

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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www.eugenevdebs.com



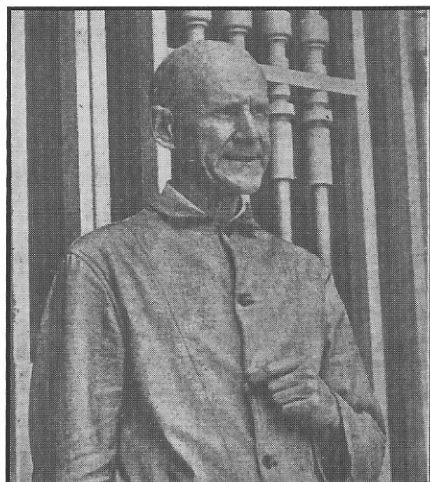
SPRING 2001

ON CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: THOUGHTS FROM TERRE HAUTE

There is something wrong in this country; the judicial nets are so adjusted as to catch the minnows and let the whales slip through... Eugene V. Debs

In labor circles and among progressives, Terre Haute, Indiana is known as the home of Eugene Debs, a turn of the century champion of industrial unionism, social justice and world peace who did jail time for his convictions. Now, in an ironic twist of history, a temporary resident of Terre Haute's nearby federal prison is scheduled to be executed May 16 after a long suspension of executions within the federal penal system. The upcoming event is already drawing widespread and even international attention. Within days of the announcement of the execution date for Timothy McVeigh, mastermind of the Oklahoma City bombing, every hotel room in Terre Haute was booked. It is rumored that the major networks will anchor their daily newscasts from Terre Haute that week. The heinousness of the offense for which McVeigh was convicted is attention getting, and so are the emotionally charged arguments pro and con on the subject of capital punishment. Proponents of both sides of the issue of the death penalty will be in Terre Haute for this media event.

Early Terre Haute native Eugene Debs had strong opinions about our criminal justice system and was, based on personal experience, highly critical of the "justness" of our legal and judicial system. It was after the first of his two prison stays that Debs spoke the lines quoted at the



Debs outside Atlanta Federal Prison

beginning of this essay. Twice Debs was sent to prison after highly dubious legal proceedings: to Woodstock jail near Chicago for violating the injunction aimed at ending the Pullman strike, and to Atlanta federal prison for alleged violations of the Sedition Laws intended to silence opposition to United States involvement in World War I. Mind you, Debs spoke of a system which caught the minnows but not the whales at a time in American history when the industrialization of America was accompanied by incidents such as the Ludlow massacre and Triangle Shirt Factory fire, and immense fortunes were being built by incredibly rich and powerful industrialists. Clearly, the "whales" were the business tycoons of that period. Debs' views on the all too evident class bias in our legal system are expressed in his only book, Walls and Bars, recently re-issued by Charles Kerr Publishing Company.

True to his convictions, not long

...continued on page 2

LAST YEAR'S BANQUET, ALWAYS THE BEST

There is a tendency always to remember each year's banquet as the best. This is partly because, no doubt, the last is fresher in memory. Nevertheless, it is nice when for a year the last banquet is remembered as the best. Given this trait of human nature, we'll just describe the year 2000 banquet as typically great, refreshing, exciting and invigorating. Award recipient Michael Sullivan was given an enthusiastic reception, attendance was above average, and the enthusiasm extended also to the remarks of keynote speaker, Richard McCracken. This was one banquet where both keynoter and award recipient have Indiana roots, mainly in Indianapolis, but attorney McCracken has in the past represented clients in Terre Haute. *See banquet photos page 3.*

A most refreshing aspect of this banquet, coming as it did a week after what was to have been the conclusion of a presidential election campaign which surely was the most disgusting ever, was to hear speakers who could stand up and make declarative statements which clearly came from personal experience and deeply held convictions rather than from a menu of vote-getting one-liners which had been generated "scientifically" and homogenized in focus group settings and opinion poll analysis. When Mike Sullivan talks about what unionism

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**SPRING BOARD
MEETING
DEBS HOME
April 28, 2001
1:00 P.M.**

On Crime & Punishment continued from page 1

before his death in 1926, and after his second imprisonment, Debs became involved in the internationally famous or infamous case of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants who, like Debs, have been generally viewed by historians as political prisoners, two men who were singled out, tried, convicted and executed, not because they were without a doubt guilty of murder in the act of committing a bank robbery, but because they, as radical anarchists and recent arrivals from Italy, were of the type capable of such a crime. It appears that Debs' involvement in this case was motivated by the all too evident errors in trial proceedings and use of evidence rather than from a blanket opposition to the use of the death penalty. Vanzetti wrote thanking Debs for his efforts in their behalf, excerpts of which follow, in the author's limited English:

Dear Comrade and Maestro:

I have read in the Daily Worker of May 27, your letter-appeal to the American Labor in our behalf. For Nick (Sacco) and I and our dear ones, I thank you with all my heart for that letter in which you putted all yourself and worth of better times and better men.

I learnt to-day that the Massachusetts S. Court has repelled the request of the defence for a re-hearing, and that the District Attorney of the Norfolk County minds again to fix a near date for our sentencing...

Dear Comrade Debs, I am sorry that your health is not quite well just now, and I wish you a good health. Have care of yourself and do not worry about us. Mankind needs you; others will take our place...

*With figlial (sic) love I am yours,
BARTHOLOMEO VANZETTI*

DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Spring 2001

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The *Debs Foundation Newsletter* is 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.

Last Year's Banquet continued from page 1

means to him, especially his Sheet Metal Workers Union, you know what he stands for.

The banquet was only the culmination of weekend events which started Friday morning with sessions of the conference on the impact on America of Debs, the socialists and other progressive movements of late 19th and early 20th century America. The conference was held on the 100th anniversary of Debs' first run for president on the Socialist Party ticket. Participating scholars came from east coast, west coast and middle America. The mission of the Debs Foundation is to preserve the legacy of Eugene Debs and to encourage examination of its relevance for contemporary society. The weekend conference and banquet were best shots at carrying out that mission.

2000 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Eugene V. Debs Foundation

Expenditures:

Indiana-American Water Co.	\$ 308.49	Springhill Heating & Air.....	1,031.51
Cinergy	1,371.63	Washer Supplies.....	129.95
AT & T	880.66	Cnkimedeia Community Holding	399.48
Indiana Gas	2,865.76	Ashley Ahren (work)	30.00
GTE - Verizon	445.12	Kelly Brown (work)	10.00
High Ground Digital	5,305.00	Ryann Harlow (work)	30.00
United States Postal Services	276.00	Anne Feeney (travel & honorarium)	940.36
Jewett Printing.....	5,193.00	AFM-EPT (Fenney's Union)	50.00
Cash Fund (Stamps & Supplies)	893.25	ISU Bookstore	29.93
Terre Haute Sewage	108.35	Marriott Food Services	4,588.43
ADT Security	186.00	Illinois University Press	160.73
Inweld Corp.....	42.50	Indiana Historical Association (books)	318.55
Terminix International	93.00	Michael Newkirk (labor)	84.00
Meierjohn - Wengler	230.00	Old National Bank (safe, deposit box)	15.00
ISU Sociology Dept.	6.60		
Indiana State University (Agency Account)	250.00	Total Expenditures	\$ 33,699.25
Robert Bussell	351.24		
Markle Insurance	982.00		
Association of Indiana Museums	25.00		
Indiana Dept. of Revenue.....	33.45		
Indiana Secretary of State	10.00		
Mr. Emblem (Shirts, etc.)	5,925.00		
Heinl's Flowers	99.50		
Flowers Plumbing	686.00		

Income:

Income	\$65,676.03
Balance from 12-31-99	3,249.44
Total Revenue	\$ 68,925.47
Total Expenditures	\$ 33,699.25
Balance	\$ 35,226.22
Less Amount Moved To Investments	\$ 25,000.00
Current Balance	\$ 10,226.22

DEBS 100 Years Ago

Having completed his first run for the presidency on the Socialist Party ticket, the year 1901 was for Eugene Debs a year of organization building. Debs' thinking had come a long way since his early days in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, when he had opposed strikes and any actions which might incite public opposition to labor unions. He now saw clearly that militancy and strike actions had their place, and also that radical political action was necessary to advance the cause of the working class. This newly "politicized" Debs would have none of the idea that government could, as presently constituted, safeguard the interests of all citizens. His conversion to the theory of class struggle led Debs to oppose all alliances with the two major parties, and to be wholly dedicated to building a Socialist Party which would represent the class interests of the masses of working men and women of America.

Much of Debs' efforts at party building, in 1901, was focused on building support within a militant labor movement, and a considerable part of that campaign was directed on the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). Many members of this union joined the Socialist Party, as did its leaders, President Ed Boyce and Secretary-Treasurer Bill Haywood. Debs was invited to address the WFM convention in Denver, in 1901, and his speech was received with great enthusiasm. The delegates endorsed socialism and recommended that all miners join the Socialist Party.

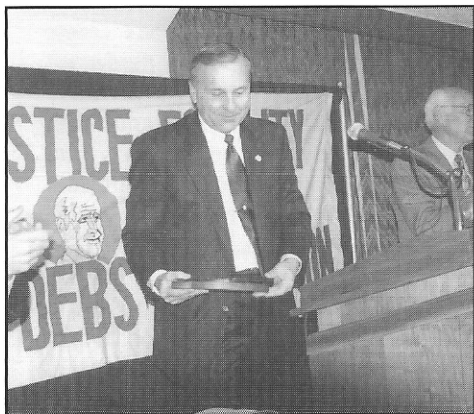
The working relationships between Debs and Bill Haywood which developed in 1901 were to have far reaching effects both on the Socialist Party and on the militant forces within organized labor. The militancy of the WFM under Haywood's leadership and that union's close ties to Debs and the socialists proved problematic for Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and equally so for socialists such as Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit. Berger was in firm control of the Central Labor Council of

Milwaukee, and Hillquit had become attorney and legal counsel to several craft unions of the AFL. Consequently, for some there was hope of working within the AFL to achieve socialist goals. It could be taken as a sign of progress in that direction when, at the 1902 AFL convention, a strong resolution was introduced by the socialists advising "the working people to organize their economic and political power to secure for labor the full equivalent of its toil and the overthrow of the wage system." By receiving nearly unanimous support from the United Mine Workers, the carpenters, and the brewery workers, while this radical resolution was defeated, it was by the surprising vote of 7899 to 4171.

Parenthetically, one can just imagine the public outcry today -- in the so-called liberal press, in the leadership of the major political parties, and within organized labor -- if such a resolution were entertained on the floor of an AFL-CIO convention, and if it received even token support from the delegates.

It can be concluded that the events of 1901, including Debs' experiences with such groups as the WFM, evidenced early both the strengths and the weaknesses which would plague the socialists from then on. There was on the one hand the appeal of alliances between the militant elements of labor and of party, and on the other the pragmatic concerns of the prospect for more immediate gains to be made by a more moderate program and a strategy of compromise and coalition building with the powerful and well-established craft unions. But in the heady days of rapid gains and enthusiastic acceptance among the members of such unions as the WFM, although the seeds were being sown, Debs could not have imagined himself, just a few years later, in pursuit of political goals, joining with such radicals as Haywood and Mother Jones to found a competitor to the AFL, the Industrial Workers of the World.

Banquet 2000



Michael Sullivan felt honored to receive the award.



Richard McCracken presented the award



Anne Feeney sang of labor and social protest

Economic Growth: Who Deserves Credit For the Good Times?

Who deserves credit for the economic growth this country experienced the past decade? Reagan-Bush if you are Republican, Clinton-Gore if you are Democrat. Some say Clinton deserves credit for letting it happen, at least not messing it up, but the the main credit should go to Alan Greenspan or to technological innovation. Frequent headlines tout one or the other of these views, but there is another headline which deserves consideration in this debate. This is the headline to the effect that "U.S. Population is Up 13 Percent, Largest 10-Year Increase Ever." That 13 percent represents a total of an additional 32.7 million Americans over the 248.7 million counted in the 1990 census. By comparison, increases the previous two decades were 23,164,078 for the 1980s, and 18,569,353 for the 1970s. This unprecedented growth translates into that many more mouths to feed, more households with furniture and appliances, more homes to be built, heated and cooled, more loans. Great for the economy! And don't forget, more workers, and more cars so those additional workers can get to their jobs. More paving, more construction, new businesses, more and more!

This "largest increase ever" for the last decade of the century inspires a look back one hundred years. In 1900, the U.S. population was 76 million (yes, it more than tripled in the 20th century), and upwards of a million new immigrants were entering this country each year and would continue to do so until World War I made it impossible. Birth rates were high and death rates were moderate, so the growth of population through immigration was augmented by a high rate of natural increase (excess of births over deaths). That rapid population growth brought on partly by immigration had been gaining momentum during the last decades of the 19th century, and its effects were reflected in the rapid growth of industry during the period. The influx of largely young adults from abroad

meant a rapid growth of the labor supply which was good for business expansion (cheap labor), and the rapid growth of consumers encouraged increasing productive capacity (only problem was that often the workers weren't paid enough to enable them to consume much). By the way, history records that this period of great economic expansion was accompanied by massive accumulation of wealth by such powerful industrialists as Carnegie, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, Pullman and others (another similarity between then and now).

A hundred years after that turn of the century population surge, we have seen another unexpectedly large increase in population. In one decade we added 32.7 million people, which is roughly equivalent to Canada's total population. Approximately one million of each year's current population increase is due to immigration. Most immigrants are young adults who are ready to work, pay taxes, consume, and reproduce themselves, all good for business. In this respect the impact of immigration on the economy is what the experts would call "front loaded." The stimulus is immediate; you don't have to wait 20 years for the baby to grow up.

But there is a flip side to this saga. The picture isn't all rosy. The flip side is that they don't remain young or middle aged workers and consumers for long; they grow old, retire, and need lots of medical care. Here we go again! Right now there is a lot of talk about the looming social security crisis when the baby boomers start retiring. Thirty or forty years down the road the experts may be talking about the looming crisis when those who produce the population surge of the last decade of the 20th century begin to retire.

But that's not now. For now, let's continue our preoccupation with debating whose policies deserve credit for the economic good times, and enjoy our tax cuts!

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