
**Open Letter
to Alfred S. Edwards
in Tennessee City, TN,
from Eugene V. Debs
in Terre Haute, IN,
June 8, 1896**

Published in *The Coming Nation* [Tennessee City, TN],
whole no. 161 (June 20, 1896), pg. 1.

Terre Haute, Ind., June 8, 1896.

Editor, *The Coming Nation*.

Dear Brother:—

Your note of the 30th ult. [May 30] with enclosure herewith returned, was handed to me at Nashville. I should have answered more promptly but was kept so busy that I was prevented from so doing. Referring to the Birmingham interview, I am not correctly quoted.¹ I used no language such as is credited to me in the line marked by your correspondent. The American Railway Union stands committed to the People's Party by a unanimous vote of its delegates in convention assembled. This being the case, you will perceive how absurd and mendacious I would be to make such a statement as is contained in the enclosed interview. I am not only in favor of organized labor going actively into politics, but I have urged such action in all my addresses during the past two years. Indeed, the action of our convention in this matter was taken upon my recommendation.

¹ Debs was in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 18 and 19, 1896, where he spoke at a public meeting held at Lakeview Park. The source of the contentious interview is unknown.

What I did say was, that I was an official of a labor organization and as such I could not be a candidate for public office. I have always been opposed to self-seekers and in order to keep myself free from even a suspicion of being one myself I have resolutely set my face against holding public office. There are special reasons in my own case why this should be so. I am willing to serve the cause of labor in any way in my power, but I cannot see what good would come either to the cause or to myself by accepting a nomination for public office. I prefer to do what little I can in my own way untrammelled by what would be certain to be construed as personal political aspiration.

You are at liberty to use this communication in any way you may see fit. I should say in this connection that I am often placed at a disadvantage by being incorrectly quoted in press interviews and alleged interviews. I am not infrequently made to say what I never said or thought of saying. The Birmingham interview has appeared in various forms and has undergone various changes to suit the purposes of those who have an object in having me appear in a false and self-contradictory light before the public.

I regret very much not having been able to visit you while in Tennessee. When next I visit your state I hope to have the pleasure of a few hours at Ruskin.² I met a number of your members at Nashville and was greatly pleased with them. They impressed me as being men of the right stamp and if the colony is made up in great part of such as they I have no doubt as to its ultimate success.

With best wishes, believe me always,

Yours fraternally,

Eugene V. Debs.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · March 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.
First Edition.

² **Ruskin Commonwealth Association** was a utopian socialist cooperative community established in rural Dickson County, Tennessee, near Tennessee City. Real estate developer and newspaper publisher J.A. Wayland was the financial angel of the project and his weekly newspaper, *The Coming Nation*, was the profitable official organ of the enterprise. Wayland left the colony in the summer of 1895 amid acrimony, abandoning his paper to the editorship of Alfred S. Edwards and moving to Kansas City to launch a new publication, the *Appeal to Reason*. Ruskin colony was dissolved in the fall of 1901.