

A Short History of the *Appeal to Reason* (April 27, 1907)

We hold in our hands a bound file of *The Coming Nation* for the year 1893-94. The first number is dated April 29, 1893. This was the birth of *The Coming Nation* and Greensburg, Decatur County, Indiana, was the town in which it first saw the light.

J. A. Wayland, now of the *Appeal to Reason*, was the founder, editor, and publisher of *The Coming Nation*, and this child of his heart and brain was born to a tempestuous career.

This was the first venture of the “One-Hoss” Philosopher¹ to spread the new gospel that had struck root and was seething in his soul. Little did he realize what he was undertaking, nor what vicissitudes lay in wait for him, but if he had, it would not have daunted him, for with the revolution of ideas that had come to him there had also come to him the spirit of determination to go forth and do battle for them with all his might without regard to personal consequences.

This spirit has ever since been his guide and marked his course, and were it not for his characteristic modesty, his utter aversion to personal notoriety, and his abhorrence of obtruding his personality upon the propaganda, some very interesting facts relating to this anniversary might be here written down, but as it is, the friends and readers of the *Appeal*, the many thousands who have followed its career through tempest and sunshine, over the hilltops and down through the valleys, must wait until the “One-Hoss” Philosopher moves on and beyond this scene of strife to read the real story of his struggle, his services, and his achievements, and when this is written it will have a permanent place in the new thought library as one of the most interesting, vital, and dramatic biographies in socialist literature.

Curiously enough, Davis H. Waite,² the grand old warrior of Colorado — as grand a man, in the governor’s chair or in his private walks, as his successors have been degenerate — was the very first subscriber of *The Coming Nation*, and his name heads the list of 98 original subscribers with which the paper began and whose names are printed in the initial issue. Other names in the list are Eugene Engley,³ P. B. Hirsch, and others who have made honorable history in the struggle since that time. To show that

even then the new thought was fairly clear, though hazily expressed, we quote the following paragraphs from the first issue:

If all labor was directed into proper channels, all the wealth now produced could be created in three hours a day, giving work to all and an equitable division of the products. * * *

The trusts and combines are dividing up the millions of wealth they have taken from the producers under the system of capitalism. * * *

The millionaire today lives in a palace, surrounded by menials, and the people who feed, clothe, and supply his wants live in tenements and cellars. Read up, see the truth, and you will be free. * * *

Man plows and produces for idlers — monkeys don't. * * *

In this country the working people have the suffrage which they use to furnish the rich the laws, officers, and courts to keep them in servitude. *
* *

Soon after the first issue appeared the subscriptions began to roll in by scores and hundreds, showing that the people were ready for the new economic and social doctrine which since has spread so rapidly over the civilized globe. The name of *The Coming Nation* was soon spread broadcast, and its enthusiastic devotees vied with each other in giving it the full measure of their unwavering and unwearying support.

Then followed the exodus from Greensburg, Indiana to Ruskin, Tennessee, where the Ruskin colony was established.⁴ In bidding farewell to the old Hoosier state, the cradle of its birth, *The Coming Nation* was not without regrets, but the future seemed to loom so brightly on the horizon that all misgivings were dismissed, and with joyous hearts the modern crusaders, for such they were in spirit and in purpose, set their faces toward the Sunny South, the land of cane and cotton, of magnolias, mockingbirds, and dreams.

Alas! The glimpses of Utopia were fleeting as they were fascinating. This vision of a beauty spot in the primeval forests, like a mirage that lures to deceive, had to be dispelled. The colonists, animated by the purest of motives, had to learn by bitter experience that there is no royal road to the socialist commonwealth; that there is no escape from capitalism for any favored few; that a miniature socialist republic is as impossible as a

miniature tidal wave or sunrise, and that instead of attempting the impossible feat of abolishing capitalism by fleeing from it to the wilderness, it was their duty to organize and extend the revolutionary socialist propaganda in its very strongholds, and from its center to its circumference for its complete overthrow and the emancipation of all from its cruel and debasing thralldoms.

The colonists were bought to realize that, after all, it is a fortunate fact in social evolution that the few cannot desert the old ship and paddle away in their little canoes to escape the tempests.⁵

The lesson was dearly bought, but no regrets remain to mar the memories of the voyage to Altruria.⁶ Most of those who shared the fortunes and misfortunes of Ruskin life are now active propagandists in the wider field,⁷ and if the colony experiment did not more for them it at least clarified their vision, dispelled their delusions, and opened the way to their proper places in the greater movement.

The Coming Nation was not intended to die with the colony. Its spirit lived and it must have a new incarnation. The trials and privations in the wilderness might sap the physical vitality of the little community, but they could not quench its revolutionary spirit and aspirations. Freedom's battle had begun, the bridges behind were all down, and the only course lay forward.

This indomitable spirit found expression in the *Appeal to Reason* in 1895, first at Kansas City and later at Girard [Kansas], where its sturdy growth and expanding vigor and usefulness have excited the consternation and dismay of capitalist exploiters, and evoked the surprise and delight of the working class.

The trials, the sufferings, the heart-burnings, the disappointments of Wayland, the founder of this great enterprise, need not be recited here. Few, indeed, have heard of them, and not at all, so far as the writer knows, from the lips of the man himself.

It was exceedingly fortunate for J. A. Wayland that Fred D. Warren joined him at what seems to have been a critical and psychological moment in the *Appeal's* career. The *Appeal* had grown too great a burden for its publisher, and as if the very man to bring relief had been in waiting, Warren stepped into the harness, and since that day these men have worked together in such efficient harmony that the spirit of their unity has permeated all the working force, and as a result the *Appeal to Reason* is a

monument of cooperative achievement, and promises complete fulfillment of its great mission in the international propaganda of the socialist movement.

Let not the impression be conveyed that the *Appeal* is, or pretends to be, a socialist establishment, or operated upon socialist principles. That, as every socialist knows, would be an impossibility in the existing order. The *Appeal to Reason* is established, maintained, and operated to advance the interests of the socialist movement, and this it does by methods its own experience has taught it to be most efficient and practicable in that great work.

From the 98 subscribers with which *The Coming Nation* began the *Appeal to Reason* has built its pyramid of over 300,000 supporters, and there never was a time in the fourteen years since the paper was born when the interest in it was as keen, the activity as great, and the support as unswerving as it is today.

The *Appeal* has set its mark at **one million subscribers** in the next three years, and those who know the men and women who are committed to that proposition do not in the least doubt its literal realization.

The *Appeal* has undertaken to secure more subscribers, that is to say, develop more power for the propaganda, two to one, in the next three years than it has in the last fourteen years.

This means nerve and will, energy and execution, and the *Appeal* has them all. The "Old Guard" at Girard and the Army of Veterans⁸ spread all over the land are all keeping step to the heartthrobs of the revolution, whose spirit flashes from their eyes and vanquishes obstacles to victory as the rising sun disperses the mists of the morning.

But little has been said in this rapid sketch of the personal life of its central character. For obvious reasons no panegyric has been here attempted. Socialists are not given to fulsome adulation, no matter how meritorious the services rendered. They hold that a socialist does his duty merely when he serves the cause, and that no special need of praise is due on that account.

Nevertheless, a few words from one who has known Wayland long and under varying circumstances will hardly seem amiss on this anniversary occasion, so fruitful of reminiscences of other days, especially in the light of the many wrongs he has suffered at the hands of men who do not know him, or, knowing him, have done him great injustice.

It is true that he has been financially successful in spite of all his costly experiences and narrow escapes from disaster. He has always known how to make money, but has hated and denounce the methods of its making in the capitalist system. Had these methods been unobjectionable and he had remained in the commercial game, he would today be a millionaire. He has yielded to the rule and sway of exploitation from necessity, while fighting the system with all the proceeds it has brought him.

Unlike many scores of others, he has not considered it wise policy nor sound tactics to be conscientiously starved into submission, frozen out of the movement, or driven into apostasy, and the future surely will vindicate his course.

All money is tainted in capitalism, one dollar as much as another, for in the last analysis it is all wrung from labor, and the founder of the *Appeal to Reason* believes it better to make money, contaminated though it be, and plenty of it, if possible, and fight capitalism with it than to let the capitalists capture all the dollars and use them to keep the workers in ignorance and perpetuate their brutal domination over the working class.

J. A. Wayland has to his credit fourteen years of service in the socialist cause, the value of which will be known only after “One-Hoss” has ceased to feel the shafts of personal detraction; long after he has fallen into his last sleep and rests in the shade and fragrance of the flowers.⁹

He is human, Wayland is, intensely so. He has made mistakes, many of them, and no one has acknowledged them more freely than himself, but his whole heart is in the cause; every selfish thought is subordinated to the good of the movement, and when its victory has been at last achieved and its history fairly written, J. A. Wayland’s name will appear in immortal letters upon its pages.

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¹ An early self-description by publisher Julius Augustus Wayland, emphasizing his folksy style of front page editorializing.

² Davis H. Waite (1825-1901) was a lawyer and newspaper publisher from Aspen, Colorado. Waite was an organizer of the 1892 national convention of the People’s Party in Omaha and the party’s successful nominee for governor of Colorado in the election of November 1892. As governor Waite was supportive of the strike efforts of the Western

Federation of Miners and the American Railway Union. Waite was defeated in his bid for reelection in 1894.

³ Eugene D. Engley (1851-1910) was a Colorado attorney who was elected state attorney general in 1893 on the People's Party ticket. He served a single two-year term in office. Engley later moved to Cripple Creek Colorado, where he was an active supporter of the Western Federation of Miners in the bitter strike of 1903-04, suffering forced deportation in August 1904, from which he bravely returned.

⁴ The Ruskin Colony was a utopian socialist community established in rural Tennessee. Wayland donated his newspaper and its press to the effort as its official organ.

⁵ A self-critical account of the failure of the Ruskin colony by a participant may be found in Isaac Broome, *The Last Days of the Ruskin Cooperative Association*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1902.

⁶ Reference to a fictional island described in a Utopian novel by William Dean Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894). The story was first serialized in *The Cosmopolitan* magazine from November 1892 to October 1893.

⁷ The best known of these was A.S. Edwards, who went from editing *The Coming Nation* to future roles as editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*, *The Industrial Worker*, and *Industrial Union Bulletin*.

⁸ Active supporters of the *Appeal* who hustled subscriptions and ordered and distributed bundles of special editions were known as the "Appeal Army." This is a play on that term.

⁹ The 58-year old J. A. Wayland committed suicide with a handgun on November 11, 1912. As Debs presciently predicts in this piece, an official history of his *Appeal to Reason* was published shortly after his death. See: George Allan England, *The Story of the Appeal*. Girard, KS: Appeal to Reason, 1913. The newspaper continued through several name changes, finally terminating as *The American Freeman* in 1951 following the accidental death by drowning of his eventual successor, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius.