

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

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



SPRING 2008

## Debs' 1908 Campaign *The Red Special and More*

No campaign conducted by the Socialists could match for sheer drama and excitement that of 1908. With Eugene Debs as the party's standard bearer, the size of enthusiastic crowds attracted to their rallies caught the attention of both Republicans and Democrats, causing them to undertake strategies to blunt the Socialists' appeal. The end results in terms of vote count were for the Socialists disappointing, but the programs they advocated resonated with millions of Americans, from dirt farmers to unskilled and unorganized workers, and even many religious groups and professionals. The flame was kindled which would in a few decades force the two major parties to absorb aspects of the Socialist Party platform into their own rhetoric if not yet in concrete programs.

Debs was fifty-two years old in 1908, reputed to be in not the best of health. With the recent extension of life expectancy through modern medicine and healthcare, Debs would be considered almost young by current estimation, but 52 was "old" by comparison to turn-of-the-century life expectancy. Besides, Debs was so committed to his work that he abused his health by his eating and sleeping habits. He carelessly sacrificed both sleep and regular meals to the demands of the cause.

The highlight of the 1908 campaign was the Red Special train, but there were additional components. The New York *Call* began publication in May that year, which became the voice of the Socialist Party when the mainstream press was not inclined to be fair and balanced in coverage. There also were the Socialist encampments, which were suited to the needs of the rural poor of the South and Southwest. These encampments were described as combined square-dance fests, socialist schools, and revival meetings. Local merchants were persuaded to finance the encampments by saying they would bring them new business. By the summer of 1908, scores of thousands of farmers were spending their annual vacations at these temporary tent colonies. Debs spoke at several of these encampments during early July, 1908. Ray Ginger reports that on July 4, he spoke at the picnic grounds of one Oklahoma city to 5,000 people, and the next day he was in Oklahoma City speaking to 3,000. On July 12, Debs was in Milwaukee, speaking to 25,000 persons who paid admission to a Socialist picnic.



*continued on page 3*

## The 2007 Banquet



Barbara Ehrenreich

The 2007 banquet was successful in many ways. A somewhat larger than average number of guests were there to hear Barbara Ehrenreich, many having read her *Nickel and Dime*. They no doubt expected to hear her analysis of contemporary American society, the increasing disparity between rich and poor. Or we should say, the super-rich and the poor. The ranks of the working poor are the fastest-growing segment of the poor and needy. Pay has stagnated for this group of workers, whereas health costs are skyrocketing, and their share of the tax burden is increasing.

Since the banquet last October, the effect of the sub-prime loan marketing is impacting housing and reaches even into the ranks of those who had appeared to be on solid financial footing. There should be no surprise that the emergency measures Republicans and Democrats can agree on to remedy the situation, even for the short term, include substantial perks for financial institutions, those that were making risky loans to unsuspecting buyers, and leave out entirely some groups living below poverty. And it is no surprise that for George Bush, a major component of a long-term solution is permanent tax cuts for the wealthy.

SPRING BUSINESS MEETING  
April 26, at the Debs Home

## The 2008 Banquet

The banquet date for 2008 will be October 4. The public announcement of the Debs Award recipient awaits final approval at the April 26th business meeting. Tickets will not go on sale until the fall newsletter is distributed, but this early announcement allows you to keep October 4th reserved for the Debs Banquet.

## Examining the Financial Statement

The financial statement takes on more meaning if some of its components are analyzed. For instance, focusing on the award banquet—income and expenses—we see how a major amount of total financial activity adds up. In income, there was \$6,150.00 for dinner program ads and \$10,672.00 for ticket sales. Together that is \$16,822.00. In expenses, there was \$1,340 for hall rental, \$2,041.72 for printing the dinner program and tickets, \$387.00 to Meier Johann-Wengler for the plaque, \$805.00 to Anne Feeney, \$904.00 to Ehrenreich for travel, and \$6,691.57 to Azar for catering. That totals \$12,169.29 in expenses. Thus, the profit from the banquet was “only” \$4,652.71. Why? It was a good year for ticket sales, where one half of the price per ticket goes for dinners, and a poor year for

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Mick Love, *Treasurer*

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.

program ads., where much of the money is profit. It also was a year for some high maintenance costs at the Debs Home: \$1,580.00 for repair of the backyard fence and \$834.60 to replace damaged carpeting due to vandalism. This is why we had to withdraw \$15,000 from the Endowment Fund.

## 2007 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

### Eugene V. Debs Foundation

#### Expenditures:

Verizon	\$ 955.26
Duke Energy	1,348.73
Indiana American Water	423.24
Vectren	1,657.13
Agency Acct. (ISU)	650.00
Lowe's	543.52
Heinl Flowers	94.50
Sears Phone Card	31.79
Office Max	254.39
Donuts	7.99
Kleptz Aluminum	10.00
affordable Plumbing	76.36
Banquet Hall Rental	1,340.00
ISU Foundation (Library)	500.00
High Ground Digital	1,440.00
Jewett Printing	4,572.93
UAW Memorial Walkway	100.00
Sateud Insurance (Work Comp)	534.00
All American Sanitation	85.00
Terminix	349.20
Springhill Heating	68.00
ADT	117.18
Freddie Sutton (repair)	40.00
Universal Advertising	168.00
Wabash Vision & Voices	175.00
Inweld (Fire Extinguisher)	21.25
Flooring America	834.60

Quality Fence	\$ 1,580.00
Meier Johann-Wengler	387.00
Anne Feeney	805.00
Azar Catering	6,691.57
Ehrenreich Travel	904.40
Fed Ex	35.96
IRS (Withholding)	4,873.32
Indiana Department of Revenue	1,699.38
Human Rights Day	200.00
Museum Director Salary	14,741.30
Total Expenditures	43,440.07

#### Income:

Dinner Program	\$ 6,150.00
Dinner Tickets	10,672.00
IRS Refund	1,077.54
From Endowment Fund	14,970.00
Memorabilia Sales	965.10
Insurance Damage Payment	270.67
Member Dues & Contributions	22,829.53
Total Income	56,934.84

Bank Balance - 12-31-06	\$ 3,730.67
Bank Balance 12-31-07	\$ 9,573.30

Mick Love, Treasurer



It was on this occasion that Debs met Lincoln Steffens, who was writing a series of articles about the presidential candidates. Debs was interviewed by Steffens in the home of Victor Berger. Debs admitted candidly that the Party had no hope of winning in 1908. The race was at this stage purely educational. Debs' answer must have satisfied Steffens. His article in *Everybody's Magazine* was friendly to Debs, and just before the election he publicly announced his support for the Socialist nominee.

The Red Special tour was an ambitious undertaking for the Socialists. It was expensive and its success depended on skillful planning. The train was to leave Chicago on August 31, proceed in a clockwise direction first to southern California, then make its way up the coast to Washington and return on September 25 before continuing to New York via Detroit and Buffalo, and then swinging down a number of southern states before concluding in Chicago after a

last rally in Milwaukee. Every night on the tour a major rally would be held in a large city, and the train would stop briefly at small towns along the route for a speech delivered at the train station or from the car's rear platform. The services of Debs' brother were indispensable on the Red Special tour as for the entire campaign. Theodore served as personal secretary, answering all correspondence, fending off adoring fans to the extent possible, making hotel reservations and in doing many small things which could be entrusted to a highly competent and dedicated co-worker. The arrangements for the tour had been amazingly thorough. Party managers had accurately estimated the literature sales, so that an ample supply of leaflets had been delivered to the Red Special for sale along the way to the crowds.

When the train passed through

Chicago on September 25 to begin the eastern tour, Debs had traveled 9,000 miles and made a hundred and ninety stops. Debs had spoken to 275,000 persons in less than a month.

The apparent success of the Socialist campaign caught the attention of Republicans, Democrats, and even the AFL leadership. Samuel Gompers charged that the Republican Party was secretly financing the Red Special. The retort was to make every contribution public. There were few contributions larger than ten dollars. Several papers charged that the Socialist Party was a "foreign" organization. Records reveal that 70% of the 40,000 Socialists had

Republican Taft.

Debs gave his last Red Special speech at the University of Wisconsin to another large, enthusiastic audience, so moving that it inspired the *St. Louis Mirror* to predict that Debs would receive one and a half million votes.

The final results of the 1908 election were very disappointing to the Socialists. The total of 420,977 was no improvement over 1904. The AFL leaders had influenced a large portion of organized labor, and the big newspapers had influenced everybody. Amazingly, not a single vote was recorded for Debs in his own precinct, although he knew several supporters,

including himself, who had voted there. It seems highly likely that the Socialist vote was deliberately miscounted by several large city cliques.

Due largely to the extreme demands of the campaign, Debs was ill for a month afterwards. He had given his best effort, but the results had to be measured in intangible terms, mainly in its educational value. Success was in the evidence that

hundreds of thousands of poor dirt farmers and unskilled and unorganized workers had been inspired and uplifted by the vision of a future society in which social justice and brotherhood would wipe out the struggle of class against class and nation against nation. History records that just four years later, in 1912, many of the proposals of the Socialists found their way into the rhetoric of the two major parties, and a few decades later were incorporated in many details into the New Deal legislation of the 1930s. Our country has still a long way to go, but was in the later half of the 20th century a better society thanks to the efforts of Debs and the Socialists.

C.K.



**Red Special Band**

Debs is standing back row, holding child, between the "P" and "R".

been born in the U.S., and another 20% were immigrants from Western Europe.

Not to be overlooked was that the enemies' attacks were front-page news in the metropolitan dailies, whereas the Socialist replies were often suppressed or buried on an inside page. The parties that controlled the newspapers could to a great extent control public opinion.

Debs' campaign rallies continued to draw large crowds on the eastern tour. The New York City crowds were especially large and enthusiastic. William Taft had barely filled the music hall in his own city of Cincinnati, but Debs in the same hall was forced to turn people away. When Taft spoke, admission was free, whereas a dime minimum was charged to hear Debs. The two candidates spoke on the same night in Evansville, Indiana, and again more people paid to hear Debs than went free to hear the

## Surprise! Winners and Losers in the Subprime Lending Crunch

“That’s how things work in the Age of Bush.” So wrote syndicated columnist Froma Harrop on January 30, 2008, at the conclusion of an essay in which she described how the “real estate operators” were able to slip away from the disaster with their millions intact. None profited more than Angelo Mozilo, now former head of Countrywide Financial. It helped that the Bush Administration, so committed to the “free market,” was not inclined to intervene through regulatory measures to stop the rush to seize the opportunity of home ownership, buyers in the process trusting the real estate brokers who were steering them to beginning low interest, some time no down payment loans which seemed to be affordable, but not pointing out such facts as that the interest rate would go up sharply after three years, and other negatives such as big prepayment penalties, and a host of fees such as for flood certification, appraisals, and for preparing the loan contract.

The mortgage companies, of which Countrywide was one of the largest and most aggressive, sold the mortgages to investment banks, who then packaged the loans into securities which were palmed off on to investors (another big loser).

When housing turned bad last year, Countrywide stock lost more than half its value. But Mozilo had already made \$414 million selling his countrywide shares from 2004 to 2007, and pending sale of Countrywide to Bank of America would allow Mozilo to waltz away with another \$115 million in severance pay. At the same time, the real victims, hundreds of thousands of them, were facing financial disaster, foreclosure, and bankruptcy. As the columnist wrote: “That’s how things work in the Age of Bush.” I would add: How little has the system changed since the days of Eugene Debs!

C.K.

NOTE: Please check here if this is a:

RENEWAL ☐

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### Membership Dues: The Eugene V. Debs Foundation

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\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 5.00 Student Member \_\_\_\_\_ \$100.00 Sustaining Member

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Enclose remittance. Make checks payable to the Debs Foundation.

The Debs Foundation • P.O. Box 843 • Terre Haute, IN 47808-0843

We are a not-for-profit organization, so your dues and contributions are tax deductible. The Foundation owns and maintains the Debs Home and offers several educational and cultural programs.

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