

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

P.O. BOX 843, TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA 47808-0843

FALL, 1993



Dolores Huerta *Union Leader, Human Rights Advocate*



DOLORES HUERTA

Dynamic, enthusiastic, courageous, sacrificial – all are adjectives which appropriately describe Dolores Huerta's career as teacher, union leader, feminist and human rights advocate. She will be honored as this year's recipient of the Debs award. Ed Asner, himself the 1987 awardee, will be keynote or presentation speaker at the November 6 event in Terre Haute.

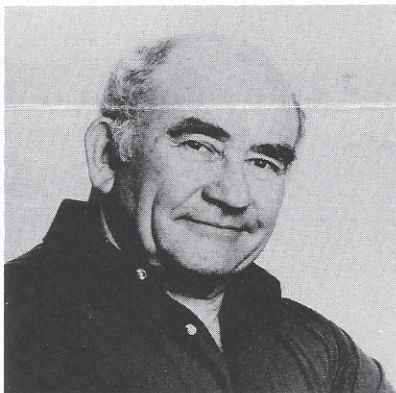
At age 14, Dolores began to help meet family expenses by working in the packing sheds after school in California's central valley, although she persisted in gaining education to better equip herself to help people. She earned a college degree, became a teacher, and then got involved in the Community Service Organization, a barrio-based self help group for California's Mexican Americans.

It was through this that Dolores met Cesar Chavez. Coming to feel that it wasn't doing enough to help workers, in 1962, they resigned and formed the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). In 1965, the NFWA joined the AFL-CIO's Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee in a strike against Delano area table and wine grape growers. It was a tough, five-year struggle that rallied millions of supporters to the United Farm Workers and forged a national support coalition of unions, churches, students, minorities and consumers. The NFWA and AWOC merged in 1966 to form the UFW-AFL-CIO. Thus was Dolores Huerta co-founder with Chavez of the UFW, and she has served these years on its executive board.

Through all, Dolores' career has shown personal involvement in innumerable struggles—picket lines, marches, one-on-one organizing, strategizing and rallies. Few have equaled her life's commitment and sacrifice for *La Causa*.

In the fall of 1992, Dolores became 1st Vice President, Emeritus, so that she could work in Washington, D.C. with the Feminist Majority. Now that Cesar has passed away, she once again is 1st Vice President of UFW, actively carrying out the work that she and Cesar Chavez began over 30 years ago.

We hope that you will join us personally in honoring Sister Huerta with the Eugene V. Debs award.



ED ASNER

Banquet Date, November 6

Celebration & Commemoration

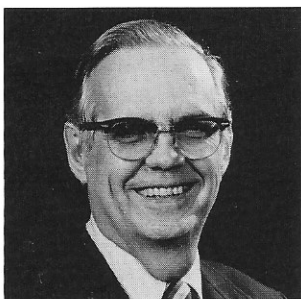
The events start early! 3:30 p.m. So if you only show up at Hulman Civic Center at 7:00, you will get the "main course" of celebration honoring Ms. Huerta, but you will have missed the opportunity to participate in the afternoon commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the ARU, significant both in Debs' career and in the history of the American labor movement.

The commemorative program – 3:30 p.m. Holmstedt Hall 102, ISU campus – is intended to be both educational and inspirational. We as a people need to know and appreciate our roots, and the ARU story is an important segment of the heritage of workers and their struggles for the rights to organize and strike, and to find stranger and more effective ways to organize. The United Transportation Union traces its roots to Debs' ARU, and its international president, G. Thomas DuBose, will be one of the discussants on the general theme of "Debs' ARU: Railroaders then and now: their work and their unions." There also will be a viewing of documentary film footage on the history of the ARU and the UTU (which itself has an important anniversary to celebrate). The films will roll promptly at 3:30 p.m.

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**Schedule &
Ticket
Information**
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Dallas W. Sells Jr. Remembered



Many photos of early foundation award banquets show Dallas Sells at the head table, presiding or having another part of the program. Brother Sells' many contributions to the Debs Foundation would appropriately be described in superlatives: one of the earliest, most effective, most

dedicated of the several union leaders who played decisive supporting roles in the foundation's early years, and until the time of his death he served as an endowment fund trustee. He was honored in 1986 with the foundation's Theodore Debs Distinguished Service Award.

Dallas Sells Jr. died in March. He and his wife, Thelma, had lived in Indianapolis since 1971. He retired as Region 3 director in 1984, after 13 years in that position. His career included meeting three U.S. Presidents and visits to the Soviet Union and China as a representative of labor. Sells became active in the UAW at a young age, while working as an industrial electrician at Delco-Remy, and was elected president of Local 662 in 1952. Later offices included the president of the Indiana-Kentucky CIO Auto Council and of the Indiana CIO, but he left that post after 10 years when the UAW withdrew in 1968. After a stint in the UAW's national office from 1969 to 1971, he then was elected head of UAW Region 3 and he and Thelma returned to Indiana.

Sells' extended shadow will continue to be felt in positive ways by the Debs Foundation. "His" UAW Local 662 has over the years remained constant in support of the foundation and its programs, and his son, an ACTWU leader in Ohio, is an active member and foundation director.

You Survived The Cut

The fact that you have received this newsletter by mail means that you survived the cut, reference being to the trimming of the foundation's mailing list. 297 names have been deleted in the past year. Considerable effort went into making certain that no person would be cut who actually was interested in being on the mailing list. One would like to assume that U.S. postal service procedures for handling "Forwarding and Return Address" requests would guarantee an up-to-date file, but this is not the case. Of the large number deleted, however, most had been added in early years when merely ordering a T-shirt or photo would get a name on the list. Many of these names had been retained for more than a decade without any dues payments or other response suggestive of a continued interest, or even of continued residence at the listed address.

The result is a membership list with a new lean look, approximately 500 names, but we continually are adding new members to build it up. It will take a while at the current rate of progress, but some day we will have 1,000 active dues paying members!

DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Fall 1993

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.

Retirements

Robert Carter's career has contributed immensely to the work of the Debs Foundation. The persons who know this for a fact are those who have engaged in research using the Debs Collection at Indiana State University's Cunningham Library. Those who visited or wrote the Rare Books and Special Collections area for research on Debs likely were directed to Robert Carter for assistance, and undoubtedly were impressed that Mr. Carter was performing a work of love, not just completing a job assignment. His years of experience and personal knowledge of the archival materials which are preserved in the collection – books, newspaper articles, professional literature, photographs – have been a valuable asset both for ISU and for the foundation. We wish Robert Carter well in his retirement.

The archival work is still in good hands. Dr. David Vancil is head of Rare Books and Special Collections, and he and his staff will carry on, for they consider the Debs Collection among the library's more valuable holdings.

Joe Jacobs recently retired from law practice in Chicago after a 60 year career which established him as one of America's most respected labor lawyers. His commitment to labor law was highlighted early in his career by his legal defense of those charged in the famous Terre Haute "General Strike" of 1935. Joe Jacobs' recent note to the foundation secretary is reproduced in this issue of the *Newsletter*.

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Banquet Continued...

Special features of the banquet program will be the addresses by Ed Asner and Dolores Huerta. Also, local folk artist Louie Popejoy, master of stringed instruments from banjo to violin, will present a short program of railroad songs. What line of work has inspired more good songs! Your plans for November 6 should be to come early and stay for all of it.

Debs 100 Years Ago

THE A.R.U., "DEBS'S UNION"

by J. Robert Constantine

The creation, early success and rapid growth, followed by the equally rapid collapse and disintegration of the American Railway Union – all within the brief space of three or four years – became one of the most dramatic and significant chapters in the history of American labor unions. For Gene Debs the rapid rise and crushing defeat of the union were determining events of his career, for the remainder of which he lived with the memories of both the potential for the unprecedented power of a united industrial union and the fragility of that power when confronted by the hostility of public opinion, management, and government in a capitalist society.

Debs was converted to the idea of industrial unionism only slowly, and after a gradual disillusionment with trade unions in the railroad industry. For nearly a decade, as secretary of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and editor of that union's *Magazine*, Debs worked tirelessly to expand the membership of the BLF and to aid in the organization of other railroad unions – The Switchmen, Brakemen, Telegraphers and others – convinced that a strong trade union could and would protect the interests of its members. Toward the end of the decade of the 1880's, however, following a series of strikes in which the new railroad unions sometimes shamefully broke ranks (and occasionally "scabbed" against each other), Debs concluded that a *federation* of the railroad unions, along the lines of the recently-founded (1886) and rapidly growing American Federation of Labor, was needed to assure unity among the "brotherhoods" during strikes and in negotiating wages, working conditions, and other issues with management. To that end, in June, 1889, Debs and a dozen or so representatives of the firemen, brakemen, and switchmen met in Chicago and organized the Supreme Council of the United Order of Railway Employees, and for a few years the new body had a measure of success in arbitrating jurisdictional disputes and dealing with such delicate issues as the racial politics of its members and the effects of religious dissension in the lodges created by the American Protective Association, a rabidly anti-Catholic movement of the time. At the same time Debs worked to bring into the Supreme Council the "aristocracy" of the railroad unions – notably the engineers and the conductors, whose leaders showed little enthusiasm for turning over their power and their members' destinies to the new governing body. Despite such obstacles, Debs remained confident that federation was the wave of the future for the railroad brotherhoods and that the reluctant leaders of the "aristocracy" would in time fall into line. As it turned out the Supreme Council was destroyed by charges of treachery and "scabbing" made by the switchmen's representatives on the Council against the representatives of the trainmen, charges growing out of a switchmen's strike in 1891. In the end the trainmen were expelled from the Council, but the fight led the telegraphers and a faction of the

conductors to withdraw their applications for membership in the federation. Left with only representatives from the firemen and the switchmen, the Supreme Council met in Chicago in June, 1892 and approved Debs' motion for its dissolution.

Debs called the failure of the railroad federation idea a "shattered dream," made impossible by the "class prejudices" and "class selfishness" of the brotherhoods and jealousies among their "Grand Officers." At the June, 1892 BLF convention in Cincinnati he resigned as secretary-treasurer of the union (he agreed to stay on as editor of the *Magazine*), explaining that it was still his "life's desire to unify railroad employees and to eliminate the aristocracy of labor and organize them all so that all will be on an equality." In the following months he worked to formulate a mechanism through which a railroad industrial union might be created, and in the spring of 1893 he told Professor John R. Commons, then at Indiana University, that he had perfected "a plan for the American Railway Union, modeled after the Constitution of the United States, which will include subordinate organizations of the railway employees as 'states' in the union."

Whether the plan for the ARU was Debs' own or he had followed a model provided by the brewery workers or coal miners, the union that emerged from the June 1893 Chicago meeting of some fifty dissident railroad labor figures was from the outset and throughout its brief and dramatic life Debs's union. He was the first and only president of the union, which welcomed to membership all white railroad workers, including coal miners and longshoremens who worked for a railroad company, and excluded only managerial personnel. Members were required to pay a one-dollar initiation fee, dues of one dollar a year to the national union, and local dues fixed by each lodge. In return, the ARU proposed to protect its members' pay scales and work schedules, lobby for sympathetic legislation, publish a weekly paper and monthly magazine, and create a low-premium insurance program.

In many respects the ARU strongly resembled the existing railroad brotherhoods and the AFL affiliates – in the services and protection it offered its members (and in its lily-white constitution, which Debs later claimed to have opposed), but the idea of organizing all the workers in the railroad industry in a single union was a challenge (and a threat), both to the brotherhoods and to the trade union concept on which the AFL was building.

The ARU's early, rapid growth would have been impressive at any time during the late 19th century, but in the context of the American economy in 1893 and 1894 – thousands of bankruptcies, hundreds of thousands of men and women (and children) out of work, bread lines, marches on Washington for relief, all the misery that followed the "Panic of 1893" – the new union's growth was astonishing. By Christmas 1893 charters had been

issued to nearly 100 lodges, whose memberships were made up of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers recruited in part from the existing brotherhoods and among the much larger body of workers who had never been included in the brotherhoods or who had been thrown out of work by the thousands as the Panic spread. Debs was able to keep four full-time organizers on the new union's payroll and in January 1894 he told his brother, Theodore, that he and the organizers were signing up to three to four hundred new members each day. On January 1, 1894, the union's paper, *Railway Times*, began publication, providing Debs with a weekly channel to the membership and a sounding board for the members' opinions, suggestions and complaints.



Debs and Railroad Workmen (undated)

Perhaps even more astonishing than the rapid growth of the ARU in its first year was the success of the eighteen-day strike it waged on James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad in April, 1894. Hill was acknowledged to be one of the shrewdest and most ruthless operators in an industry in which competition for such recognition was keen, and the decision by the fledgling union to challenge him was a risky one. In a "confidential" letter to the leaders of the ARU locals on the Great Northern, dated April 16, 1894, Debs noted the "sweeping reductions of wages,... the scheme to discharge our leaders, ... and to reduce the men on the Great Northern to a horde of slaves" and urged the locals to "get together promptly, organize thoroughly and stand up and be men." To Hill, Debs wrote that the ARU "embraces the large majority of the employees on the Great Northern System" and urged Hill to negotiate "the existing difficulties" so that the strike could be quickly brought to an end. Following an exchange of letters and a series of meetings between Debs

and Hill, a meeting was arranged for May 1, to be held in Minneapolis at which Debs and Hill's representatives presented their positions to a committee of Minneapolis-St. Paul businessmen, headed by milling tycoon Charles A. Pillsbury. The settlement that emerged from the meeting, the *New York Times* reported, "gave the strikers nineteen-twentieths of their demands," including Hill's agreement to restore the 10 percent wage cuts made during the previous year. Acknowledging that "no case of malicious injury to the property [of the Great Northern] has turned up," Hill further agreed that "there will be no prejudice on the part of management against any particular employee... who has taken part in the adjustment of the affair." The successful, non-violent conclusion of the "affair" confirmed for Debs the efficacy of industrial unionism and, as a by-product, elevated him to national prominence and recognition.

Flushed with the victory of the Great Northern strike the delegates to the ARU's first national convention in Chicago in June 1894 adopted resolutions in support of the desperate striking workers at George Pullman's Palace Car Company and "model city." The resulting Pullman Strike (or "Debs' Rebellion") of 1894, its fatal consequences for the ARU, and its profound effects on Debs's career will be treated in a later issue of the *Newsletter*.

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Citings With Social Relevance

GET OFF MY BACK! "A veteran returning from Korea went to college on the GI Bill; bought his house with an FHA loan; saw his kids born in a VA hospital; started a business with an SBA loan; got electricity from the TVA, and later water from an EPA project. His parents retired to a farm on social security, got electricity from REA and soil testing from USDA. When the father became ill, the family was saved from financial ruin by Medicare and a life was saved with a drug developed through NIH. His kids participated in the school lunch program, learned physics from teachers trained in an NSF program and went through college with guaranteed student loans. He drove to work on the Interstate and moored his boat in a channel dredged by Army engineers. When floods hit, he took Amtrak to Washington to apply for disaster relief, and spent some time in the Smithsonian Museums. Then one day he wrote his Congressman an angry letter asking the government to get off his back and complaining about paying taxes for all those programs created for ungrateful people."

Sen. Fritz Hollings in *Seeds* magazine

So what can you buy with the wages in Mexico? To earn enough money to buy a half gallon of milk a worker in Reynosa would have to work an hour and a half. If we assume a half gallon of milk costs two dollars in the US, a Levi's worker can earn enough to buy it in only 18 minutes. To buy 500g of coffee they would have to work three and a half hours. If we assume coffee costs \$3.50 in the US, then it would take only a half an hour for the Levi's worker. For a pound of beef Mexicans would have to work five and a half hours; again in America, a Levi's worker would get that same pound of beef in about 40 minutes.

Lacher in *Socialist*, July/August '93

ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET TERRE HAUTE

November 6

1993

Honoring
Dolores Huerta

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Afternoon

3:30 p.m. Debs' ARU: Railroaders and their Unions Then and Now, Holmstedt Hall 102, ISU Campus

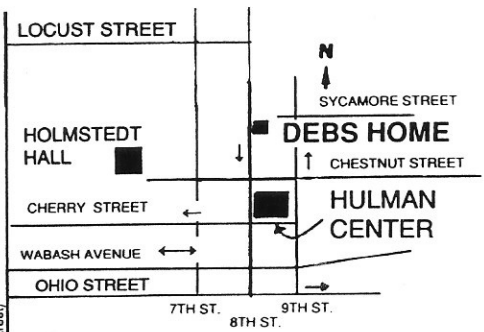
Evening

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 Dolores Huerta

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

The fall business meeting will be Sunday, November 7,
at 9:00 a.m. at the Debs Home



DEBS HOME

451 N. 8th St.

Parking south of Home

Enter from Sycamore or 8th

Persons entering Terre Haute from North
may take Locust St. to 8th, then south.

*Hulman Center Parking
is free, across street west.
Enter thru west doors.*

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 _____

_____ X \$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.

From the Mailbox...

All sorts of mail are directed to P.O. Box 843, Terre Haute. There are requests for scholarship information (only students at ISU are eligible), inquiries regarding memorabilia or books, catalogues for museum supplies, and on and on. There are inquiries regarding some facet or event in Debs' life – was he in a certain city on a given date, did he correspond with a certain individual, or requesting permission to publish a given photograph. All these fit into the scheme of things as regards the *raison d'être* for the Debs Foundation. Naturally, some types of mail have special meanings. One obviously is dues payments and donations. Another involves personal notes of appreciation and support for the foundation's work. Excerpted here are examples of one rewarding type of mail, and an example of tedious museum work.

First the Personal Notes:

Jacobs to King, June 1993

As usual your recent report was very informative. The Debs heritage is more relevant today than at any time since the New Deal era, when we had a glimpse of the "promised land," when the search of social and economic justice was the national agenda.

At 85, I have now retired from my 60 year labor law practice. My memories of the Terre Haute General Strike are still vivid. My \$100 dues contribution is enclosed.

Cordially, Joe Jacobs.

Shadduck to King, May 1993

Enclosed is my \$25 contribution to a memorial in his Hoosier home to his longlasting struggles, not without errors, for industrial unionism and peace among all workers everywhere.

I also wish to note that my husband – Lenn Shadduck, now deceased, stood with the Reuther brothers... in the Flint Sitdown Strike... Norman Thomas and Franklin Roosevelt led the great thirties struggle. So many more brave and patient folks never

stopped working for real industrial unionism and longlasting peace. None of us youngsters at the time fully realized how long we would have to walk and work for such a sublime goal.

Sincerely, Ms. Louis Shadduck

Some Nitty-Gritty of Museum Work

King to Lewis, July 1993

This communication is in response to the June 25, 1993 letter from Melinda Young Frye... Who am I going to believe! The foundation's bust of Debs done by M.W. Dykaar was given to us by the ILGWU, ... A clipping of an article in Forward, the liberal, New York-based Jewish newspaper which printed in Yiddish and in English, accompanied the bust. This article mentions the exhibition... carries a photo of Dykaar... gazing at the Debs bust... identifies the artist as "Michael Weiner Dykaar." I must confess that I do not consider Michael to be a typical first name for a Russian born Jew... If you are reasonably certain that your records are correct... please make the proper corrections in your records.

Sincerely yours, Charles D. King

Lewis to King, July 1993

Thank you very much for your letter of July 1. It is amazing how many variant names can appear regarding artists, isn't it?... I searched... you will notice one or two variant names in these articles also... since you felt it was possible that your source of information may have misprinted..., we will adjust our records to read Moses Dykaar instead of Michael Dykaar.

Thanks again... it is due to the interest of the people such as yourself that our records are kept up-to-date and correct.

Sincerely, Ann Lewis

NOTE: Ann Lewis is an assistant coordinator in the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 843

Terre Haute, Indiana 47808-0843

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