

**“It Will Necessitate Our Parting Company”:
Letter to Fred D. Warren
(August 11, 1912)**

[Terre Haute, Ind.], Aug. 11th, 1912.

Personal

My dear Fred:—

Yours of the 8th is received.¹ I have carefully read and considered it. First of all, I must say to you that I have no recollection of you having proposed at the Chicago meeting to publish a Hillquit statement.² But I was intensely preoccupied myself at that meeting and it may have escaped me on that account.

The policy of the *Appeal* as you outline it will undoubtedly necessitate our parting company. But perhaps it may be as well to wait until after the campaign when we can sit down together and carefully go over the whole situation. I think of you just as you think of me and if the parting has to be made it will be upon the honest conviction of both of us and I shall always have the same personal regard and affection for you that I have always had.

I think I anticipate to some extent what is to come. Quite likely you expect that after the campaign I shall want through the *Appeal* to state some facts and explain some matters hitherto withheld from the rank and file which they have a right to know. Very likely I shall have something of that kind to say and if the *Appeal* does not want to print it I have no fault to find. The members of the party will decide whether or not what I have to say is legitimate matter for our press to handle. But our press is to a large extent boss-ridden, just as the party is, and if the press is so completely under the domination of the boss power and so cowardly that it dare not give me a hearing after having flooded the country with attacks upon me I will find a way of reaching every member of the party if I have got to start a paper of my own and run it at least long enough to show the members of the party just who and what is responsible for the Barnes affair. I will have behind me as true a lot of comrades as ever fought for a principle and I will stake all I am that when it is over with I will be overwhelmingly sustained by the rank and file as I have been all

my life when I have been in the right, and I never was more right than I am today.

If the *Appeal* proposes to remain mute and silent while the boss power develops and practices its abuses upon the party then its day of usefulness will soon be over. The whole official power of the Socialist machine and everyone it employs in any capacity is the enemy of the Appeal and spreading the poison that in time will counteract and overcome all the boosting of the circulation and all the ingenuity you have for arousing enthusiasm among the *Appeal* worker. I learned some things when I was in Chicago that convinced me thoroughly of what the machine program is so far as the *Appeal* is concerned and so far as I am concerned. You could not fail to notice in the little while you were at headquarters that you were in an atmosphere of deadly hostility as a representative of the *Appeal to Reason*. That enmity has been intensified and from now on it will be spread over the country through all the channels the machine controls, and it could not be a particle worse if you had taken a positive stand against Barnes and the machine and in defense of the rank and file.

I did not expect you to commit yourself or the *Appeal* although you will remember that almost the last thing you said to me before I left Girard was that I must demand the withdrawal of Barnes or myself withdraw from the ticket, and after I returned to Terre Haute and had the interview with Barnes and wrote you saying that I did not blame Barnes after he assured me that he did not want the place and that it had been forced upon him you wrote me saying that my explanation was not satisfactory and did not change your opinion of the matter but for me to follow my judgment and you would back me up. I think you have changed since then but of course that is your right and I do not question it, but I suspect that Simons has had something to do with presenting the case to you strongly from his point of view. I know how he feels and I for course concede to him the right to his own opinion But I am not forgetting that it was Simons who very heatedly in our little conference (at which you were not present) denied that Barnes was the father of Jean Keep's child and when Ricker mentioned the name of a certain woman and said she had arranged to go with Barnes, Simons said if that was true then he was in favor of running Barnes out of the party. I quote his exact words. Ricker, "Push," Brewer, and two or three others will remember them.

Well, both statements are true. Simons also was emphatic in declaring that there never would be a ripple on the surface in the way of opposition to Barnes and that it would amount to absolutely nothing. I repeat

so that you may see that others may be mistaken in some matters as well as I. The storm has broken as I knew it would and I am having to face it pretty nearly alone. If it were not for being sustained by the consciousness that I am absolutely right and fighting a fight that has got to be fought out to save the Socialist Party from boss rule and boss ruin, I would be crushed by the load I am bearing.

If the evidence of the Barnes trials had gone to the membership as it should have gone Barnes never would have been nominated and the Barnes affair never would have occurred. And still you could not see your way clear to advise the members to demand the evidence that they must know the truth and do justice to all concerned.

I have just received a letter from marguerite Prevey detailing part of the trial at Chicago which she personally attended and my blood runs hot as I read it. She tells how Hillquit and Stedman, Barnes's lawyers, tore the heart of poor Jean Keep when they had her on the stand, ripped open her wounds, and mercilessly exposed every quivering fiber of her outraged being, while the machine sympathizers leered at her and mocked her in her unspeakable agony — and this is how Barnes was “vindicated” by the gang who are now accusing me of having no sympathy for the erring, and persecuting Barnes.

I say to you now that I feel as if I was responsible for my share of this infamy, although I have never seen that unfortunate creature. If I had ruined a woman I would be everlastingly damned and go to the pits of hell and stay there eternally before I would accept vindication at the price of loading with deeper infamy the trusting woman I had dishonored and whose life and hope I had blasted.

I think that we were all cowardly and ought to be ashamed of ourselves that we were silent and uttered not a word while poor Mother Jones was branded as a blackmailer and a thief by that gang of machine politicians whom no one has had the nerve to question and before whose power everyone cringes with abject servility. I felt it at the same time but I kept silent because I did not want to appear as persecuting Barnes or adding to his troubles and because of party consideration, but had I spoken out there and had the Appeal spoken out and called a halt when the socialist press dominated by the machine spread that infamous slander broadcast it is not probable that we would be reaping the wretched harvest that we are reaping today.

I propose after the campaign to atone for my part by repelling that calumny and vindicating so far as lies in my power that brave old woman who, whatever her petty faults, had much to do with giving the Appeal its

start and has suffered as much to serve the cause as anyone in it. When I think of how she nursed strikers, ignorant foreigners, in jail with the small pox, when I think of how she fought for the miners in the hills of West Virginia, how she comforted the wives and nursed the sick children week after week and month after month and then think of that old warrior of four score years being prodded with soldiers' bayonets at midnight because she helped the slaves to fight their battles, I am hot with indignity at the outrage of this brave old comrade being branded as a blackmailer and a thief to vindicate a man she befriended in his sore need, and if you and the *Appeal* propose to continue a policy of silence while such an outrage goes unwhipped of justice I shall speak out and denounce the cowardice of the press and if the rank and file do not sustain me in doing it I will be deceived as I never have been before in all my life.

You may think you can exclude party matters from the *Appeal* and keep your hands clean for fear of dirtying them in party filth but it will not be long until you will be forced to change your policy or the star of the *Appeal* will begin to wane.

There are powerful influences at work to undermine and destroy the *Appeal* and if you propose to shut your eyes to them they will be rudely opened by a falling circulation in spite of all you can do to prevent it.

The *Appeal* has never uttered a word in the way of criticism of a national officer or a machine politician of the Berger-Spargo-Hillquit type and they all hold it in contempt and spit on it every time it is mentioned. Berger's Milwaukee papers have made a foot-mat of the *Appeal* and worse and the *Appeal* all the while was [building] up Berger and Milwaukee and the machine that runs things there. If the *Appeal* had taken just one square crack at Berger and the machine I'll bet it would have brought them to their senses and while they would not love it you can safely bet they would respect it and they would stop their low and contemptible attacks upon it. And this would not lose a single subscriber but on the contrary would raise the paper in the estimation of the rank and file and make them work the harder for it instead of having to be prodded day and night as now.

I not what you say of the party and the movement and you are right. But don't forget that the party is the necessary instrument and that if it is corrupted the movement is betrayed and defeated.

The *Appeal* is under a certain responsibility to keep the party clean and straight and if it fails for fear of giving offense it is not true to the party and it cannot retain the confidence of the members after they find it out.

I am as little in favor of mudslinging as anyone and I would never have the *Appeal* get down to that low level but I would have it fearlessly criticize high party officials when they establish a bureaucracy to run conventions and to throttle the party as they have done for the last five years or more without a word of protest to warn the unsuspecting members as to what is going on. I would not have the *Appeal* slander anyone but I would have it tell the truth about chronic office-seeking and office-holding politicians and if it did it could prevent mischief to the party, and we are just now in an ordeal in which we are reminded that an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure.

Now, Fred, I am not expecting any answer to this. you are extremely busy and so am I. let us wait until after the election and then we shall see what course to pursue and whether or not we can worth together on the Appeal. If not there will be some ways in which we can serve each other and there will never come a time until I go to the grave when it will not be a pleasure to me to do anything for you.

With all love and the warmest wishes that one comrade can have for another I am

Yours always,

E. V. Debs.

Typed letter, unsigned, included in *Papers of Eugene V. Debs, 1834-1945* microfilm edition, reel 1, frame 1074. Not included in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs: Volume 1*.

¹ See: "Fred V. Warren to EVD," August 8, 1912, in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs, Vol. 1*, pp. 533-536. In this letter Warren reiterates his unwillingness to use the Appeal to Reason as a foil in a factional fight against "bossism," declaring "the day the Appeal starts in to try to correct the abuses ... in the conduct of our party affairs, that day marks the beginning of the end of the Appeal's career." He adds that if Debs remains "determined upon the course suggested in your last etters, then we will have to part company." (p. 534)

² Reference to the joint meeting of the National Executive Committee and national campaign committee held at party headquarters in Chicago on Saturday, May 25. The session feature fireworks between Morris Hillquit and Bill Haywood over the election of Mahlon Barnes as national campaign manager and specific representations about the NEC's views on the matter which Hillquit is alleged to have made.