

The Center of the Fight:
Letter to the *Appeal to Reason*¹
(circa January 17, 1907)

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I am getting over my rheumatic attack² and I leave for Cincinnati Monday, where a specialist will treat my throat. I expect to be out in a few days. As soon as I get through with this and am in physical shape I will come to Girard and stay until the kidnapping edition is made up, and take a hand at helping you on the *Appeal*.³ I would like a chance to edit the *Appeal* for a couple of weeks, or help you edit it, or help in any way to do the thing that this supreme hour tells me must be done.

Now is the time to strike!

A few weeks more and it will be too late. I have a rush of ideas and want to fuse them with yours and I believe that in combination we can raise hell with the capitalist plans, so far as Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone are concerned. I believe, furthermore, that we can do work in three or four weeks' time that will give you a hundred thousand more subscribers and after the trial begins send it up to half a million and climbing towards a million. I say I believe this can be done and I would like a chance to try it.

Should the trial be announced while I am in Girard I could go from there straight to Caldwell [Idaho], *for I propose to be in the center of the fight.*

To do the kind of work I have in mind, and to make it blaze and flash, awaken and inspire, I would have to be on the ground. I feel burning within me the fire of righteous indignation, lightened by the supreme court decision and fanned into crackly flame by Roosevelt's infamous action and attitude as set forth in Gooding's message to the Idaho legislature.⁴ Besides the regular articles I have in mind, there is a variety of short stuff that can be used to great advantage, and, included in the plan, the central part of it, in fact, is the attempt to raise the *Appeal* circulation to the highest possible pinnacle. This will be the sure way, and, in fact, the only way to save our Idaho comrades. If we cannot arouse the people sufficiently to threaten revolt on a large scale, they are gone. Nothing else can save them. The case in outline is already fully developed and its tragic culmination

inevitable. To prevent the catastrophe we have got to reach out in all directions and in every state, township, and county and take hold of and shake the people into action. If we let this chance go by unimproved, the good Lord help us, for we will need it.

The thing must be a tremendous victory or a tragic failure. If we grasp this opportunity in all its offers and use our brains in unison and our energies in harmony, to their full capacity, steadfastly following the dictates of our consciences and fearlessly faithful to our own souls, we shall achieve a glorious victory for our fellow workers, ourselves, and humanity. *The great clock is striking an epoch!*

Yours always,

Eugene V. Debs.

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¹ This press-stopping special delivery missive was probably addressed to *Appeal to Reason* editor Fred D. Warren.

² In his earlier letter to the *Appeal* published January 5, Debs characterized his ailment as "sciatica" — pain of the lower back or legs caused by a pinched nerve. (See: Debs, "A Personal Word," this volume.)

³ The special "Kidnapping Edition" of the *Appeal* was published February 17, 1907.

⁴ Frank R. Gooding took the oath for a second term of office at noon, January 7, 1907 and sent a message to the state legislature immediately afterward. In it, Gooding called for the state of Idaho to assume the cost of trying the Steuenenberg case from Canyon County and declared "this is a murder case, and as such it should be tried, regardless of the position the accused men have occupied, or may now occupy in labor organizations.... The confession of Harry Orchard, which is corroborated in large part by the late confession of Steve Adams, tells a tale so full of horror as to be almost unbelievable. The proceedings ... were matters of strict inquiry by the president of the United States, who, acting through his personal representative, the first assistant attorney general of the United States, visited Idaho and made a careful and painstaking investigation of the matter. He reported to the president, and Mr. Roosevelt has since that time, by word and action, expressed himself heartily in accord with the state in prosecuting the case."