

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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

SPRING, 1994

## DEBS PARLOR CHAIR DONATED



For a historical museum such as the Debs Home it is highly desirable to have furniture and a host of other items which fit the period; the ultimate is to have originals. Descendants of the Debs family have over the years been generous in the donation of numerous items of priceless worth to the Debs Museum: such memorabilia as letters, campaign materials, trophies, photos, and personal items, even dishes and furniture. Recently another valuable accession came in the form of a chair in which Debs is seated in the above photograph. The young man seated with Kate and Eugene in the parlor is Howard Debs Selby, a nephew. The gift came from Peter Sargent, of Portland, Oregon, whose mother (Kathryn Sargent Barry) was the daughter of Cecilia Bauer Martin. The Bauers were Kate's family. Mr. Sargent sent also a scrapbook which had belonged to Kate, which contains obituaries of Eugene from various

newspapers and a couple of letters and photographs. Several of the items shown in the photo above are in the possession of Mr. Sargent's family and will be given to the foundation in the future.

Unfortunately but not surprisingly, the chair now is minus the upholstery, but the wood frame is in good condition. Restoration and upholstery work likely will not be undertaken until we have all the pieces in the suite. Then, visitors passing through the parlor can be told that this is not just furniture of the period, it actually belonged to Kate and Eugene Debs.

Spring Business  
Meeting  
April 30, 1:00 p.m.  
at the Debs Home

## Pullman Strike Conference at ISU

No two years in Debs life were more important than 1893 and 1894. These were the years which saw the A.R.U. formed, which demonstrated amazing organizing success and one highly successful strike (against the Great Northern), and the disastrous "boycott" against the Pullman Car Company. For Debs they represented crowning success and fruition of dreams, then frustration and dashed hopes and a career change from union leader to political activism. The foundation last year commemorated the founding of the A.R.U. and this is the year for centenary activities relative to the historic Pullman Strike.

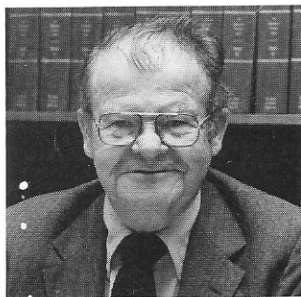
The foundation is planning appropriate activities in conjunction with the award banquet November 5. You also will be interested to know that on September 23-24, 1994 Indiana State University is sponsoring a national conference of scholars, teachers, trade unionists, students, and members of the public to commemorate the Pullman Strike. The conference has the theme: "Labor, Politics, and the State in the 1890s." No doubt many of the sessions will be of particular interest to Debs Foundation members.

At a banquet on Friday evening **Professor Nick Salvatore**, the major biographer of Debs, will deliver an address on Debs; at lunch on Saturday a slide show will be given on the Pullman Strike; later, **Professor David Montgomery**, one of this country's most eminent labor historians, will give a public address on the place of the Pullman Strike in American history. Among the 35 papers that will be delivered will be discussion of: Debs and the Socialist Party, the transformation of class relations in Terre Haute in the 1890s, and how to teach and study about the Pullman Strike.

Admission charges for interested members of the public will be nominal (the conference is funded by the Indiana Humanities Council). A more detailed schedule of events will be available later. For more information contact: Richard Schneirov, Department of History, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47809.

## JIM WOLFE:

### *Longtime Foundation Friend Dies*



James E. Wolfe was for many years a regular at foundation award banquets and business meetings, and he served unofficially as liaison for the foundation with the Molders Union. In 1987 Jim was honored by the foundation with the Theodore Debs Distinguished Service Award.

He passed away February 26 after a heart attack. He is survived by his wife, Mary, a son, daughter and granddaughter. Such adjectives as brilliant, intense, knowledgeable, friendly and involved were used to describe this labor organizer and educator. And who could not be impressed with his keen sense of humor.

Jim Wolfe became a dues paying union member in 1937, with the National Federation of Post Office Clerks, and he held office first in that union. He worked for the Kentucky Federation of Labor and the United Brewery Workers before becoming Research and Education Director for the International Molders and Allied Workers Union. Jim had been hampered in his activism somewhat in recent years by arthritis, although he still kept busy in local politics and especially as secretary of the Silvis Society. When sending lengthy biographical material which could be used at the time of the 1987 award Jim wrote: "You can cut it all out and say I am a labor-liberal activist (radical?)."

## Electronic Access to Debs Letters

(From Cunningham Library Newsletter, May, 1993)

The Rare Books and Special Collections Department is currently in the process of producing online abstracts of more than 4,000 letters in its Debs Collection, which were sent by or to Eugene V. Debs or his brother, Theodore, or which directly concerned the Debs brothers. In this collection are original letters from famous persons such as George Bernard Shaw, Helen Keller, Upton Sinclair, Edgar Lee Masters, Bertrand Russell and many others. The letters cover the period 1874-1955 and are a gold mine of primary source material for American social history.

Having the abstracts, which currently are available through a typed card index system, accessible through electronic retrieval will mean that a patron can search by key words such as geographic entities, personal names in the body of the abstracts, organizations, etc., and find citations almost instantly – hardly possible with the printed card index system.

The original abstracts were done in the 1970s by Robert Carter, Reference Librarian in the Department. The process of placing the abstracts online is now half complete.

## DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Spring 1994

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.

## Major Contributions In 1993

We value all dues payments and contributions, but sometimes it perhaps is appropriate to give recognition to those who make the more substantial contributions to the Debs Foundation. Listed here, hopefully with none overlooked, are those who in 1993 gave one hundred dollars or more:

Communications Workers of America	John J. Sweeney
Frank D. Garrison	Max & Sylvia Wohl
Indiana State AFL-CIO	United Food & Commercial Workers Union
Joe Jacobs	Local 700
George J. Kourpias	United Steelworkers of America
Gordon P. MacDougall	United Mine Workers of America District 11
David J. Rathke	United Auto Workers Local 662
Bessie D. Redmond (in memory of her husband Samuel Redmond)	Kurt Vonnegut
Richard R. Renner	Wabash Valley Central Labor Council
Bert Rose	
Ben Ross	
David C. Spencer	

Another class of contributors are those who place greetings in the award banquet program, which in 1993 included the following:

Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union  
American Postal Workers Union  
American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees Union  
Communications Workers of America, District 4  
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers  
International Ladies Garment Workers Union  
Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Union  
Service Employees International Union  
United Automobile Workers Local 662  
United Automobile Workers Region 3 CAP Council  
United Steelworkers of America  
United Transportation Union

## THE A.R.U., "DEBS'S UNION" Part II

by J. Robert Constantine

In the last issue of the newsletter an attempt was made to trace the conditions and factors which led Debs to abandon the conservative trade unionism he had advocated with striking success during the 1880's and to adopt the idea of industrial unionism. That evolution led in June, 1893 to the founding of the American Railway Union which from the outset attracted thousands of members from the ranks of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled railroad workers and from the growing thousands of other workers who were victims of the depression which followed the Panic of 1893. By the Spring of 1894 the new union claimed nearly 150,000 members, whose cohesion and discipline were first tested in a strike against James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad in April 1894. In less than three weeks a negotiated settlement of the strike, which had been notably non-violent throughout its course, was viewed as an impressive victory for the A.R.U. and was for Debs a confirmation of the efficacy of industrial unionism and, as a by-product, elevated him to national prominence and recognition.

The triumph of the A.R.U. in the Great Northern strike in April-May 1894 was followed almost immediately by its fatal-albeit idealistic-decision in June 1894 to support the workers on strike at George Pullman's Palace Car Company at Pullman, Illinois. Meeting in Chicago at the union's first national convention, more than 400 delegates, representing 465 A.R.U. lodges and 150,000 members and buoyed by the successes of the past 12 months, agreed to organize a "sympathy boycott" of Pullman cars on all the roads served by the A.R.U. membership. Debs cautioned the delegates against undertaking such a major project on the heels of the Great Northern strike, but he shared their sympathy for the hopeless and brutal conditions of the workers and their families living under the "tender mercies" of George Pullman's "model city," which a contemporary described as similar to living in "Bismarck's Germany" (a comparison which may have slandered Bismarck). Some of the Pullman workers had joined the A.R.U. (secretly) and several appeared at the convention to explain their reasons for going on strike in May 1894: in response to the depression which followed the "Panic of 1893" Pullman had drastically cut wages, fired many workers, and announced a policy that maintained the various costs, fees and rents charged the workers at their pre-depression levels, all of which would make it possible to continue to declare a dividend for investors in the Palace Car Company. The A.R.U. delegates were told also of the genuine hunger and desperation of the Pullman workers and of the ordinary indignities of daily life there: a network of spies who monitored the press and the pulpit and the political life of the residents, the relentless search for "agitators," the compulsory patronage of the company stores, and the like.

The A.R.U.'s "sympathy boycott" became the "Pullman Strike," perhaps the most famous strike in American history. It was called "Debs's Rebellion" by segments of the contemporary press which from the outset was nearly unanimous in its support of George Pullman and in its denunciation of the new union. As noted, Debs had been lukewarm toward a strike at that particular juncture, but once the decision was made he entered whole-heartedly into its planning and prosecution. In a matter of days in late June

1894 the strike paralyzed much of the commerce in the western two-thirds of the nation, typing up the economic life of twenty-seven states and territories. Indicative of the thoroughness of the strike action was one incident in which the widow of Leland Stanford, on July 1, 1894, wired Debs in Chicago from California requesting his permission to move her private railroad car from Dunsmuir to San Francisco. Debs granted Mrs. Stanford's request and assured her that a copy of his telegram to her would be accepted by the A.R.U. men in California as authorization to service the car.

Despite Debs's repeated admonitions to the A.R.U. men and assurances to the public that the Pullman boycott was to be orderly and nonviolent, most of the press described it as the outbreak of class warfare and portrayed Debs as an ambitious dictator and "czar" who sought to destroy an already shaky economic system. At the same time the owners of the railroad were determined that the A.R.U.'s success in the Great Northern strike not be repeated. United in the General Managers Association, a coalition of all the railroads running in and out of Chicago, the Association found powerful allies in President Grover Cleveland, grown even more conservative since his first term in office (1885-1889), and Attorney General Richard Olney, a longtime attorney for railroads in the East. On July 2, Olney secured from the federal district court in Chicago a blanket injunction against Debs and other officers of the A.R.U., enjoining them from "interfering with mail trains and interstate commerce;" hundreds of special marshals were deputized to monitor compliance with the injunction (and, Debs said, to create countless confrontations with the men on strike, leading to most of the violence and destruction of property which occurred along the lines). On July 4 Cleveland, ignoring the vigorous protests of Illinois Governor John Altgeld and citing his constitutional obligation to protect the mails and interstate commerce, mobilized federal troops in Chicago, Los Angeles, and trouble spots in between, and the troops were immediately called upon to protect, not only the mails and interstate commerce, but the thousands of replacements for the striking A.R.U. members. "Hit with soldiers, marshals, and injunctions," a recent historian concluded, "the union never had a chance." By late July the Pullman strike was over. Following the formalities of a trial for violation of the federal injunction and appeal procedures, Debs was given a six-month sentence, which he served in the McHenry County Jail at Woodstock, Illinois, about 50 miles from Chicago.

From his jail cell at Woodstock (from June to November 1895) Debs tried to re-group the union and to resume the momentum it had acquired in the pre-strike months. He was "damned near crazy with work," he wrote his brother, Theodore, on October 11, 1895 and a few weeks later told Theodore "we are getting in an average of 130 or 140 new members a week which is not bad." In the *Railway Times* he used his weekly editorials to "fire up the locals" and to plead with the members not to be intimidated by the savage counter-offensive being waged on all the lines against A.R.U. locals.

Following his release from Woodstock at the end of 1895



# 1993 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## Eugene V. Debs Foundation

### Expenditures:

Utilities:	
Indiana Gas Co., Inc.	\$ 1,344.82
Indiana American Water Co.	237.90
PSI Energy	1,423.46
City of Terre Haute (Sewage)	139.00
GTE North	845.08
U. S. Postmaster	715.41
Jewett Printing	4,771.78
ISU Division of Printing	178.25
Terminix International	370.50
Audio Visual	90.00
State of Indiana (Sales Tax)	32.09
Leilani K. Newkirk (Clerical Work)	205.00
Association of Indiana Museums	20.00
All Star Sanitation	65.00
Merchants National Bank (Savings Acct.)	1,887.00
Security System	186.00
Secretary of State	10.00
Inweld Corp.	51.06
Indiana Division of Tourism	143.50
A.D.T.	100.00
Markle Insurance	1,014.00
Annette R. Duke (Spann Award)	500.00
Betty Hyland (Spann Award)	500.00
Meier - Johan - Wengler, Inc.	172.64
Tribune Star	202.52
Steven & Mary Filbert (Refund on Ticket)	50.00
Indiana State (Newspaper)	76.00
Louie Popejoy	100.00
Vintage Transport Service (Chair)	250.00

Azar Catering Service	3,885.00
Edward Asner (Travel)	470.00
Holiday Inn	73.83
ISU Hulman Center	916.00
Heinl's Florist	57.00
Tim King (Work)	15.00
Merchants National Bank (Box)	15.00
Jay McElevey (Projectionist)	12.50
ISU Foundation (Hanna Scholarship)	1,200.00
ISU Library	1,000.00
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$ 23,325.34</b>

### Income:

The Spann Family	\$ 1,000.00
The Hanna Family	400.00
Membership Dues	5,620.00
Dinner Tickets	5,447.50
From Savings Account	2,000.00
Program Ads	7,700.00
House	729.69
Contributions	3,782.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 26,679.19</b>
Balance as of Jan. 1, 1993	\$ 5,061.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 31,740.97</b>
Less Total Expenses	\$ 23,325.34
Balance as of Jan. 1, 1994	\$ 8,415.63
Savings Account	\$ 4,117.00

### Update/Dues Reminder

Dues payments for 1994 were coming in at a fast clip until the kind of "real" winter the old timers talk about hit, then they plummeted. We know you have high utility bills, but so does the foundation. If you have not paid dues or contributed this year, now would be a good time to do it.

#### 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 47808-0843

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 100 Year Ago... cont.

Debs raised funds for the A.R.U. in a series of speaking tours (he had by now become a national celebrity), but all his efforts failed to bring about the union's recovery and at its national meeting in Chicago in June 1897 a handful of delegates agreed to its transformation into the Social Democracy of America, a new body which would try to help the large numbers of blacklisted former A.R.U. men through political action and a somewhat visionary plan to "colonize" and "socialize" a sparsely settled western state or territory.

Debs had by then already announced his conversion to socialism in a January 1, 1897 editorial in *Railway Times*, giving as one of his reasons his belief that the Pullman Strike had demonstrated that in a capitalist system not even a strong industrial union such as the A.R.U. could protect its members' interests. Despite its failure the A.R.U. had a profound and lasting effect on Debs's career. He remained throughout the rest of his life a dedicated industrial unionist and was always ready and eager to lend his support to the growing number of efforts to create such unions after the turn of the century. Debs never forgave Samuel Gompers for what Debs believed was Gompers's failure to come to the aid of the A.R.U. during the Pullman Strike, and in his writings and speeches and private correspondence he listed Gompers as chief among the "fakirs" in the labor movement (Gompers responded by calling Debs "the apostle of failure"). Debs assumed personal responsibility for the A.R.U.'s debts of some \$30,000 (for legal fees, printing, etc.) and for nearly 15 years used part of his income from speaking and writing to liquidate that debt. And for as long as he lived he had a "soft spot for the boys in the A.R.U." Nothing pleased him more on his endless travels than to be greeted by one of a group of the "old boys," including several who were his prison mates in Atlanta following World War I. He kept up a life-long correspondence with a man who had been a lodge leader of the A.R.U. in Minneapolis.

Toward the end of his life, from a sanitarium in Colorado and from his prison cell in Atlanta, Debs wrote a long series of emotional, passionate letters to a Terre Haute woman, Mabel Dunlap Curry. He signed the letters, "Ura," a reversal of the initials of the American Railway Union. Debs died before the full flowering of industrial unionism in New Deal America, but he must surely be credited with planting the seeds and nurturing the early growth of the idea which led in time to union membership for millions in scores of industrial unions.

\*\*\*\*\*

## The 1993 Banquet in Retrospect

The foundation's annual award banquet day is for many of us very special. The focal point is the banquet itself which brings special persons (shall we call them dignitaries) of the types we don't often get to meet and hear in person. We usually manage to make the dinner program educational and inspirational (this year it was assisted with Louie Popejoy's picking and singing). The 1993 banquet was the occasion to honor the life work of a courageous and dedicated union leader, Dolores Huerta, and also to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the American Railway Union.

An afternoon commemorative and educational program was well attended and with an excellent response. Two railroad union leaders—President G. Thomas DuBose and Patrick Simmons of the United Transportation Union—made us aware that the conditions of railroad workers today, while far superior to conditions in Debs day, are continuously and alternately nibbled at and assaulted by management. Professor Rick Schneirov's presentation focused on the historical context socially, economically and legally in which labor and management operated in turn of century America.

Banquet speakers Ed Asner and Dolores Huerta were in excellent form when they took over the mike. Accomplished actor and public speaker that he is, Ed

knows how to work an audience and he has a message worth hearing. In addition to his astute commentary on American social and political life, he spoke movingly and in some detail of the contributions Dolores Huerta has made both to the union movement and to civil rights causes. He referred to Huerta as "the Mother Theresa of the labor movement."

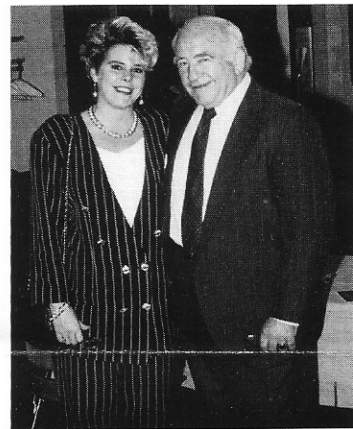
Award recipient Huerta is no mean public speaker herself. She spoke with eloquence and spirit of the struggles of the people she has worked to bring empowerment and social justice. She clearly is committed that the union which she and Cesar Chavez helped build will move ever forward in its drive to more effectively represent the cause of farm workers. Reflecting on the union since Cesar's death she quoted his statement once to the effect that "if I thought this union could not survive without me, I would not work one hour to build it." Huerta also reminded us that the plight of farm workers is intimately interwoven with the health and well being of all of us. The same pesticides which endanger the lives of farm workers become residue on the fruits and vegetables we eat. Not surprisingly, both speakers were interrupted numerous times with applause, and both were most gracious to give time to visit with guests and to sign autographs.



*Huerta makes a point.*



*Asner presents the Award.*



*Ed poses with a fan.*

## What Would Debs Say?

Eugene Debs was not timid in expressing his opinions and was right on the mark with much that he had to say. What would he have to say today about the widening gap between the rich and the poor in this country and around the world? Or about the millions in America who cannot afford to get sick or have a toothache? You know that Debs would express forcefully the injustice and basic immorality of a social system which allows these conditions to exist and even to worsen. But here is a tough one: what would Debs say when venerable, mainline unions join the tobacco companies in campaigns to axe the Clinton proposed 75

cent tax hike on cigarettes? You have to consider that Debs was a smoker, at least he had a collection of pipes, but it would appear that he was more attracted to the bottle than to tobacco (both were often considered among the necessary "social" skills of a public figure). But one must also consider that in Debs' time there was no documented scientific evidence of a link between smoking and lung cancer and heart disease. Neither was the tobacco industry benefiting from huge government subsidies. Debs just likely would take note of all these factors. He might also ask if among the "expenditure induced sectors" (estimated to lose 192,000 jobs) which are mentioned in the ad campaigns as threatened if the tobacco industry is hit with

*Continued on page 6*

## Labor History Society Award

Eugene Debs was officially inducted into the "Union Hall of Honor by the Illinois Labor History Society at its annual dinner November 13, 1993. Initially the dinner had been scheduled for November 6, but was changed in a fine show of cooperation so as to avoid conflict with the Debs Foundation award banquet. The award plaque reads: "A dynamic visionary leader of the 19th Century railroad workers; preeminent spokesman for the socialist labor tradition; beloved by those whose lives he touched." The Illinois Labor History Society was founded in 1969. It is appropriate that Debs would be honored by this statewide Illinois organization exactly 100 years after history making events involving Debs took place in that state.

## Its A Good Deal!

Its not an outright steal, but it is a fabulous deal: memberships in the Debs Foundation range from \$5 (student and limited income) to \$250 (life). American Rifle Association memberships range from \$25 to \$500. The Debs Foundation admittedly doesn't have the lobbying machine which can deliver on a legislative agenda. But neither do we have an operating budget in the tens of millions, and recruitment efforts which cost \$25 for each new member and renewal costs of \$5 each. We count on our members to decide that the Debs Foundation membership is a good deal, to pay up themselves, and to help spread the word. Already this year many of you have paid annual dues and some have helped spread the word to bring in new members. But many have yet to pay up. Now would be a good time to do it.

## "Elderperks"

Another perk is Medicare... the government has to supplement those payments from general revenues to keep the system solvent. With health care costs now more than \$200 billion a year and rising at more than twice the overall inflation rate, one wonders how long the system can work without some system of means-testing...

Charles O. Kroncke, dean of the University of Texas-Dallas School of Management, agrees: "The elderly have been encouraged to band around the Claude Peppers to fear and fight for their financial security instead of providing Americans with much-needed leadership and vision. It doesn't seem proper that the elderly should be encouraged to focus all their energies on the conservation of economic privilege instead of thinking through their social and spiritual as well as economic priorities and taking advantage of their stage in life to act on them."

A segment on ABC's *Nightline* in June 1992 featured six leading U.S. senators—three from each party—calling for an end to "platitudes and poppycock" once and for all. "My parents borrowed *for* me; they didn't borrow *from* me," one said in decrying the "eat, drink, and be merry and let our children pay" mentality. He recognized the need to cap entitlements in concert with raising taxes. Another called for a crash adult education program to confront Americans with their collective fiscal straits and inescapable individual responsibilities.

source— "Retired Faculty: Sharing the Wealth"  
Clay Schoenfeld, *Academe*, Sept-Oct, 1992.

## What Would Debs Say... *cont. from page 5*

the tax hike are those health care providers who would not be needed if the population begins to eat right, exercise more and smoke less. We can only speculate as to what Debs would say, but what do you say?

EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 843

Terre Haute, Indiana 47808-0843

FORWARDING AND ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 977  
TERRE HAUTE, IN