

**“A Good Excuse to Drive a Center Shot at Him”:  
Letter to Fred D. Warren  
(August 12, 1912)**

[Terre Haute, Ind.] Aug. 12th, 1912.

*Personal*

My dear Fred:—

The advance proofs of your Barnes statement received this morning, also copy of *Appeal* of 17th. Glad you have the statement. It is late but the best that can be done under the circumstances and I feel personally obliged to you for having printed the Barnes statement.

I suppose you have seen this week's *National Socialist* and Hillquit's dirty attack on you. This will doubtless appear in all the rest of the papers controlled by the machine, and this is nearly all of them. I suppose that under your policy as outline in your letter you are going to allow Hillquit to set you up as a liar, dissembler, double-dealer, and coward and then turn the other cheek. I do not know, Fred how you feel but that vicious attack on you from a shyster lawyer and a politician as unscrupulous as Murphy of Tammany makes me hotter than all the things that all the gang have said about me. I only wish I was in your place for now for just one issue of the *Appeal*. If I did not hit Hillquit a jolt that would make his teeth rattle it would not be my fault.

You have now a great chance and a good excuse to drive a center shot at him and you can do it in a few words. Call him the Murphy of the Tammany machine in the Socialist Party and you will put him on the defensive not only but down and out so far as office-holding is concerned. It was Hillquit who when Jean Keep<sup>1</sup> was on the witness stand, telling the sad story of having been drugged and raped by Barnes,<sup>2</sup> cold-bloodedly tore open the wounds from which she was still bleeding and with less mercy than a Hottentot sought but every secret center of agony in her lacerated soul and leered upon her writhings like the shyster he is as he laid bare her quivering heart to the gang that surrounded her and for the delectation of the machine gang who had to load that poor creature with odium and infamy to vindicate the man who had ruined her and blaster her honor in order to keep intact their machine and their grip upon the national office and upon the press and upon the lecturers and organiz-

ers and subordinates of all kinds so that they can go to conventions, as they did the last one, and caucus nightly and send their emissaries out among the delegates, like Murphy and his Tammany and his “ninety wax figures,”<sup>3</sup> to defeat the nomination and election of men who do not do their bidding and elect those who will.

This is the Barnes case in a nutshell, and now that Hillquit has been emboldened by you the weak policy of the *Appeal* of never chirping, no matter what the machine may do, to make this vicious and unprovoked and utterly indefensible attack on you and the *Appeal* you have the chance to come back in a way to put the appeal way up in the estimation of every honest member of the party.

The *Appeal* has played a sad and losing role in this affair, really humiliating in bringing up the rear by now publishing the Barnes statement after having been denounced by the machine press, but you can correct all this and set yourself right now by showing that the *Appeal* can hit a machine politician inside of the party as well as outside of the party, that it can flay a socialist Roosevelt or Murphy or Hinky Dink as well as any other kind. You need not be dragged into a controversy. You can cut it off then and there. They have had their whack at you over and over again and spread it through all the papers, and you are now entitled to your say and your friends will certainly expect it and if you remain silent in the face of Hillquit’s attack, which will go into every paper they control, it will be all the worse for you and the *Appeal*. You may think differently but I tell you if this attack of Hillquit’s remains unchallenged it will go a long way toward discrediting the *Appeal*.

You can say in your statement that in this Barnes affair they have been given ten columns to our one. The current *National Weekly*, the Berger organ, is almost filled with it. The *Chicago World*<sup>4</sup> is not satisfied to print what comes to it in favor of Barnes but it copies the attack of Hoehn’s St. Louis papers and others.<sup>5</sup> *It is very evident that the machine gang is largely in control of the press as well as the lecture bureau and that is the point you can score with deadly effect.* Bring out these facts for they are coming out anyway, the sooner the better. There is a rising revolt against the machine and my correspondence proves it and all that revolt wants to make it successful and overthrow the gang [which] is just such leadership as the *Appeal* can give it. ***A vigorous column over your name*** embracing the points made in this letter will clarify the murky atmosphere like a crash of lightning.

The Texas comrades are going to roar pretty quickly about the machine and it will be practically unanimous down there. I have a letter

from a Wisconsin comrade this morning who tells me that the comrades in his vicinity are ready to get up in arms against the Berger machine and he asks why the Appeal does not open up on that gang and rip off its mask and reveal the real issue of the Barnes case to the party, the rank and file of which are groping in the dark. The machine and those who are working with it are working with precision and deliberate aim but the rank and file are confused, dazed, and in fact in the dark and if the *Appeal* now comes to the front and discharges a battery aimed straight at the machine it will rally the party membership to its standard and do more to inspire confidence and win support than a hundred columns of appeals of the stereotyped kind of which a good many are thoroughly tired. Hillquit has made the opening for you as if providentially and if you cannot see your way clear to take advantage of it and strike back a straight and smashing blow that will make that machine lawyer see starts and jar the whole gang and open the eyes of the whole party membership you will allow to go by unimproved the opportunity of a lifetime.

Yours always,

***Debs.***

Typed letters, unsigned, included in *Papers of Eugene V. Debs, 1834-1945* microfilm edition, reel 1, frames 1080-1081. Not included in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs: Volume 1*.

<sup>1</sup> Debs wrongly has the name as "Jane Keep."

<sup>2</sup> At a party hearing Keep claimed that she had never had an affair with Barnes but that he had drugged and raped her, fathering her child. This charge was rejected after cross-examination.

<sup>3</sup> Pejorative name for those delegates at the recently-completed Democratic Party convention who were blindly reliable votes for the Tammany faction.

<sup>4</sup> The *Chicago Daily Socialist* was renamed the *Evening World* at the time of the city's 1912 newspaper strike of leading capitalist publishers to better attract a non-socialist readership. The paper would fold at the end of the year.

<sup>5</sup> G.A. Hoehn published *St. Louis Labor*, an eight-page English weekly, as well as the German-language *Arbeiter-Zeitung*.