

**“I Favor a Thorough Housecleaning”:  
Letter to Representative Victor L. Berger  
(August 10, 1912)**

Aug. 10, 1912.

Mr. Victor L. Berger,  
Washington, DC

Dear Comrade:—

I have before me a copy of the *National Socialist* dated Aug. 3 and am surprised and disappointed to learn of the position you have taken in the Barnes case. After reading, very carefully, the statements of both those who oppose and those who favor the retention of the campaign manager in his present capacity I am forced to conclude that the Socialist Party is suffering more from those who claim to be its friends than from its avowed enemies.

Leaving out of consideration real and imaginary complications (all of which in this particular instance are of minor importance) the status of the unfortunate affair now before us seems to me to be as follows: whether guilty or innocent of the charges brought against him the fact remains that only a few months ago Barnes resigned the office of national secretary under a shadow. Many, probably the majority, of the members of our party as well as many non-Socialists knew of the circumstances under which he retired and were not slow to criticize him. Nothing has transpired since then, so far as the public knows, to change any phase of the matter. The inevitable result of again placing him in one of the most conspicuous and important positions in the party organization is internal dissensions and external criticism.

There seems then to be but one course open. That course is to remove Barnes immediately. By so doing party harmony would in large measure be restored and our opponents would lose a choice campaign issue. A candidate on the Indiana state ticket, who is now on a speaking tour, told me a few days ago of a member of an old party publicly asking him what we meant to do with our Barnes case. This is no doubt typical of what thousands of our other speakers must face during the campaign.

If I knew that Barnes was innocent (and I sincerely hope he is) and if we had requisite proof, time, and money, I would strongly favor a na-

tionwide propaganda to vindicate him. However, the welfare of a great party, which is the hope of downtrodden humanity, is more important than that of any individual. Since we are less than 30 days away from the opening of the campaign such a move is in any case not only inexpedient but suicidal. Comrade Ghent and any who may be back of him are therefore doing the party a grave injustice when, at a time when we need our combined strength and all the funds possible to fight our opponents, they ask for contributions to carry on a Barnes propaganda in the party. I trust that you are not identified with so ill-advised a movement and that you will use your influence against it.

I do not think there is any immediate danger from the alleged anarchistic element of which you speak. Nevertheless, I favor a thorough housecleaning after the election and the expulsion from the party of any who prefer violence to the ballot. Furthermore, I favor putting an end to Hillquitism, which as come to be synonymous with bossism. In addition to his desire to be dictator extraordinary, Hillquit is primarily responsible for the untimely "coming back" of Barnes, made an inadvertent remark about atheism at the national convention in 1908, which caused no end of annoyance, and in many other ways has conclusively proven himself to be the proverbial bull in the china shop. When the term of the New York attorney as a member of the National Executive Committee expires, I strongly favor his retirement to the ranks where he can do fully as much good and infinitely less harm than in his present capacity.

But in conclusion I plead, first of all, for harmony, especially when it can come in a fair degree at the expense of the personal ambition of possibly one or at most a few members of our party.

With kind regards and sincere good wishes I am

Fraternally,

***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*.