and hot dogs." Certainly he has moved beyond social criticism to effective political action. Currently Nader's Washington based network includes



the Center for the Study of Responsive Law, which is the original research organization and home of "Nader's Raiders." Since its founding in 1969, the Center has produced innumerable reports on subjects ranging from the Interstate Commerce Commission to food safety, pensions, company towns, and pollution.

Other Nader-inspired groups currently include no less than seven different centers and projects, dealing with aviation consumer action, auto safety, clean water, disability rights, pension rights, freedom of information, and insurance consumer rights.

Nader also helped establish the PIRGs -- Public Interest Research Groups -- the student-funded and controlled organizations which function on college campuses in 24 states. Their impact has been tremendous, publishing hundreds of ground-breaking reports and guides,

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## Historical Site Marker To Be Unveiled

A successful application has been made to have the Debs Home declared a State of Indiana Historical Site, and a formal plaque unveiling will occur the afternoon of the annual award banquet. A representative of the Indiana Historical Bureau will be present for the ceremony, along with other appropriate dignitaries.

The Debs Home was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1966, a designation which carries a distinct prestige factor, for only eleven sites are so designated in Indiana. It also protects the property against such threats as seizure by right of eminent domain. Legislative action by the Indiana General Assembly had further declared the home a state historical site.

In recent years, the Indiana Historical Bureau has made such evaluations and decisions, and with state funding has operated the Historical Marker Program. The program operates in a nonpartisan manner to select appropriate sites for recognition, and to provide money for the production of attractive, informative plaques to mark the sites. Approval for including the Debs Home came at the bureau's May meeting. The plaque will replace the present wooden sign, which incidentally gets stolen occasionally and which is becoming more than a bit weathered.

The marker's sponsor line reads:

*Continued on page 3*

## DEBS, LOUIS and NADER AMONG *LIFE's* IMPORTANT AMERICANS

In 1990, Eugene Debs was named by the editors of *Life* magazine as one of the "100 Most Important Americans of the 20th Century." Prior to this year, the only recipient of the prestigious Eugene V. Debs award included in the *Life* selection was John L. Lewis, the fiery UMW leader who in 1965 became the first recipient of the award granted by the Debs Foundation. It could be that we "Debsians" define "important" a bit differently from the way the *Life* editors did.

Ralph Nader was also included in that honor roll of important Americans. Of him they wrote: "He was the champion we never knew we needed against an enemy we never suspected was there." In 1965, when Nader took on GM over the fatal defects of the Corvair, "Americans were still innocent 'customers.'" "When Nader was done, we had become a nation of suspicious 'consumers'" who realized that what was good for General Motors might be calamitous for the rest of us."

October 24  
Award Banquet  
Schedule & Ticket  
Information  
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# THIS HOPEFULLY IS NOT YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER

If you are one of those not heard from in over three years this could be your last copy of the foundation's *Newsletter*. The previous membership mailing carried an essay on the importance of some "signs of life" from individuals on our membership list. The notice for payment of 1993 dues will be included with minutes of the fall, 1992 business meeting, to be mailed in November, but if you are one who has not paid 1992 dues, you just might wish to act now and use the form appearing elsewhere in this issue to pay up.

Since the last membership mailing the number of dues payments and the dollar value involved has been most encouraging. It means that 1992 will continue the upward trend in the number of dues payments and in the amount of contributions, increases which are necessary to match the escalating costs of operations which service our members (costs for printing, postage, supplies, etc.). We are holding our own financially, which is more than many voluntary organizations are doing in these hard financial times.

As regards the purging of the membership list, it is intended to be done only after three warnings or alerts. This should be considered alert number two.

## A "FORTUNATE" BREAKDOWN

In his address at the annual meeting of the Mountain-Plains Museum Association in Albuquerque, John Nichols described memorable visits to many of the leading museums in the United States and Europe. He vividly described his visits in 1973 to the Debs Home, when he was stuck in Terre Haute for three days while the engine of his 1968 VW bus was being rebuilt. Describing his visits, given by Ned Bush, he said: "We spent a wonderful few hours together, and I learned oodles about Eugene Debs. I also learned a lot about American history and about the struggles in the country to organize labor and to fight for the eight hour day and other workers' benefits... For the

### 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 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.

### DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Fall 1992

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.

next three days, Ned Bush gave me a college education in U.S. labor history... among all the memories of Eugene Debs... And that was one of the most productive museum experiences of my life."

Nichols is best known as author of *The Milagro Beanfield War*, a novel with excellent social justice content which also was made into a great movie. His remarks were published in *El Palacio*, Spring/Summer, 1992.

## A Centenarian MARTIN H. MILLER

Martin Miller turned age 100 in March, 1992, and was honored on this occasion by organizations he has served during a long and productive life. The United Transportation Union honored him with a special luncheon, and a special recognition ceremony, including presentation of the state's Sagamore of the Wabash award, was held in the rotunda of the state capitol. The ceremony was conducted by the Aging and Inhome Services Section, Family and Social Services Administration. He later was honored in Clay City, Indiana, where he grew up and where he first met Gene Debs.

Not many living persons can say they actually met Debs, but Miller is one who as a small boy sold Debs a newspaper on the streets of Clay City. Miller became a leader in the railway unions, for many years as legislative representative for what today is the UTU. Since his retirement in 1957, Martin has been active as a senior citizen lobbyist both in Indiana and nationally.

Some of our members may not know that Mr. Miller was honored in 1976 with the Debs award, and he rarely misses an annual award banquet. We trust that he will be able to make it again this year, and we hope to have some special recognition for him at the banquet.

# Twenty Five Years Ago

## The Debs Foundation: 1967

### J. Robert Constantine

In May 1967 the officers and directors of the Debs Foundation held their semi-annual meeting at Tucker's Steak House in Terre Haute. Among those attending the meeting was Earl Stephanson, who had served briefly as the first president of the Foundation in 1962 and had played an important part in launching the Foundation in February that year. In his remarks Stephanson commented briefly on the "remarkable progress" of the Foundation during the five years in which it had functioned. By 1967 the "remarkable progress" noted by Stephanson included the near-completion of the physical restoration of the Debs home and its recognition as both a state and national historic site, and the beginnings of the Foundation's work in the fields of education and research.

The contributions of scores of individuals and labor unions had made possible the completion of the restoration of the rooms on the first and second floors of the home and during the course of the year Marguerite Debs Cooper (whose generosity had filled the rooms with Debs memorabilia) provided funds for hall carpeting and the installation of period lighting fixtures in all the rooms. (As a critically necessary preservation measure the Foundation agreed to the use of aluminum siding to cover the outside of the house). In the first of his many gifts to the Foundation

Oscar Edelman provided funds (\$100.00) for the purchase of display cases for the home.

At the same time that these measures toward the completion of the physical restoration of the Debs home were being carried forward the Foundation continued its support and sponsorship of educational and research programs. Large audiences had attended its conference on War, on Racism, on Poverty, and on the Environment between 1964 and 1967 and in the latter year the Foundation co-sponsored the appearance at Indiana State University of Leon Keyserling in February and a conference on Chinese-American Relations in April. At the May 1967 board meeting the secretary announced the completion of the project which had collected some 100 essays by men and women who had known Debs or had been influenced by him (These essays were published as *Debs Remembered* in the 1983 microfilm edition of the *Papers of Eugene V. Debs*).

Perhaps the most memorable event of 1967 for the Foundation was the Debs Award Dinner honoring A. Philip Randolph, who was in the truest sense a labor leader "in the Debs tradition" and whose acceptance speech at the Award Dinner was a powerful and riveting one for the nearly 600 people who attended the dinner. Like Debs, Randolph was a gentle and courtly man, but there was steel in his resolve and fire in his oratory and his speech that night set a very high standard for the Award recipients who have followed during the past quarter-century.

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*Nader..., cont. from page 1*

lobbying for laws in state legislatures, and calling state and often national media attention to environmental and energy problems.

Today, Nader speaks of the growing "imperialism" of multinational corporations and of a convergence of corporate and government power that he says resembles the textbook definition of corporate socialism. A magazine founded by Nader in 1980, the *Multinational Monitor*, tracks the global influence of multinational corporations and their impact on the Third World, labor, and development. Nader's overriding concern and vision is presently focused on empowering citizens to create a responsive government which responds to citizen's needs.

Ralph Nader defines himself as "Full-time Citizen, the most important office in America for anyone to achieve." He is a modern day crusader very much in the tradition of Debs, and it is highly appropriate that the foundation honor him with the Eugene V. Debs award. You will want to make every effort to participate in this special occasion.

### REMINDERS

Are you a "snowbird?" We have a few members who split living time between northern and southern residences. By the time we change the mailing address, it has been changed back again. If you are one of these, it would be helpful if you will let us know when your address will change.

**RECYCLE** your **NEWSLETTER** by sharing it with a friend or placing it in a reading room.

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*Historical site..., cont. from page 1*

"Erected 1992 Indiana Historical Bureau and Eugene V. Debs Foundation". It should be mentioned that the foundation paid only \$300 toward the cost of the marker. The remaining over \$1,000 was paid by the Indiana Historical Bureau. The attractive plaque, gold lettering and trim on a blue field, will be officially unveiled in ceremony at 4:00 p.m., the afternoon of the award banquet date.

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### Harrington Plaque Donated

Michael Harrington (1928-1989) was a noted author, articulate spokesman for the poverty stricken, crusader for human rights, educator, friend of labor and Socialist Party leader. His *The Other America* (1962) is credited with spurring the Great Society anti-poverty programs, including Medicaid and Medicare, food stamps, expanded social security benefits and job training programs. He was a believer in the eventual brotherhood of humankind, with unity of races and nations, an end to poverty and war, bringing life and fraternal peace for all.

Harrington was honored in 1973 with the Eugene V. Debs award, and he returned to Terre Haute in the Shubert Sebree Lecture Series. A plaque commemorating Harrington will be formally presented the foundation at the award banquet, being donated by the Indiana Chapter, Social Democratic Party of America.



## The Debs-Leslie Connection: Comradeship, Friendship, Adoration

Personal correspondence is one of the historian's most useful sources in the analysis of a prominent figure's public as well as private life. J. Robert Constantine's three-volume *Letters of Eugene V. Debs* make available a sampling of the letters which reveal not only professional activities, but also the mutual bonds of attraction, even adoration between Eugene Debs and his followers. Most of Debs' personal correspondence is stored in the Special Collections area of Cunningham Library, Indiana State University, in original or duplicate format.

Only recently added to the collection are the letters of William and Anna Leslie, including correspondence with several early socialists and especially Debs. Debs positioned himself as the voice of the downtrodden and dispossessed, the victims of capitalism, in turn of the century America. But his causes -- workers' rights to organize and to bargain collectively, restriction on child labor, voting rights for women, anti-capitalism, anti-war -- appealed to some individuals in all social and economic circumstances. One family of avid supporters were situated on what today would be described as the "upper middle class." William Leslie had operated a real estate and insurance business in Leominster, Connecticut before moving in 1915 to Norwich to operate the Reliance Yarn Company. As a young man Will Leslie had in 1908 worked on the Red Special campaign. The letters reveal that another worker in that campaign, Anna Murphy, soon to become Leslie's wife, also made a permanent impression on Gene and Theodore Debs. Anna Murphy Leslie had been one of three sisters who became firmly implanted in Debs' fond recollections of the Red Special campaign.

All the Leslie letters convey mutual bonds of comradeship and affection, as well as political and social concerns. Many of them were Christmas and New Year greetings, not the colorful products of the greeting card industry, but lengthy, one or two page personal exchanges which exude friendship, comradeship and, on the part of the Leslies, near adulation. Earlier letters in the collection reveal the origins and the consistent nature of the Debs-Leslie relationship. In a letter dated December 27, 1913, Debs wrote: Since the days of the "Red Special" I have loved, and so have we all, the Murphy girls, one of whom is now your wife. Never can we forget their beautiful spirit, their cheering presence, their inspiring example, and their untiring efforts in behalf of the cause. they are socialists indeed and as we think of them we vision the coming day when the world will be as beautiful and unselfish and loving as they are now in what they are doing to mankind.... Your loving and grateful comrade, (signed) Eugene V. Debs.

William Leslie, in a letter dated December 23, 1914, expressed his distress concerning the war clouds over Europe and the divisiveness of this issue for socialists in America. It also provides an interesting assessment of Gene Debs' persuasiveness as public speaker. "But it is only when ideas become ideals that they have permanency and

are satisfying to the soul. Hillquit, and others are often quoted as America's leading socialist exponents: Yet with all their spoken or written words they have never moved men's souls to tears... You kindle the soul with an ideal that absorbs and takes possession of the man, and explaining so clearly at the same time the economic way to make those ideals possible and imperishable."

"A successful protest against capitalism must have more than a kick in it. It must have a soul in it. A Debs protest never lacks (sic) the kick -- there is none greater -- but it always contains the soul as well. While your kick is always sufficient to give your ideals force, -- your soul is sufficient to give your ideas stability. Had the socialist movement the soul of Debs, it could never be caught with guns in its hands, killing comrades in defense of capitalism."

The 1918 seasons greetings from Leslie contains an element not apparent earlier, Debs' personal financial situation, this attributable to Debs' circumscribed activities due to the recent trial in Cleveland and impending execution of sentence. Dated December 23, 1918, Leslie wrote: "Dear Gene, Anna and myself are enclosing with our love a small token for the closing of the year: not in return, or in part for your undying devotion -- for that can only be paid in love. We know by the event of things -- your resources if not entirely suspended has (sic) been reduced to a minimum, and that the past year has borne heavily upon you, and we feel that out of the graciousness of your great heart you can accept it just in love."

Debs' response, dated January 1, 1919, is not exactly the word-processed form letter a substantial contribution might receive today. A thousand times I thank you, my beloved comrade! You are one of the sweetest souls alive. You would have been that without the extreme generosity of heart which moved you to enclose that hundred dollar bill. It is too much and while the spirit of the offering touches the very center of my heart I feel myself but poorly entitled to such extraordinary liberality of recognition and reward. On the same day, Debs wrote separately: "... From my inmost heart I thank you, dear Comrade Anna, for your gracious, loving offering which so enriches me; I thank your noble comrade-husband who has these many years been to me a younger brother, and I thank those lovely sisters whose bright eyes I still see and whose fidelity and devotion in every hour of darkness has kept my heart warm and the fire burning on the altar of my soul. It was a blessed day for me indeed when you precious souls came into my life. I can never forget the golden hours we were together in that memorable campaign when you lovely young girls were aboard the "Red Special," your bright eyes sparkling with interest, your faces all aglow with enthusiasm, and your hearts attuned to the lofty ideals of the cause as you busied yourselves every moment in passing out literature and in speaking words of hope and cheer to the people who gathered to hear our message. It was a delight to me not only but relieved my weariness and made my work a continuous joy and inspiration."

Debs' circumstances at the beginning of 1919 gave little to cheer about, and the above letters reveal his fond recollections of brighter days of rising hopes and the shared

*Continued on page 6*

# ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET TERRE HAUTE

October 24

1992

Honoring  
Ralph Nader

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

### Afternoon

4:00 p.m. Official unveiling of State Historical Site Marker,  
Debs Home

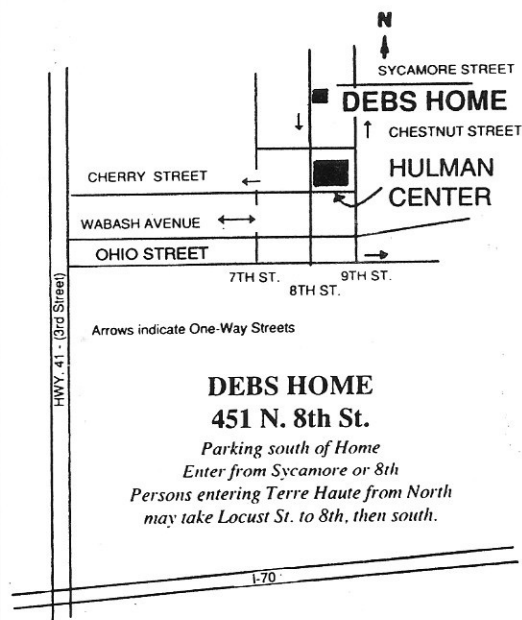
### Evening

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 Ralph Nader

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

The fall business meeting will be Sunday, October 25, at 9:00 a.m.  
at the Debs Home



## NOTE

We offer a choice of entrees. Please indicate your choice of prime rib or fish when you order tickets. If you **prefer fish, indicate this also at the door the evening of the banquet**

## Dinner Ticket Order (\$25 per ticket)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
number of tickets amount  
enclosed

Prime Rib Dinner(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Fish Dinner(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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

☐ Hold tickets at the door, in the name of \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Mail my tickets to the following address:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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.

enthusiasm of those working on the Red Special.

Clearly, memory of the Murphy girls had been a continued source of inspiration and joy to Debs, and Will Leslie had "been to me a younger brother."

Many of these letters were typed, on Theodore Debs' stationary, but the Debs' response to the Leslie's seasons greetings for 1921 came from the hand of Katherine Debs with her signature. Those who have had their impression of Kate Debs' relations with her husband and her feelings about his causes formed by reading Irving Stone's *Adversary in the House* will be surprised with Kate Debs' form of greeting and the overall tone of the letter dated January 9, 1922. "Dear Beloved Comrades: How can we ever thank you for your very kind and generous holiday remembrance! ... Your message is beautiful in every thought and word, and your more than generous offering, which we hardly dare accept, bespeaks a generosity of heart and loftiness of spirit our appreciation of which is beyond expression. We recall with most grateful emotions your loving kindness and service these many years... Gene, as you may know, is very happy to be home again, as are we to have him with us once more, thanks to the loyal devotion of our many comrades and sympathizing friends. The letters coming in are so very many that I trust you will excuse this brief expression when there is so much that should be said." Again the next year the Debs family response to the Leslie family greetings was hand written by Katherine Debs.

In William Leslie's December 17, 1923 letter to Theodore, he comments on his concern for Gene's serious illness, attributing its cause to the rigors of a recent speaking tour. "Why does Gene now attempt such overtaxing work? We all know that his spirit is eternal and inexhaustable, - - but his physical is limited in such sacrifices. We tried to take Gene out of jail, to save him from the master enemies! Now I fear we should put him back again to save him from his friends and himself... Dear Theodore, a great work is in your hands. You must protect Gene from himself and his

friends."

On October 21, 1926, one day after Debs' death, the Leslies wrote to Katherine. The letter of sympathy covers more than a page and is in such eloquent style that one wonders if it were intended for a wider circulation. It read in part: "Our hearts go out to you and your home folks. Where ever man lives today the world is in tears. It is a universal sorrow through the hearts of the world that reaches its flood tide at your very hearth.

Dear old Gene - his labors done, lays his burden down, and his weary body finds its rest...

And now, to you all love and strength, and to Gene a last and tender farewell. Gene has earned the right to rest: may he sleep well.

With tenderest sympathy.

(signed) William and Anna Leslie

The exchange of letters between the families of Debs and Leslie did not cease with the death of Eugene. On December 19, 1936, the Leslies wrote Theodore and wife, extending sympathy, having read of the death of Katherine. Years later, Christmas 1949, the letter reflects the succession of generations. It reads: "Mother joins me in extending love and best wishes for a happy holiday season --if that is possible in this upset world so full of sadness, sorrow and apprehension -- and may the new year, fast approaching, bring to you in abundance all of its many blessings. Sincerely, Marguerite Debs Cooper (signed).

### **THE BENDING CROSS Reissued**

Ray Ginger's award winning biography of Debs has been out of print for some time. The soft bound edition had been low priced, but the print size left much to be desired. The new edition will be full size, hard bound, on acid free paper, include a number of photographs, an up-dated bibliography and an introduction by J. Robert Constantine. It will be available for the first time at the award banquet. Information for mail orders will be provided as soon as possible.

## **EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION**

P.O. Box 843  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47808

**FORWARDING AND ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
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