

Calumny and Mendacity:
Telegraphic Letter to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
(April 24, 1907)

Girard, Kan., April 24 [1907].

To the Editor of the *Post-Dispatch*:—

After many days President Roosevelt concluded to revise his publicly announced determination to treat the communications of organized labor with silent contempt. He changed his mind only when he saw the representatives of the working class preparing to move on the White House. In the voluble and vague explanation just issued the president is guilty of a most extraordinary lapse of memory or a deliberate falsehood. In defense of his unenviable position he now claims that he never said anything concerning the guilt of Moyer and Haywood. I answer by quoting the exact words he used in his speech on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone of the office building of the House of Representatives, April 14, 1906, as follows:

The wealthy man who exults because there is a failure of justice in the effort to bring some trust magnate to an account for his misdeeds is just as bad and no worse than the so-called labor leader who clamorously strives to excite a foul class feeling on behalf of some other labor leader who is implicated in murder.

Moyer and Haywood had been arrested and I had made what was called a sensational appeal in their behalf but a short time before this speech was delivered.¹ Roosevelt's words were clearly meant for Moyer, Haywood, and myself. They could by no possibility apply to anyone else. The press so understood it, and the whole country knew who it was that the president was condemning. There was not the least room for doubt.

Upon reading this extraordinary speech in the public press I at once wrote an open letter to the president protesting against his condemnation of untried men, which he ignored.² Fred D. Warren, editor of the *Appeal to Reason*, wrote to the White House at the time, refusing to believe that the president was correctly quoted in his reference to Moyer, Haywood,

and Pettibone as being guilty of complicity in murder, and the answer of Secretary Loeb³ admitting that the president had been correctly quoted is now before me.

The president made no attempt to shift his position at that time. He had denounced these labor leaders as murderers, and proposed to stand by it. That was his attitude a year ago. There is not a shadow of a doubt in regard to it.

Bear in mind that the president did not say that Moyer and Haywood were alleged to be implicated in murder, but he made the charge direct and emphatic that they were so implicated, thus pronouncing their guilt in unmistakable words.

I now challenge President Roosevelt to deny that he mean Moyer and Haywood in this charge of murder a year ago. If he did not mean them, whom did he mean? If he did not mean them, why did he not deny it at the time?

I challenge President Roosevelt to name any persons, except Moyer, Haywood, and myself, to whom his words could by any stretch of possibility apply. If he will name them I agree to tender him a public apology. If he will not name them he must stand branded from his own mouth with calumny and mendacity.

A year ago it was that President Roosevelt charged Moyer and Haywood with murder, in a public speech that went broadcast to the country. He now claims never to have said anything concerning their guilt. He thus stands pilloried before the American people. If he attempts to deny the charge, I shall convict him with the proof.

As between himself and those of us he has denounced as "undesirable citizens," the people shall decide when they have heard both sides.

The reference of President Roosevelt to debauched legislatures comes with poor grace from a president who is cheek by jowl with the mine and smelter owners of Colorado, who have repeatedly bought the legislature of that state and have now seated their chief as a representative in the senate of the United States.

In the nearly twelve hundred words of his reply, President Roosevelt found no room for even a hint as to what he thought of the kidnapping of working men at midnight and rushing them by special train into another state. That, being the work of "desirable" citizens, has, doubtless, the hearty sanction of the alleged square-deal president.

The “explanation” of President Roosevelt is the first decisive victory for organized labor in the kidnapping battle of the class war of the United States.

Eugene V. Debs.

Published as “Roosevelt’s Memory at Fault or He Prevaricates, Debs Says” in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, vol. 59, no. 247 (April 25, 1907), p. 13. Also published as “Debs Challenges Roosevelt to Say Whom He Did Mean” in *New York World*, April 25, 1907.

¹ See: “Arouse, Ye Slaves!” March 10, 1906, this volume; and “Labor’s Awakening,” April 7, 1906, this volume.

² See: “A Few Words, Mr. President: An Open Letter to Theodore Roosevelt,” April 15, 1906, this volume.

³ William Loeb, Jr. (1866-1937) was the longtime personal secretary and political advisor of Theodore Roosevelt. He was the father of William Loeb III, publisher of the right wing *Manchester Union Leader*.