

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

P.O. BOX 9454, TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA 47808-9454



SPRING 2017

In October of 1935 "It Can't Happen Here," a novel by Sinclair Lewis, was published.

It became an immediate best seller. Lewis, a friend and comrade of Eugene Debs, projected a vision of a future where there is a fascist takeover of the United States following the election in 1936 of a shrewd demagogue who utilizes the new social media of the time (radio) to manipulate the minds and emotions of an electorate angered and confused by the chaos following the Stock Market collapse of 1929.

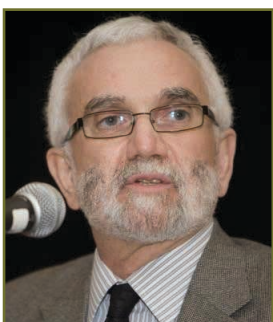
More than eighty some very odd years later, I'm walking to one of the countless protests and demonstrations that have occurred before and after the Electoral College selected Donald Trump to be the President of our country and I spot the novel in the window of a bookstore. I immediately buy it and quickly read it. Like a torch on a dark night, the book illuminates the forces that must be resisted and defeated when a fascist offensive attacks and attempts to destroy everything worthwhile in our society.

Fascists were in power in Germany and Italy as Lewis was writing his novel and they were being acclaimed and supported by celebrities (Lindbergh among them) and by corporate chieftains (especially those in the steel and auto industries who were awash in profits from selling war machines to Hitler and Mussolini). Family farms were destroyed by Dust Bowl winds. The large urban centers were dominated by gangsters inside and outside of City Hall. Jews, Catholics, African Americans, immigrants, communists and socialists were threatened and assaulted by hate groups whose mobs hysterically chanted "America First." The world was headed for another war and it was only a question of when not if it would occur.

Lewis describes with nightmarish clarity the velocity of the repressive actions that dictators can initiate when they seize power. The free press is suppressed. Gestapo squads (called Minute Men in the book) rule the streets and drive resisters underground and then into concentration camps. Canada becomes a haven for expatriate rebel leaders who plan to recapture their country. The regime in power plans to start a war with Mexico. At the story's conclusion, the United States is plunging into another Civil War.

There are many reasons why in reality there was not a fascist coup in our country during that time. Significant among them was the strong, mature and highly active presence of a powerful Left. Trade unions were expanding rapidly in the industrial sectors. Successful strikes and organizing drives built a culture of fighting for rights with discipline and defiance. The struggle to shift power and wealth from the few to the many was celebrated in song and theatre and talking movies. Many of the accomplishments of the New Deal had their origin in the platforms and campaigns of the Socialist Party under the leadership of Gene Debs.

As distressing as the first few weeks in power by the Fake President have been, any lingering sense of depression that many of us have been feeling has been more than



Noel Beasley, President of the Debs Foundation

IT MUST NOT HAPPEN HERE

by Noel Beasley

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International Women's Day Rally

March 8, 2017 in front of the Debs House



It Must not Happen Here – continued from page 1

trumped by the energy, excitement, determination and diversity displayed by millions of activists at marches and forums. There is a growing sense of not just pushing back but of reorganizing our forces to secure the power of the majority. We no longer need to accept "one step forward, two steps back" as the rhythm of social change. We make better music when we close ranks and build instruments with a sharp point and a wide, deep base.

The Debs Foundation can play an important role at this time and in this place. The deliberate assault on public education over the past thirty years has produced a culture afflicted by historical amnesia. The story of our country can and should be understood as the ongoing struggle for freedom and security of the majority. No one ever explained that story more effectively than Debs. Now it is our turn.

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DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER SPRING 2017

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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.

Debs Day

The Foundation would like to thank Michelle Bennett of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), Susan Baley of the Swope Art Museum, long-time board member, Harriet McNeal, and "new" board member Wesley Bishop for working together on Debs Day and for continuing to keep Debs' legacy alive.



Secretary's Report:

by Lisa Phillips



I am happy to report that Allison Duerk is doing a wonderful job at the Museum. She is giving tours throughout the week,

mailing out merchandise, and getting ready for the Spring and Summer months. Thank you so much, Allison, for your continued hard work at the Debs House and Museum.

Noel, Ben, and I communicate often about all Debs' related, everything from maintenance to financial issues. Noel has been working down the list of potential awardees for Fall 2017. It is something of a process, as I know he has explained multiple times. We will have an update at the April 15th Board Meeting.

My three-year term as Secretary ends in April. If anyone is interested in coming on as Secretary, please indicate as much either by email (info@debsfoundation.org) or at the Board meeting. While the work involved is not overly taxing, it requires, at times, more time than I have. I pictured being able to do much more than I have (although we did have quite a few transitions to get through and I'm happy to say, the Foundation is on solid ground). Benjamin Kite has done a tremendous job as Treasurer and has picked up many of the duties a secretary would normally handle because he knows all about databases! He, Noel, and Allison are great to work with.

Debs House & Museum Updates

Spring Yard Work: We are thinking about how we might beautify the Debs' House' grounds. If any of you can devote some time to either a Spring Clean Up Day (we're thinking the morning of the Board Meeting, April 15th) and/or a more regular (weekly, bi-monthly) commitment (weed pulling, grass mowing, flower tending, etc.), now's the time to volunteer! Contact Allison at Allison.Duerk@debsfoundation.org.

SAVE THE DATE:

Fall Banquet, Saturday, October 14th, 2017, Sycamore Banquet Center on the campus of Indiana State University.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

April 21st: **Ernie Freeberg** will be stopping in Terre Haute as part of a four stop Debs-related tour to give a talk on the suppression of free speech during World War I at the Debs House. He is the author of *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, The Great War, and the Right to Dissent*. His other stops include the Illinois State Historical Society (Springfield, IL) on Thursday, 20 April; Northern Illinois University (DeKalb, IL) on Monday, April 24; and, Woodstock Celebrates, McHenry County Historical Society and the Illinois Labor History Society (Union, IL) on Tuesday, April 25th.

May 31st-June 3rd:

The Working-Class Studies Conference will be held primarily in Bloomington, Indiana but attendees will drive to Terre Haute to tour the Debs House and take Tim Kelley's Labor History Tour.

Spring Board Meeting

Saturday April 15, 2017 (Tax Day) - 1 PM

Hilton Garden Inn

750 Wabash Avenue, Terre Haute



EUGENE V. DEBS AWARDS BANQUET

2016

The Fall Banquet was a smashing success! Award winner Cindy Sheehan gave a wonderful speech in which she talked at length about contemporary politics. She encouraged the audience to think about engaging in civil disobedience. "Why pay taxes?" she asked, if those tax dollars serve only to extend U.S.' imperialism, if they result in the needless deaths of young men and women, including, of course, her son Casey who died serving during the (second) Iraq War. A veteran herself, Sheehan exemplifies Debs' antiwar, anti-imperialist stance. The Debs Foundation was proud to honor her with the 2016 Debs Award. Bill Breeden introduced Ms. Sheehan. He, too, exemplifies Debs' legacy. A preacher and politician, Mr. Breeden drew comparisons between his own political positions

and those of Ms. Sheehan, emphasizing the moral imperative to resist governmental policies. The two complemented each other well. Audience members asked good and tough questions and encouraged them both to run and/or continue to run for office. Between their speeches, Magpie (Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino) performed. Their music was more than well-received. They sang folk songs, some familiar, some not, including a piece they wrote, entitled "Canton, 1918." Their music brought some in the audience to tears. It was something to have people from all walks of life with diverse talents and similar political perspectives together in Debs' honor. The Foundation would also like to thank the people who always work behind the scenes, including Allison Duerk, our museum director, ISU's banquet staff, the sound technicians, photographers, videographers, Jewett Printing, and Pam McMains, who keeps the Debs House spotless.



Terre Haute Labor History Tour

The afternoon of the Banquet, Board Members Tim Kelley and Micki Morahn, with Micki's husband Steve driving, led a group on a Terre Haute Labor History Tour. It was fantastic! Mr. Kelley compiled a Labor History brochure, copies of which are now available at the Debs House. The tour ended at Debs' gravesite where people reflected on Debs and his legacy. Thank you to Tim, Micki, and Steve.

In Debs' Words...

The following is available in its entirety at Indiana State University's Special Collections' Digital Archives (a wonderful resource) at http://debs.indstate.edu/d288c3_1971.pdf

EUGENE V DEBS CANTON SPEECH

WITH STATEMENTS TO THE JURY AND THE COURT

EUGENE DEBS delivered his famous Canton Speech at Canton, Ohio, on Sunday June 16th, 1918. He was at once arrested and charged with violation of the Espionage Law. Debs eloquently pleaded his own case but was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court to test the constitutionality of the law. However, a motion for a new trial was denied, President Wilson refused to intercede, and Debs went to prison. President Harding commuted the sentence soon after he took office in 1921; and Debs was released on December 23, 1921.

THE CANTON, OHIO SPEECH COMRADES, FRIENDS AND FELLOW-WORKERS, for this very cordial greeting, this very hearty reception, I thank you all with the fullest appreciation of your interest in and your devotion to the cause for which I am to speak to you this afternoon. (Applause.)

To speak for labor; to plead the cause of the men and women and children who toil; to serve the working class, has always been to me a high privilege; (Applause) a duty of love.

I have just returned from a visit over yonder (pointing to the workhouse), where three of our most loyal comrades are paying the penalty for their devotion to the cause of the working class. (Applause.) They have come

to realize, as many of us have, that it is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe in the world. (Applause.)

I realize that, in speaking to you this afternoon, there are certain limitations placed upon the right of free speech. I must be exceedingly careful, prudent, as to what I say, and even more careful and prudent as to how I say it. (Laughter.) I may not be able to say all I think; (Laughter and applause) but I am not going to say anything that I do not think. (Applause.) I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than to be a sycophant and coward in the streets. (Applause and shouts.) They may put those boys in jail-and some of the rest of us in jail-but they can not put the Socialist movement in jail. (Applause and shouts.) Those prison bars separate their bodies from ours, but their souls are here this afternoon. (Applause and cheers.) They are simply paying the penalty, that all men have paid in all the ages of history, for standing erect, and

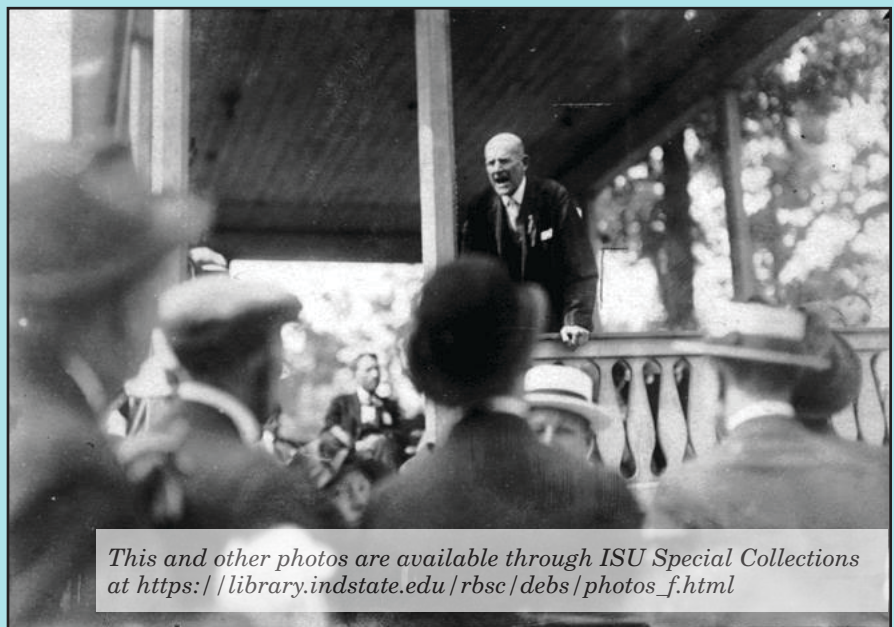
for seeking to pave the way to better conditions for mankind. (Applause.)

If it had not been for the men and women, who, in the past, have had the moral courage to go to jail, we would still be in the jungles. (Applause.)

There is but one thing you have to be concerned about, and that is that you keep four-square with the principles of the international Socialist movement. (Applause.) It is only when you begin to compromise that trouble begins. (Applause.) So far as I am concerned, it does not matter what others may say, or think, or do, as long as I am sure that I am right with myself and the cause. (Applause.) There are so many who seek refuge in the popular side of a great question. As a Socialist, I have long since learned how to stand alone. (Applause.)

I never had much faith in leaders. (Laughter.) I am willing to be charged with almost anything, rather than to be charged with being a leader. I am suspicious of leaders, and especially of the intellectual

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This and other photos are available through ISU Special Collections at https://library.indstate.edu/rbrc/debs/photos_f.html

variety. (Applause.) Give me the rank and file every day in the week. If you go to the city of Washington, and you examine the pages of the Congressional Directory, you will find that almost all of those corporation lawyers and cowardly politicians, members of Congress, and misrepresentatives of the masses-you will find that almost all of them claim, in glowing terms, that they have risen from the ranks to places of eminence and distinction. I am very glad I can not make that claim for myself. (Laughter.) I would be ashamed to admit that I had risen from the ranks. When I rise it

will be with the ranks, and not from the ranks. (Applause.) They who have been reading the capitalist newspapers realize what a capacity they have for lying. We have been reading them lately. They know all about the Socialist Party . . . except what is true. (Laughter.) Only the other day they took an article that I had written and most of you have read it-most of you members of the party, at least-and they made it appear that I had undergone a marvelous transformation. (Laughter.) I had suddenly become changed-had in fact come to my senses; I had ceased to be a wicked Socialist,

and had become a respectable Socialist, (Laughter) a patriotic Socialist-as if I had ever been anything else. (Laughter.)

What was the purpose of this deliberate misrepresentation? It is so self-evident that it suggests itself. The purpose was to sow the seeds of dissension in our ranks; to have it appear that we were divided among ourselves; that we were pitted against each other, to our mutual undoing. But Socialists were not born yesterday. ... [the rest is available at http://debs.indstate.edu/d288c3_1971.pdf]

EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION

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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.