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As to “Hissing Snakes” :  
Letter to the Editor of The People  
(February 10, 1901)

Comrade:—

In your issued of the 27th ult. [Jan. 27, 1901] you have an editorial captioned “The Chicago Convention,” from which the following is an excerpt.

We hope for an authoritative denial of the widely published report that Comrade Debs said that after accepting the nomination of the comrades represented by the Springfield executive he found himself in contact with a nest of hissing snakes.

For obvious reasons I break over a rule not to notice calumny. Every delegate who sat in the Chicago convention knows that the statement above quoted is an unmitigated falsehood, and so does the anonymous person who penned it. How “widely published” it has been I do not know, as your paper is the first and only one in which I have seen it.<sup>1</sup>

In a capitalist paper such a paragraph would be perfectly becoming, but in a socialist paper it is quite inexcusable. The editor is satisfied the statement is false, practically admits it, then proceeds to circulate it as widely as possible, and finally, in all charity pleads with the victim to exculpate himself from the calumny he helped to fasten upon him.

Mr. Editor, it is easy to guess what party your informant belongs to, and it is safe to assume that he is an evangel of “unity.” This is of small consequence, but allow me to suggest that the next time that such a palpable slander comes under your eye you give the victim a chance to explain before, instead of after, crucifying him.

The recent Chicago convention in its clearly defined attitude voiced my sentiments in regard to socialists of all parties. I rejoice that my comrades went on record by acclamation, and am confident that they will labor with becoming zeal to have the joint convention accomplish fully the purpose for which it is intended.

Yours fraternally,

***Eugene V. Debs.***

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<sup>1</sup> The line was from the Chicago *Inter Ocean*, one of the leading conservative dailies of the city, which quoted Debs on the floor of the Chicago SDP's January convention as saying: "Last summer I accepted the nomination for the office of president at their hands in the interests of harmony, because I felt it my duty to accept it. My experiences after that time were most humiliating. Instead of the expected harmony we took into our midst a lot of hissing snakes. However, for the sake of our principles I propose that every effort shall be made to conciliate the factions now at variance." See: "Debs for Harmony," *Inter Ocean*, Jan. 16, 1901, p. 5.