

“Officialdom is Solidly Pitted Against Me” :
Letter to Fred D. Warren
(July 31, 1912)

[Terre Haute], July 31st, 1912.

My dear Fred:—

I feel that I must write you again about the printing of the Barnes statement. You have doubtless seen the editorial in the *National Socialist* condemning the *Appeal* for refusing to print the Barnes statement. Goebel has just written me to the same effect and I understand the report is being widely circulated to Barnes’s advantage that the *Appeal* has shut him out of a hearing. I think it is a great mistake, to put it on no other ground. I have thought it over very carefully and I concluded that whether you change your position or not¹ I must at least write you once more and tell you that I think the *Appeal* should print the Barnes statement to maintain itself as a paper that stands for the square deal. It is helping Barnes and his case far more to shut him out than to print his statement. I tell you frankly that so far as I am concerned I would rather have had his statement printed and mine shut out than to have mine printed and his shut out.

There is far more in what is called the Barnes case than appears on the surface. It is deeply rooted and spreads out wide and it is not going to be settled in this controversy. It is coming up again after the campaign when the real issue of which this is the veneering will be laid bare and I want the record to be one that we can stand on squarely and fight the world. So far as my part of that record is concerned up to date, I would not change it in the least. I am being fiercely attacked, denounced, and repudiated, exactly what I expected and pretty nearly from the sources I expected, and through it all I feel the securer in my position and I am as certain that the rank and file will overwhelmingly sustain me in the end as I am that I am drawing my breath.

Officialdom is solidly pitted against me and this includes practically all who are officially in the service of the national party and dependent directly or indirectly upon the NEC, and it includes most of the socialist press. They have always been solidly, or practically so, with Barnes and opposed to me. You can readily see what the real issue is and that the Barnes case is but a manifestation of the cause underlying it. From the

hour I gave Berger to understand that I could not be bossed officialdom has been solidly against me and I am glad of it.² They are now openly denouncing me, using the Barnes case as an excuse, and this is some improvement over their previous method of conniving secretly to discredit and defeat me.

I am making not the slightest complaint. My position is one that my bitterest enemies would not envy me but I was never stronger or serener or more confident in my whole life. I am in that fortunate state of psychology that I can sustain the attacks from within and without and even from those who have assured me of their love and now serve notice on me of their hate — I can endure all these and the deep pain that comes with some of them and feel the blood within me quickening with new life and every fiber of my being strengthening for any test of moral power that fate or fortune may have in store for me.

I think i now realize to some extent at least how Lincoln must have felt in the beginning and through the early part of his administration when he was assailed by those who had pretended to be his friends, as well as by the bitterest of enemies, and when every conceivable attempt was made to discredit and destroy him.

I suppose you have seen Spargo's vicious attack. They tell me he used to be a preacher.³ He weeped great gobs of tears over Barnes and accused me of putting my heel on him when he is trying to get out of the pit and then he shows in preacher fashion how Christ shielded the erring woman, and then to prove his consistency, and reveal his true nature, as every hypocrite does in spite of himself, he crucifies poor Jane Keep, the victim in the case, and paints her black as the devil to "vindicate" the man who wrecked her life.

I received a most insulting letter from Goebel yesterday but I answered it with patience and becoming dignity. I have always had a high regard for Goebel and I still feel that some day he will know better. He denounces the *Appeal* bitterly for refusing Barnes a hearing and this is the only point he scores against me in his letter. He charges me with making a cowardly attack on Barnes. I answered by saying that if I had ever in all my life made a cowardly attack on any human being I was not conscious of it but that if I had ever made such an attack, rebuke would come with very poor grace from men who put their heels on the neck of an unfortunate and helpless woman and paint her black with infamy to "vindicate" the man who had dishonored her and blasted her life. Upon that rock I stand. Poor Jane Keep may be friendless and deep in disgrace but my heart is with her and when the time comes she will find in me a

friend. I have never seen her and never expect to but I can feel for her as if she were my own sister. The hypocrites who are stoning her shed alligator tears over Barnes as they melodramatically charge us with keeping down an "erring brother," but that is all subterfuge and shame to conceal the true cause and nature of their opposition. I have as much sympathy for Barnes as anyone but I have more for the woman. And I have sympathy, too, for the family of Jim Brower, as fine a comrade as I ever knew, who was hounded to his grave in this affair;⁴ and I have sympathy for Mother Jones, who has been maliciously branded as a blackmailer and thief, and when the campaign is over and I am no longer fettered, I shall defend these as it is my duty to do against the aspersions and slanders of those who have a deep-seated purpose in destroying them.

Please treat this letter *as private to yourself only*. I had not intended saying so much but I somehow feel as if I must be entirely frank with you and keep in close touch. But it is the Barnes statement and my deep concern for the Appeal and its reputation alone that prompted me to write to you.

Yours always,

Debs.

Typed letter, unsigned, included in *Papers of Eugene V. Debs, 1834-1945* microfilm edition, reel 1, frame 1042. Not included in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs: Volume 1*.

¹ Debs refers to the position expressed in a recent letter from Fred Warren declaring "I do not feel called upon to devote any more space to this controversy than we have already done... The *Appeal's* mission is to make socialists out of the material capitalism furnishes us. We can't straighten out all the kinks in the characters of the men and women that come into our movement. Great God! Where would we stop?" Warren in Girard to Debs in Terre Haute, July 27, 1912. *Papers of Eugene V. Debs* microfilm edition, reel 1, frame 1033.

² Debs broke with Berger over the establishment of the de facto dual union to the existing craft union movement, the Industrial Workers of the World, at a face to face meeting held in Racine, Wisconsin on April 29, 1905. Heated words were exchanged. The meeting was also attended by Berger's right-hand man, Fred Heath, former member of the NEC of the Social Democratic Party and editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*. Debs was effectively blackballed from the Milwaukee socialist press in the aftermath.

³ John Spargo (1876-1966), the British-born son a stonemason, had briefly served as a lay Methodist preacher in his youth.

⁴ James K. Brower (1870-1911) was a national organizer for the socialist party from 1909 to 1911 and the Socialist candidate for governor of Illinois in 1910. Brower was among those who testified against National Secretary Mahlon Barnes at hearings in Chicago on August 11, 1911. He died of typhus on October 7 of that year.