

**“The Load Will Be Shifted” :**  
**Three Letters to Fred D. Warren**  
**About the Barnes Affair**  
**(July 2-3, 1912)**

**I.**

[Terre Haute], July 2nd, 1912.

My dear Fred:—

Yours of the 24th has been carefully read.<sup>1</sup> I will probably prepare my statement in the Barnes matter this week and send it to yo in time for the issue of [July] 20th. That will probably be as soon as I can get to it. There are a thousand things pressing. I never was so crowded. The mail continues to be filled with protests, many of them very angry and threatening. Not a few demand and insist upon my resigning. This morning’s mail brought an emphatic protest from the women of Texas, numerously signed.<sup>2</sup> It is a situation which no one need to envy me, but I am going to face it and deal with it in the way I think best for the party regardless of all personal interest.

I am going to place the responsibility for this situation on the official machine where it belongs and I am going to call them by their name without any beating around the bush. The statement will be calm and observe all proper dignities but it will tell the truth. If the matter is allowed to drag through the whole campaign it will grow worse and worse and result in complete demoralization. It is hard for me to understand how anyone, whatever his motive might be, could strike the movement such a foul blow at the moment of its greatest opportunity and brightest promise.

I am having a pamphlet to write for the national campaign, two in fact, besides a lot of other work, so that I may not have a chance to send you much copy during the next week but I will get around to it just as quickly as I can and I shall certainly not forget you even though I be too hard pressed to be of much substantial service to you in my present situation.

Ryan Walker has just sent me the first copy of the *Red Portfolio*.<sup>3</sup> It is magnificent. I am quite enthusiastic over it and so is everyone who has

seen it. I believe this to be a powerful propaganda number. Let me suggest that you advertise it in both the *Appeal* and *The Coming Nation* liberally and that you call for agents to handle it, making them a special rate. There is something about this book of cartoons that appeals to everyone, even though they cannot read, and if a hundred thousand of these would be spread over the country they would be a powerful factor in molding sentiment in our favor. Each of these will be preserved and shown to neighbors and friends and serve as a perpetual educator and awakener. I hope you can see your way clear to getting out a great edition and appealing to the locals and soapboxers and newsstands to handle them. If you could have this Portfolio put on all the newsstands I believe you would find it to be a magic seller.

It is but an inch from the serious and solemn to the laughable and ridiculous. Ryan Walker had already announce the arrival of the goat. I took in the whole picture like and flash and reared — and I'm shaking now so that I fear I shall have to jump Theo's frame to work off my surplus. I would give several bits to see Max and the goat hitched up and the goat heading for Fort Scott or some other seaport.<sup>4</sup> I suppose Mrs. Warren must be overjoyed. How Brewer must envy his whiskers! Take a careful look in that goat's optics and you will discern a twinkle of merriment and a gleam of wisdom that will make you a respecter of goats the rest of your days. Jake Sheppard was kind indeed to make Max so happy by providing him with motive power for his transportation department.

Love to you all,

*Gene.*

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## II.

[Terre Haute], July 2nd, 1912.

My dear Fred:—

I send you the enclosed for your private eyes. you will see that I am going to force this issue. They counted on my standing hitched and muzzled while they laughed up their sleeves at my discomfiture. My instinct is keen in this matter and I have the right of it and if I don't make some of these machine politicians wish they had kept their hands out of the

cogs I will miss my guess. Up to this time I have had to bear it all. When my statement appears the load will be shifted to where it belongs. Please return this as soon as you have read it as I shall very likely have use for it soon.

Yours,

**Gene.**

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### III.

*Personal and Confidential.*

[Terre Haute], July 3rd, 1912.

My dear Fred:—

It goes against my grain to write you about anything disagreeable but it seems as if every now and then I am driven to it in spite of myself. "Push" writes me that he thinks the slump in the *Appeal* is due to its silence and inaction in the Barnes affair. I do not know to what extent he is right but I am inclined to think there is a good deal of ground for what he says. The same complaint has come to me a number of times and I now have a letter just received from a good *Appeal* worker who denounces the *Appeal* as dishonest and hypocritical and says that he will never get another sub for it. He says that the *Appeal* goes to all lengths to lay bare and expose the immorality of a Grosscup and a Lemon, but that it has not a word to say about a Shoaf or a Barnes. It must be confessed that when this is put up to the *Appeal* there is no answer to it.

I am not of those who persecute a man because he has gone wrong but at the same time I recognized the fact that if the *Appeal* for reasons of its own mercilessly flays transgressors who are non-socialists while it covers up far worse immoralities on the part of preeminent and representative socialists it is going to lose the respect and confidence of men and women who think and believe in fair play and in a square deal to all, and a mighty lot of the *Appeal* readers are exactly that kind of people.

I do not know how to answer by correspondents when they raise this question except by frankly admitting that they are right. That is the only way to honestly answer them if any attempt is made to answer them at

all. I know that the *Appeal* lost many a good supporter on account of screening Shoaf and its silence in regard to his misdoings. And now it is going to lose a good many more on account of its silence in the Barnes affair. I am not writing this to criticize or to find fault but only that the thing as it seems to me may not escape you and that you may not be at a loss to know why your appeals to go out and get subs to some who in the past have been mighty loyal Appeal supporters now fall upon deaf ears.

You have very likely seen the *International Socialist Review* for July on the Barnes matter. The explosion is as certain to come as anything can be. The enclosed circular is being widely distributed. Seven thousand members are protesting bitterly and determinedly. It is a grave situation and if allowed to go unchecked will demoralize and paralyze our whole campaign.

Please return the enclosed circular as soon as you have read it. You do not need to answer this unless you care to suggest something. I am going to issue my statement in the next two or three days. I have been up to my ears in work or it would have been done before.<sup>5</sup>

Affectionately your comrade,

*[Gene].*

Typed letters, both unsigned, included in *Papers of Eugene V. Debs, 1834-1945* micro-film edition, reel 1, frames 1007-1008. Not included in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs: Volume 1*.

<sup>1</sup> In his June 24, 1912 letter from Girard, *Appeal to Reason* editor Fred Warren stated “that it will be better and much more effective for my statement to appear in the same issue in which yours is printed” and states his agreement with Debs “that we cannot mince matters in dealing with Barnes.” See: Fred D. Warren to EVD in Constantine (ed.), *Letters of Eugene V. Debs: Vol. 1*, pp. 490-491.

<sup>2</sup> A writing campaign seems to have been organized by Debs’s friend Tom Hickey of Texas, who had been formerly married to Jean Keep, sister of Socialist Labor Party NEC member Arthur Keep. Keep was the principal female figure in the Barnes affair as well as mother of Barnes’s child. For the Hickey-Keep-Barnes triangle, see Peter Buckingham, “Red Tom” Hickey: *The Uncrowned King of Texas Socialism*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2020, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan Walker, *The Red Portfolio: Cartoons for Socialism from Coming Nation and Appeal to Reason*. Introduction by Eugene V. Debs. n.c. [Girard, KS]: n.p. [Appeal to Reason], n.d. [1912].

<sup>4</sup> Apparently a reference to a boy, a goat, and a wagon. Fort Scott was a town just north of Girard, the county seat of neighboring Bourbon County, located in thoroughly landlocked southeastern Kansas.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Warren responded with a three page letter dated July 5, 1912 in which he rejected Debs's connection of falling subscriber rolls with the Barnes affair, noting that published readership numbers were delayed nearly a month from when subscriptions were actually sold. He further noted that Charles Kerr had written and indicated his *International Socialist Review* was facing similar difficulties. "I am sure that the Appeal Army is not interested to any great extent in the Barnes controversy," Warren declared, noting that it was Debs himself who "furnished the tip that led to our Grosscup exposures" and that Warren felt Debs had been inadvertently but unfairly placing upon his shoulders "all the responsibility for the inauguration of these tactics in our warfare on the supporters of capitalism." He sought an in-person meeting in Chicago at the LaSalle Hotel to discuss the Barnes matter. Debs declined to attend this meeting, declaring himself "too busy and too far behind with work of a pressing nature connected with the campaign," but sent his brother in his stead. The Debs statement on Barnes was finally published in the *Appeal to Reason* of July 20, but was buried on page 3 and did not appear at all in some editions. See: *Papers of Eugene V. Debs* microfilm edition, reel 1, frames 1009-1011.