

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

PO BOX 9454 ■ TERRE HAUTE INDIANA 47808-9454



FALL 2018

William "Bill" Lucy to Receive 2018 Debs Award



2018 Award Recipient
William "Bill" Lucy

Fifty years ago in Memphis, Tennessee, **Bill Lucy**, then the director of legislative and community affairs for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), was a key leader of the sanitation workers striking for safe, healthy working conditions and higher wages. In coordination with the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Poor People's Campaign, the union strikers exposed the de facto segregation of job opportunities in the South in 1968 and confirmed the strength and power to be gained from combining their fight with the domestic civil rights movement and the global struggle to end the war in Vietnam. In the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. King, Bill helped to lead the strike to a successful resolution.

After growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, in the 1950's Bill worked as a materials and research engineer for Contra Costa County and was active in AFSCME Local 1675, becoming its President in 1965. The next year he went to Washington, D.C., to join the staff of the International Union. The events in Memphis galvanized Bill's commitment to national and international political action utilizing the trade union movement as a platform to accomplish fundamental change.

In 1972, Bill was elected Secretary-Treasurer of AFSCME, a position that he held until his retirement in 2010. 1972 was the year that George Meany, then President of the AFL-CIO, announced that the Federation would be "neutral" in the forthcoming election between Richard Nixon and George McGovern. Many union leaders and members found that to be disgraceful. One outcome was that Bill and a grouping of fellow high ranking activists founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) and he became its first President. The organization exposed the inherent racism in much of the union movement of that time, fought segregation in the workplace and formed coalitions with other progressive organizations. CBTU continues to be a critical component in 2018 as workers and their unions face unprecedented attacks by a hostile administration and its Congressional lackeys. Bill also co-founded the Free South Africa Movement, a grassroots organization that developed support in the United States for the overthrow of apartheid.



Memphis Sanitation Workers Picketing in 1968
with the Iconic "I Am a Man" Slogan.

The legacies of Gene Debs and Bill Lucy are closely intertwined. One hundred years after Gene's speech in Canton, Ohio, and fifty years after Bill's courageous leadership in Memphis, we must now continue to accelerate the achievement of freedom and justice for all.

Clayola Brown to Present 2018 Debs Award

The 2018 Debs Award will be presented to Bill Lucy by his longtime colleague and friend, **Clayola Brown**.

Beginning as a sewing machine operator in Charleston, South Carolina, (where she and her mother were active in an organizing campaign), Clayola has devoted a lifetime to advancing the causes of all workers with special emphasis on civil rights, the rights of women, and the right to organize into unions. She has been the President of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute since 2004 and is an International Vice President of Workers United (an affiliate of SEIU). Clayola received the Debs Award in 2012.



Clayola Brown, 2012 Debs Award Recipient
Will Present this Year's Award

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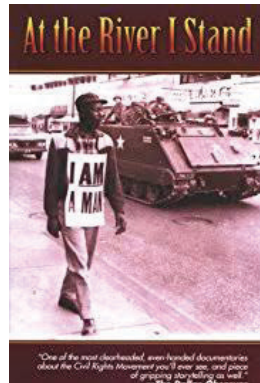
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The Debs Foundation Newsletter is published twice yearly for distribution to supporters and friends of the Foundation. The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a non-profit, private organization which maintains the home of Eugene and Kate Debs as a museum 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 supporters, a donation form is provided elsewhere in this issue.

Film Screening: "At the River I Stand"



"At the River I Stand" is an outstanding, award winning documentary film that traces the first two months of the 1968 sanitation workers strike in Memphis, Tennessee. The film examines the connection between economics and civil rights and highlights the debates between leaders over tactics and strategies for creating social change.

As part of our activities on October 20, the film will be shown at 2pm at the Events Center at ISU's Cunningham Memorial Library. The film is an hour and will be followed by the comments of Bill Lucy and an opportunity for discussion with Bill by members of the audience.

Banquet Musical Performance by the Shelby Bottom Duo

This fall, we are again glad to continue the tradition of the best in labor music at our annual banquet: The **Shelby Bottom Duo**, which continues the tradition of the Shelby Bottom String Band (also formed by August and Levin): entertaining, irreverent social commentary, humanity, and humor. They also delight listeners with some obscure, quirky songs that deserve a wider audience.

Michael August is a songwriter and was the lead singer and rhythm guitarist of Shelby Bottom String Band for 7 years. He has played as a solo fingerstyle guitar act in bars & coffeehouses. He has hosted an acoustic music radio show on WRFN for eleven years.



Nell Levin and Michael August are
The Shelby Bottom Duo

Nell Levin has played with Americana artist Tom Roznowski, Buffalo Gals, Cadillac Cowgirls, Goldrush and bluegrass pioneer Earl Taylor. She was voted Most Promising Female Songwriter by Tennessee Songwriters Association. She was the primary songwriter, fiddler and back-up vocalist for Shelby Bottom String Band for 7 years.

Museum Director's Report

Allison Duerk

How is Eugene V. Debs relevant to the average museum visitor in 2018? From his stately Victorian home to his Midwestern sensibilities, to his comradery and courage in speaking truth to power, each guest in the home appreciates unique aspects of Debs' legacy. But simply preserving Debs' house and story is not enough - we also have to prove that his work still matters today. Beginning September 4th, I will host monthly study circles at the Debs Museum with the goal of examining Debs' writings and speeches in their historical context and present-day relevance. More information will soon be available on our Facebook page and website.

Speaking of Debs' words, June 16 marked the centennial of Debs' historic Canton speech that resulted in his sedition conviction and imprisonment. To commemorate the event, the Foundation and Museum hosted a community reading of the speech from the porch of the Debs House. Rather than a single reenactor, over twenty individuals participated in reading short segments of the speech for a crowd of about fifty supporters, bringing Debs' words to life "in our voices." Volunteer **John S. Morahn** and Secretary **Micki Morahn** led a packed Labor History bus tour of Terre Haute on the morning of the speech reading, and board member **Nancy Gabin** provided

the opening remarks printed on page 4. Thank you to everyone who attended or otherwise played a role in making June 16 a successful centennial commemoration.

I am pleased to share the news of two recent additions to the Museum's collection. **Andy Alderton** of Terre Haute donated two gunpowder measures from the home of Eugene Debs' parents. These are now on display in the kitchen along with several other items and furnishings from Debs' childhood home. **Virginia Longyear**, also of Terre Haute, donated a Steiff Teddy bear that once belonged to Marguerite Debs Cooper, Eugene's niece and a charter member of the Debs Foundation. Among the first of its kind, the toy bear has been added to a display of items related to the family of Eugene's brother Theodore Debs. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Longyear and Mr. Alderton for their remarkable contributions to our collection.

Lastly, I owe unending appreciation to the team of volunteers who selflessly give their time and support to ensure uninterrupted daily operations at the Debs Museum. Community members interested in joining our volunteer docent program are welcome to contact me at allison.duerk@debsfoundation.org

Banquet Schedule of Events Saturday, October 20, 2018

10 am | **Labor History Tour leaves from Debs Home.** This tour is free, but reservations are required and limited to the first 13 people. Registration form is on the Foundation website.

11:30 am | **Graveside ceremony at Highland Lawn Cemetery,** East Wabash Ave in Terre Haute, to honor Eugene and Kate Debs at the conclusion of the Labor History tour, but all are welcome to join.

12 noon | **Rededication of the Debs Birthplace monument.** The marker denoting the location of Eugene V. Debs' birthplace on North 4th Street, ½ block north of Chestnut, was removed for construction of the new CHHS building and is being returned to its original location. This event is free and open to the public.

2 pm | **Documentary Film Showing.** ISU Cunningham Memorial Library Events Area. "At the River I Stand" an outstanding, award winning documentary film that traces the first two months of the 1968 sanitation workers strike in Memphis, Tennessee will be shown. The film examines the connection between economics and civil rights and highlights the debates between leaders over tactics and strategies for creating social change. The film is an hour and will be followed by the comments of Bill Lucy and a question and answer session will allow discussion with the audience. This event is free and open to the public. The archives of the Debs Collection will be open after the screening.

6 pm | **Social hour preceding the annual banquet.** Sycamore Banquet Center, 218 N. 6th Street, Terre Haute. Banquet tickets and an area map are available at our website.

7 pm | **Banquet featuring 2018 Debs award recipient William "Bill" Lucy.** The award will be presented by 2012 award winner, Clayola Brown. Banquet tickets required.

**The Eugene V. Debs Foundation
Gratefully Acknowledges
Donations Made in Memoriam:**

**In memory of
Jim Nuttall**

**from Indiana State Pipe Trades
Association Organizers John Kurek,
Salvador Espino, Duane Harty, and
Brian Moreno**

Fall Board Meeting

Sunday, October 21 — 9 am

Hilton Garden Inn • 750 Wabash Avenue
Terre Haute, IN

Secretary's Report

Michelle K. Morahn

It seems every report I have done begins with the same words, "It's an exciting time at the Debs Foundation." After years of dedicated treading water, we are beginning to see some activity towards our goal of bringing the message of Eugene V. Debs to more people. There is a lot of excitement and enthusiasm we haven't seen in a long time.

The watchword for the past few months has been "outreach." This means taking the Foundation message on the road as well as enriching the experience at the Debs home. Presentations were given at the Women's History Month Colloquium at ISU, a talk in the Debs home, and our Debs in Our Voices Day celebration on June 16th. All these events brought in new people and increased our presence in the community. Future events planned include a full slate of activities on October 20, the day of our annual banquet, a table at the events in Woodstock, IL, on November 3rd and 4th commemorating the Pullman Strike, along with items from the house to be displayed, and a presentation on the families of Gene and Kate Debs September 9 at the Historic Poland Chapel, in Poland, IN at 3pm. All of these events are free and open to the public. Some of us are also planning on representing the Foundation by marching in the Labor Day Parade in Terre Haute. Please join us!

If you have any organization who would like to have a guest speaker, please let us know. We have a 40 minute presentation on Gene and Kate Debs' families that provides a lot of insight into the people they were and the influences that shaped their lives. Many know a lot about Gene the labor leader, or Gene the Presidential Candidate, but not as much about his family life. That has been our area of research and the program introduces the "human" side of Gene and Kate. We would love to share this story more, so contact me (michelle.morahn@debsfoundation.org) for details.

To enrich the experience at the Museum, we have hired Browning Day Mullins Dierdorf of Indianapolis, architects who specialize in historic homes to update our house assessment to guide us in setting priorities on restoring the house. We should have their report by the fall board meeting. We have also worked with ISU on re-setting the marker that denotes the birthplace of Gene Debs on 4th Street in Terre Haute. The marker was removed during construction of the new CHHS building. The location won't change, but the new building and landscaping certainly make the marker more prominent. Its rededication is scheduled as part of our Oct 20th activities.

All of this has truly been a collaborative effort. Our website and presence on social media have been greatly enhanced, which make the job of sharing Debs' message even easier to a much more diverse audience. Thanks to **Ben Kite**, **Jeanne Rewa**, and **Allison Duerk** for all their help in spreading the word. And to all the volunteers who have donated time, talent, or treasure to the Foundation, we couldn't do it without you. Let's all dedicate ourselves to spreading Debs' message now more than ever. If you have any suggestions on outreach or programs you would like to see, just contact any of the officers.

Remarks on the Centennial of Debs' 1918 Anti-War Speech

Nancy Gabin

The following remarks were made by Debs Foundation board member Nancy Gabin at the centennial celebration held at the Debs House last June. Nancy is an Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies for the Purdue University Department of History.

It is important to understand the context for Eugene Debs' keynote speech at Ohio's annual Socialist Convention and Picnic one-hundred years ago today. Events before and after June 16, 1918 enhanced and augmented the power and significance of his remarkable speech, one of the most famous protest speeches in American history.

On the day of his speech, the U.S. had been involved in the "Great War" for fifteen months. When the war broke out in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed American neutrality and Americans found themselves divided. Some were sympathetic to one side or the other, some were advocates of neutrality, and some opposed in principle the war and U.S. involvement. But whether they were proponents of neutrality or peace or, like Socialists, critics of the war as a class struggle that sacrificed workers for corporate benefit and greed, anti-war sentiment ran high.

American involvement in World War I provided a great test of Woodrow Wilson's belief that "the world must be made safe for democracy." But rather than bringing Progressivism to other peoples, the war destroyed

(Continued on following page)

Debs' 1918 Speech

(Continued from previous page)

it at home. The government came to view critics of American involvement not simply as citizens with a different set of opinions, but as enemies of the ideas of democracy and freedom. And in turn, the war produced one of the most sweeping repressions of the right to dissent in American history.

As soon as the U. S. entered the war in April 1917, the federal government began to move against persistent critics, particularly the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist Party. The Espionage Act of 1917 prohibited spying and interfering with the draft as well as "false statements" that might impede military success. The postmaster general barred from the mails numerous newspapers and magazines critical of the administration, including virtually the entire socialist press and many foreign-language publications. In May 1918, the Sedition Act further banned "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about the U.S. government, its flag or its armed forces, or that caused others to view the American government or its institutions with contempt. The government charged more than two thousand people with violating these laws. Over half were convicted. The victims included Charles Baker, Charles Ruthenberg and Alfred Wagenknecht — the three leaders of the Ohio Socialist Party whom Debs visited in the Stark County Workhouse before his speech. In his speech, Debs named other victims of government repression, activists who had been harassed, beaten, arrested and imprisoned for their ideas and speech.

The country's leading socialist and labor organizer, and then four-time candidate for President, Eugene Debs was a charismatic and compelling speaker, able to convey the cause of the working-class movement and the vision of socialism

with animation and passion. One thousand socialists, sympathizers, and supporters cheered, applauded, and embraced Debs and his message that day. Debs prefaced his remarks by telling the crowd that he had to be "extremely careful, prudent, as to what I say, and even more careful and more prudent as to how I say it." He added that, "I may not be able to say all that I think; but I am not going to say anything that I do not think." Debs was right to be cautious. While he spoke, federal agents and vigilantes from the Canton chapter of the American Protective League circulated through the crowd. A stenographer hired by the Justice Department took notes on the speech. Hostile reporters, including Clyde Miller from the Cleveland Plain Dealer, also took notes. Based on Miller's report, Edwin Wertz, the federal prosecutor for the district of Northern Ohio, decided to indict Debs under the Espionage Act.

Debs was indicted on June 29, charged that he did, among other things, "unlawfully, willfully and feloniously cause and attempt to cause and incite and attempt to incite, insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny and refusal of duty, in the military and naval forces of the United States." On June 30, as Debs traveled through Cleveland to another speaking engagement, he was arrested and escorted to jail. Released on bail, Debs returned home to Terre Haute. His trial in U.S. District Court in Cleveland began on September 10. Only Debs spoke on his own behalf. He did not dispute the government's account of his speech in Canton or repudiate his views. He denied only that his intent was to aid the imperial government of Germany. Beyond that, he challenged the constitutionality of the Espionage Act's restriction of free speech. On September 12, Debs was found guilty of attempting to incite mutiny, obstruct recruitment and promote the cause of the enemy, and was sentenced to ten years in prison. Debs remained free while

his attorneys appealed the verdict to the U.S. Supreme Court. As he and his followers waited for the court's decision, the First World War ended on November 11, 1918. Despite the war's end, on March 10, 1919, the Supreme Court rejected his appeal.

Debs spent the next thirty-three months incarcerated — first at the West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville, West Virginia, and then at the U.S. Penitentiary in Atlanta. As a massive campaign demanded his pardon, "Convict 9653" ran again for president in 1920, receiving almost one million votes, 3.4 percent of the total. On December 23, 1921, President Warren Harding commuted Debs' ten-year sentence to time served. His health undermined in part by his imprisonment, Debs died in 1926.

Although this is the centenary of Debs' speech, it remains timely and contemporary. Historians continue to debate World War I, but they widely agree that imperial rivalries were a major cause of the outbreak of the war and that economic interests played a significant role in U.S. involvement, as Debs emphasized in his speech. The Sedition Act was repealed in 1921, but much of the Espionage Act remains in effect. Although contested as unconstitutional and repressive, it still is used against dissidents and whistleblowers. Debs' defense of democracy and civil liberties and his challenge to those who equate dissent with treason resonate today. As Ernest Freeberg reminds us, "For Debs' supporters and many historians ever since, his imprisonment has served as a cautionary tale about the way the passions of war can undermine traditional democratic liberties."

References: Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008);

Tom Twiss, "A Speech that Resonates 100 Years Later," <https://socialistworker.org/2018/06/04/a-speech-that-resonates-100-years-later>.

Eugene V. Debs Award Banquet Ticket Order Form

\$43 per ticket, Table of 8 is \$280 ■ Students K-College ½ Price

Purchase Tickets Online at: www.debsfoundation.org

Name _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Please indicate your meal preference: {
Chicken _____
Vegetarian _____
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Tickets must be paid in advance, checks payable to:
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Your reservation will be recorded and honored at the door.

Inquiries may be directed to Benjamin Kite at 202-538-2845, or
by email: banquet-information@debsfoundation.org



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Personal Program Greeting

Name Only \$20.00 _____

Name and Greeting \$30.00 _____

Name(s) and Greeting:

Greetings will appear in the banquet program book, either including your name only or your name and a brief greeting (20 words max). Copies of the program book will be furnished upon request. Greetings must be received by September 15th.

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