

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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



Spring, 1989

April 5th Lecture on Occupational Safety



Dr. Eula Bingham

Health and safety at work will be the topic of the Shubert Seabee Lectures this spring. Dr. Eula Bingham is eminently qualified to speak on the subject. She headed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the Carter Administration, and is in great demand in this country and abroad to speak and to serve on various advisory panels. In addition to her administrative and consulting activities, she has researched and published extensively on health hazards at work, using her professional training in chemistry, biochemistry and biology to study carcinogenic (cancer causing) risks and other dangers in the workplace. Bingham currently is Vice President and Dean for Graduate Studies and Research, and Professor, Environmental Health, College of Medicine, University of Cincinnati. Her appearance in Terre Haute is co-sponsored by the Debs Foundation and Indiana State University's Department of Health and Safety (its Safety Management Program). Lectures will be at 2:00 and 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 5, in ISU's Heritage Ballroom. Both addresses are free and open to the public.

The topic of worker safety is very much in the Debsian tradition. Debs experienced first hand the hazards of railroad work, dangers caused partly by the lack of knowledge and awareness in the new transportation industry, but due also to callous disregard for worker safety on the part of owners. Major train wrecks were all too common, due to collisions, or to collapsed trestles or washed-out roadbeds resulting from cheap construction. The work of switchmen, brakemen and others was fraught with danger, since they had to work in all kinds of weather—wind, rain, ice and snow—in conditions where safety precautions frequently were neglected. A major function of the early brotherhoods was to cope with the heavy toll in injury and death by assisting with burial expenses and in making life insurance affordable. John Laska, when doing research for the scenes for the Third Floor Murals, was impressed by the numerous accounts of injury and death in *Locomotive Fireman's Magazine*, and the many advertisements by brace and limb makers. It was partly because of his mother's deep concern for his safety that Eugene gave up work as a fireman, and returned to Terre Haute to work in the Hulman company's wholesale grocery business.

Workplace safety has improved considerably since then. There is greater awareness and concern, and we do have OSHA and state regulatory agencies. But there is need for improvement and

for constant vigilance to see that gains are not eroded. There always is a question of priorities, for it is obvious that a clean and safe workplace adds to production costs. The problem is of international proportions, for a company can calculate the possibilities of shifting production to a developing nation so desperate for jobs that its government is willing to look the other way concerning occupational hazards which would not be tolerated in North America or Western Europe.

The Safety-Management faculty and students at ISU have planned a Safety Management Awareness Day for Thursday, April 6. They are delighted to share with the foundation responsibility for Dr. Bingham's appearance in Terre Haute, considering her Wednesday afternoon and evening addresses an excellent lead-in to their special day. We expect large and diversified audiences for both speeches. Remember, both are free and open to the public.

The 1988 Banquet

Last year's award banquet honoring Joyce Miller was of the caliber our guests have come to anticipate. Good food, good fellowship, some humor, inspirational and challenging speeches, the opportunity to meet old friends and to make new ones, to share an evening with like-spirited persons. Such an opportunity doesn't come too often. The purpose of the occasion is the same each year, to honor the memory of that great American, Eugene Victor Debs, but a new twist is guaranteed each year by the particular theme which is set by the accomplishments of that year's award recipient. With Joyce Miller being

(continued on page 5)



Ring and Pin Coupling Used Circa 1870.
A Likely Way To Lose Fingers

The Debs Collection At ISU

A major function of the Debs Foundation from the beginning has been the preservation of the history of Eugene Debs. This educational and preservational function has included the acquisition of books, papers, and memorabilia, through the acceptance of donations or by purchase. Except for rare autographed copies, most of the books, magazines and papers are useful for research but not for display purposes. For years the foundation went more or less two ways in strategies to encourage research usage of these materials. One way was to place many of them in the Debs Collection in the Rare Books and Special Collections section of Cunningham Library, Indiana State University. The other was to house many of these materials in the Home and to allow access to them on the premises. This was a practice fraught with problems, the most serious of which were accessibility, security, and preservation. All libraries, even those at theological seminaries, have the problem of stolen books, even with elaborate security provisions. It is unrealistic to assume that the museum curator-tour guide can provide adequate security for situations when a person may wish to spend an extended period of time in our facility for research. Preservation is important for rare, historical documents, and proper preservation requires specially controlled environments for temperature and humidity, conditions found in the rare books area but not in the Debs Home.

The Debs Collection at Cunningham has been growing since the foundation's existence. Many items were made available due to the efforts of foundation members, especially Robert Constantine and Bernard Brommel, and major donations came from Marguerite Debs Cooper and from the library of Oscar Edelman. Both the Debs Collection and the general holdings at Cunningham have been expanded by an aggressive acquisitions policy. For a number of years, as our financial resources have permitted, the foundation has helped underwrite some of the costs of these acquisitions and this service to the public. Thus, these valuable materials now are properly housed, secure, and accessible to serious researchers. The holdings are extensive, too long a list to include here, but include Debs' personal correspondence and papers (in original or in microfilm), bound volumes of **Locomotive Fireman's Magazine**, which Debs edited from 1880 to 1894, and many campaign memorabilia and photographs. The books in the collection now number over 1,500.

An upcoming issue of **Labor History** will be devoted to library collections on labor history, and an article on the Debs Collection at Indiana State University is to be included.

DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Spring

1989

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

Foundation Officers:

Jack Sheinkman, *President*

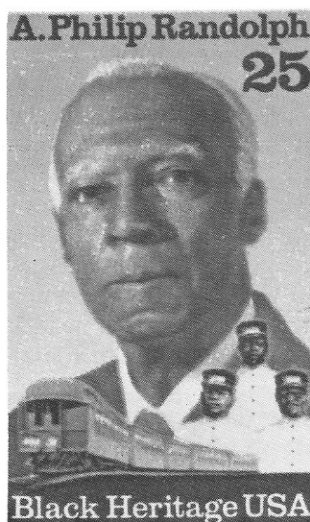
Noel Beasley, *Executive Vice President*

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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.

A. Philip Randolph Commemorated



The 1967 Eugene V. Debs Award recipient was commemorated on a 25 cent stamp in the Black Heritage Series, issued by the U.S. Postal Service in February, 1989. A. Philip Randolph (1889-1979) embarked in 1925 on a campaign to organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. His efforts paid off in 1937 with the first contract signed by a white employer and a black labor leader. In 1963, he directed the famed March on Washington for Jobs and

Freedom, which is best remembered for the historic "I Have A Dream" speech by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The commendatory statement for Randolph at the presentation of the Debs award referred to him as a "Labor Leader, Journalist, Civil Libertarian, Partisan of Peace, Great American." We consider his selection for this honor by the Postal Service highly appropriate. It's also a very attractive stamp!

**Spring
Business Meeting
May 13, 1989
1:00 P.M.
Debs Home**

Debs 100 Years Ago

The Supreme Council: An Early Effort at Federation

The year 1889 was busy and productive for the young, age 35, Eugene Debs. Beginning in 1878, he had served two years as associate editor of the *Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, and as editor. The *Magazine* provided him a medium through which his ideas regarding the direction of the labor movement could be disseminated to a generally receptive audience. His additional title of Grand Secretary of BLF (1880-1892) placed him in a strong position to influence the opinions of members and also to shape the union's policies. Debs was not an on-the-job railroader during these years, but his service as recording secretary for the BLF Vigo Lodge #16—of which he was a charter member in 1875—had put him in personal touch with conditions in the industry. As Grand Secretary and editor throughout the eighties, Debs had worked tirelessly in efforts to organize workers both within and outside the railroad industry. His ties with the rank and file of his own union gained strength from his vigorous efforts to organize scores of BLF locals. He had helped also in the organization of carpenters' and printers' locals in Terre Haute and throughout Indiana, and he assisted in organizing miners' locals in the region. This range of activities gave Debs a prominence in the American labor movement of his day which extended well beyond the BLF.

Debs' commitment to fulltime union affairs in the 1880s came at a crucial time in the history of American labor. The decline of the Knights of Labor as a potential wave of the future was rapid after 1885. There was a public fear of "radicalism" stemming from such incidents as the Haymarket riot of 1886, and equally important was the launching in 1886 of the American Federation of Labor, with its emphasis on pragmatic or "business" unionism. While the Gompers

led AFL was becoming the dominant force among many types of skilled workers, for many railroaders of this time there was a much more real and dynamic leadership among their own ranks in the person of Gene Debs. Under Debs' editorship the *Magazine* had grown in circulation from 3,500 to 28,000, and its readership was by no means confined to the membership of the BLF. As a superb labor organizer he had been instrumental in the increase in BLF membership from 2,000 to nearly 20,000, and had helped launch other brotherhoods in the railroad industry as well. In 1888 the Grand Master of the Brakemen, S. E. Wilkerson, called Debs the "godfather" of the union. The Brakemen, he declared, would "never be able to repay him for what he has done for us and for the benefit of our Brotherhood." This is why the Brakemen, at their 5th Annual Convention, presented Debs a special badge as a "Token of Friendship."

Developments in the year 1889 were to prove symptomatic of the direction which Debs' union leadership would take. Debs had seen and experienced first hand the ability of the railroad management to divide and conquer the brotherhoods when they acted separately in job actions, usually breaking ranks in pursuit of particular interests. Debs became convinced that the remedy for the ineffectiveness of brotherhoods lay in federation. A federation of all railroad brotherhoods could present a united front to management and strengthen all of the unions in their negotiations with management. Although rejected earlier, the BLF in 1888 endorsed the federation idea, and Debs was named as chairman of a three-man committee charged with creating a formal alliance with the other brotherhoods, and in June 1889, 100 years ago, a group of nine men representing the Firemen, the Brakemen, and the

Switchmen met in Chicago and drew up a constitution for the Supreme Council of the United Order of Railway Employees.

Debs worked tirelessly to persuade other railway unions to join the federation. He continued using his editorials in the *Magazine* to popularize the subject. The Supreme Council successfully confronted management on behalf of component unions and won wage and workplace improvements without resorting to strikes. In spite of these early successes, however, in 1892 the council became so split over internal disputes that only two unions sent representatives to the annual meeting, and the dissolution of the Supreme Council was approved. So, much like Debs' later experiences with the American Railway Union—initial success, then tough times and eventual demise—this early effort at federation on the railroads did not last long.

This of course was not the end of Debs' struggle to shape the direction of the American labor movement. The efforts at union consolidation initiated in 1889 were to be tried in different form in just a few years, this time not in a federation, but in one industrial union, the American Railway Union. It was such ideas as these which were to put Debs considerably at odds with the AFL. Debs' cause was that of the unskilled and low skilled workers who were being left out of the craft unions of the AFL of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Historians have viewed Debs as a radical leader, and rightly so, by and large, but who can say what the course of the labor movement would have been without the demonstration effect of these early, so-called "radical" efforts, including the attempt at union federation among railroad brotherhoods which was initiated exactly 100 years ago.

Your Dollars At Work

Money came in ways both regular and nonroutine last year, and worked or went out in ways both regular and special. Income from membership dues and contributions have been moving upward slightly, year by year, and two "nonroutine" sources of income gave a boost in 1988. One source, which we hope to develop into a regular avenue of financial support, was the payments for listings in the greetings section of the banquet program. This money went out partly to defray the costs associated with the banquet, and \$4,500 was sent to the Endowment Fund.

The other nonroutine income was from the estate of the late Marguerite Debs Cooper, Theodore's daughter. Left to the foundation were several items of mens jewelry which had belonged to Theodore, and five shotguns which had belonged either to Theodore or to Gene Daniel, the father. The father and both sons loved to hunt the numerous small game found in the Wabash Valley. As the jewelry had not been associated with Eugene and could present some security problems, it was decided not to display it in the Home. After considerable "dealing," the jewelry items were sold for \$400 (one early offer had been for \$125).

The shotguns were sold for a total of \$5,500, of which \$4,000 was placed in a CD. (Elsewhere in this issue is an article on Debs, guns and the NRA.) When the CD matures this spring, it is expected that a great deal of it will have to go to pay for new guttering and down spouts. For some reason, the old is pulling away from the house, and is pealed, rusted and unsightly. At least \$600 will go for a new window AC unit on the third floor. One of the two units there conked-out right at the end of last year's hot summer.

The treasurer's report shows all these regular and nonroutine ways in which money came in and was used in 1988. On balance, it was not a bad year at all. The negative aspect, where improvement is needed, is the slow pace at which the endowment fund is being added to. We are headed in the right direction, but with a long way to go before the fund is large enough to make financially feasible the hiring of a fulltime person as Museum Director and Curator.

Debs, Education and Social Change

Eugene Debs never went to college, never finished high school for that matter, having quit school at age 14 to earn money to help support the large Debs family of four girls and two boys. But Debs respected education; books were very important to him, and he managed to achieve a more than merely respectable level of self-education. The following, which is excerpted from the **Chronicle of Higher Education** (Feb. 1, 1989) is thought provoking in its suggestion that higher education should prepare students to become social critics and innovators of the types that Eugene Debs, Susan B. Anthony, et. al. were.

"We Deweyans think that the social function of the American colleges is to help the students see that the national narrative around which their socialization has centered is an open-ended one. It is to tempt the student to make themselves into people who can stand to their own pasts as Emerson and Anthony, Debs and Baldwin, stood to their pasts. This is done by help-

ing the students realize that, despite the progress which the present has made over the past, the good has once again become the enemy of the better.

With a bit of help, the students will start noticing everything that is paltry and mean and unfree in their surroundings. With luck, the best of them succeed in altering the conventional wisdom, so that the next generation is socialized in a somewhat different way than they themselves were socialized. To hope that this way will only be *somewhat* different is to hope that the society will remain reformist and democratic, rather than being convulsed by revolution. To hope that it will nevertheless be *perceptibly* different is to remind oneself that growth is indeed the only end which democratic higher education can serve, and also to remind oneself that the direction of growth is unpredictable."

Richard M. Rorty
(emphasis on Debs added)

1988 Financial Report Eugene V. Debs Foundation

Disbursements

Public Service Indiana.....	\$ 1530.45
General Telephone.....	749.54
Terre Haute Gas.....	1223.61
Indiana American Water.....	224.64
Terre Haute Sewage.....	119.21
Illiana Pest Control.....	200.00
U.S. Sprint.....	444.26
Audio Visual Center.....	107.95
ISU Foundation (Scholarships).....	800.00
ISU Library.....	500.00
ISU Division of Printing.....	73.13
City Press.....	3231.51
ISU Hulman Center.....	694.50
Timothy King.....	58.00
Merchant National Bank (savings).....	500.00
Safe Deposit Box.....	14.00
Max All Construction.....	2111.95
Brandon Sign Co.....	45.00
Hemminghouse Signs.....	294.00
Indiana Dept. of Revenue.....	39.32
Richard A. Cloward (Spann Award).....	187.50
Service Merchandise (Hoover cleaner).....	138.94
Bunch Nurseries, Inc.....	46.95
House and garden supplies.....	237.23
Highsmith Company.....	39.13
Macksville Station.....	250.00
University Products Inc.....	74.50
Mailing & Packing Center.....	119.00
American Fire & Safety.....	13.75
Markle Insurance Agency.....	1029.00
Mike Lanke (photography).....	112.50

Jack Newfield (Spann Award).....	750.00
Harper & Row.....	157.25
Cornell University Press.....	121.75
Vigo Security.....	20.00
Pat Compton.....	40.00
Viquesney's Office Supply.....	21.00
Tracie Patterson.....	20.00
Indian Acres Deli & Catering.....	2685.00
Pathfinder Press.....	125.40
Cambridge Documentary Films.....	54.00
Conservatory of Music.....	75.00
Heinl's Flower Shop.....	50.00
Debs Endowment Fund.....	4500.00
CD Merchants National Bank.....	4000.00
U.S. Post Office.....	691.55
Total.....	\$28,520.52

Receipts

Sale of Shotguns.....	\$ 5,500.00
Sales of Memorabilia and books.....	1052.19
Membership dues.....	3,500.00
Ads in dinner program.....	7,000.00
Dinner tickets.....	5,700.00
Hilton Hanna Family.....	400.00
Contributions (includes Spann Award).....	1,449.73
Total receipts.....	\$24,661.92

Plus Beginning Balance.....	6,056.34
Grand Total.....	\$30,718.26
Less Disbursements.....	28,580.52
Balance Dec. 31, 1988.....	\$2,197.74
Savings Account balance.....	\$780.10

(1988 Banquet continued from page 1)

honored, the theme was women at work and the family.

An afternoon colloquium on problems at work was well attended and informative. In a discussion of problems facing women who work, Joyce Miller was joined on the panel by Betty Foster, Mary Humble and Ruth Needleman. The discussions fitted together as though their parts had been rehearsed. It helps, of course, when the speakers know their subjects and have feelings about the issues. I'm told that audience participation was enthusiastic and it was hard to shut it off so people could leave to get ready for the banquet.

An extra for the 1988 banquet was an impersonation of Eugene Debs, a recitation of excerpts from his speeches, by Gene Frazier, local businessman, city councilman and actor. The presentation speech was by Jim Jontz, newly re-elected congressman from Indiana's 5th Congressional District. Jontz won re-



Miller speaks



Depperts, Jontz, Miller, Beasley

election against the odds in Republican Indiana, and survived handily his challenger's efforts to "color" him with a Willie Horton imagery by calling attention to Jontz's open avowal of Gene Debs as his hero. Joyce Miller's acceptance speech was a thoughtful declaration of the challenges and unfinished agendas held in common by the three major organizations represented by the banquet guests: the Debs Foundation, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (of which she is President), and the AFL-CIO (of which she is a Vice President and Executive Council member).

Many individuals deserve credit for a job well done when an event of this magnitude goes off smoothly. Back of the afternoon program lay the planning efforts of Don Scheiber and Pete Culver, and Carolyn Toops served as host. Curators Jeff and Lisa Witt were busy showing visitors through the Home right up until time to rush to the banquet hall to set up display tables.

We already are planning for this year's banquet, which will be either November 4 or 11. We don't claim to make each year's event bigger and better, just each one the best.

**REMINDER: Are Your
1989 Dues Paid?**

**WE NEED
YOUR FINANCIAL
SUPPORT**

Membership Dues: The Eugene V. Debs Foundation

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

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

(Amount)

Enclose remittance. Make checks payable to the Debs Foundation.

The Debs Foundation

P.O. Box 843

Terre Haute, IN 47808

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

(Eugene Debs continued from page 6)

Roosevelt, Taft, Westinghouse, et al.—and wrote: "But barring Roosevelt, who, as a soldier made a record to make angels weep, there is not another member in the entire bunch who ever smelt powder outside of a barber shop... not one of them would dream of making rifle-fodder of himself." He summed his feelings with the following:

If the plutocrats and their retainers and mercenaries want to organize a National Rifle Association to cultivate the art of human slaughter, let them do so, but certainly no workingman with a glimmer of intelligence will be caught in the trap baited with their patriotic bunc. (sic)

Let the murder advocates carry on their vicious propaganda in the name of perverted patriotism, if they will; we shall not be deceived by it, and while they are attempting to sow the seed of hate in the mind of childhood and to glorify the lust to kill, we shall do our utmost to teach the youth of the land that a system that has to be upheld by murder should be overthrown and a new system established in which there are no warring class interests, no incentive to bloodshed, and in which men will love and serve one another instead of maiming and murdering one another as they are now taught to do as their patriotic duty by the National Rifle Association of America. (excerpted from *The National Rip-Saw*, Nov., 1915)

Eugene Debs, Guns and the NRA

Gene Debs was against war, he advocated nonviolence, and he loved to hunt! He occasionally wrote his brother, Theodore, to "get old Babe ready, I'll be home this weekend." Babe was Theodore's hunting dog, a pointer. Both boys learned hunting from their father. A typical Sunday morning for Eugene would have included, not church, but an outing to hunt mushrooms or the small game and birds which abounded in the Wabash Valley. This would have been followed, often, by family dinner and a discussion lead by the father of the writings of Hugo, Voltaire or Paine. With this family background, it should come as no surprise that five shotguns were in the estate of the late Marguerite Debs Cooper, Theodore's daughter, and that Marguerite would leave these to the Debs Foundation.

These guns had been used by Theodore or the father, Jean Daniel. One was an inexpensive and worn American made gun. The others were of European make, old, but in good condition. Most interesting and valuable was a shotgun made in London, in 1903, ID no. 1053, by Henry Atkin. Company records show that it was one of two guns made for a Mr. Patterson of Philadelphia. Henry Atkin had been a Purdey gunsmith in the last century, who eventually went out on his own. Both companies still exist

and produce only fine, custom-made guns; the difference is that a Purdey sells for about twice the price of the Henry Atkin. Still in excellent condition, this gun eventually was placed (sold) with an out-of-town collector for \$4,000. Three of the guns were antiques of French make, fine but not expensive guns, one of which was a muzzleloader. They were black powder guns, with beautiful Damascus-twist barrels. They make attractive display pieces, but require proper security and a fitting setting. The executive officers felt that the Debs Home did not meet either of these requirements. Our insurance premiums are high enough as it is! We were able to sell these antiques for \$1,500, with the understanding that they will be displayed on an upper floor of the Terre Haute First National Bank.

This placement of these French-made guns has an interesting historical twist. Jean Daniel Debs immigrated to Terre Haute from the Alsace area of France, and the muzzleloader is old enough to have been brought over with him. His occasional hunting partner was a business friend, Herman Hulman, who founded a business empire which expanded to include wholesale groceries, Clabber Girl Baking Soda, railroads, printing, and the Terre Haute First National

Bank. Thus, it is entirely possible that the French made guns were used by Jean Daniel on hunting trips with Herman Hulman. It is gratifying that we were able to place these guns in a way which was profitable for the Foundation and which at the same time kept in Terre Haute these artifacts from Wabash Valley history.

Debs did love to hunt, but was he a gun lover of the type which sets policy for the National Rifle Association? Definitely not! Would he have defended on constitutional grounds every American's right to own any and every kind of firearm, including even assault weapons of the AK 47 variety, arguing that every man is part of the "citizen army" which may have to use such weapons to defend the country? Absolutely not! As was his style, Debs was not timid in expressing his views on the subject. Writing in 1915, he apparently was not impressed with NRA claims to represent the sportsmen of America. He was concerned, rather, that the newly founded NRA was, with its advocacy of the constitutional right of an arms-bearing "citizen army," contributing to the war frenzy which was sweeping the U.S. into the European war. He referred to the illustrious list of life members of the IRA as plutocrats—mentioning Elihu Root,

(continued on page 5)

EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION

P.O. BOX 843

TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA 47808

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