

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 346.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

OWEN-HAYES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**P**ERISH the cotton trade, perish even the political superiority of our country, if it depends on the cotton trade, rather than that they shall be upheld by the sacrifice of everything valuable in life”—so spoke ROBERT OWEN in 1815 after reviewing the iniquities, one may say the cannibalism, practised by the cotton manufacturers of Great Britain upon their male, female, and even upon their child operatives.

Let us now pass from England to the United States; from the year 1815 to the year 1908; from Owen to the large employer of labor EVERIS A. HAYES, a Congressman from California.

“If it were true that our Pacific coast industries can not be developed without Oriental labor, it were better that they never should be developed than that our white laborers should be degraded or driven out by contact with Orientals”—so spoke Representative Hayes in Congress on the 27th of last May, after drawing a lurid picture of the low standard of living that the Oriental brings with him.

Contrast the two men—Owen and Hayes.

Owen denied that “the death-warrants of the strength, morals and happiness of thousands of our fellow creatures” was at all necessary in order to produce the vast wealth that poured at the time into the private pockets of the cotton manufacturers. He perceived, still imperfectly in his days, the possibility of fabulous wealth going hand in hand with universal happiness. His declaration, Perish the cotton trade if it is inseparable from mass degradation! was a call to his country to halt and turn into a better path. His declaration was the announcement of a new era—and he lived up to his declaration.

How about Hayes? It seems incredible, but there can be no doubt. His words are printed black on white in the *Congressional Record*. The first part of his declaration

seems to have the ring of Owen's. Allowance may be made for Hayes's superstition concerning Oriental "contamination." Though an ignoramus on biology, he still may be honest in the declaration that he objects not only to racial contamination but to lowering the standard of the white laborer. When he addressed his speech to Congress the expectation was justified from the passage quoted that he is an upholder of well paid labor. Is he? A minute later he said "there is no possible reason why white labor should not be as cheap and as plenty" in California as anywhere else in the United States. In other words, Congressman Hayes clearly indicated that white wages could be reduced as low as Oriental labor without using the Oriental to that end. The Congressman's opinion with regard to lowering white wages was an inducement thrown out to the House to accept his biologic views. Owen said: "Perish the cotton trade rather than that it flourish on the backs of a degraded proletariat." As to Congressman Hayes, it was as if he said: "Perish the industries of the coast, if they must flourish with Oriental aid, but they can flourish without Oriental aid because we white capitalists know how to lower white wages down to the Oriental level."

Congressman Hayes spoke ninety-three years later than Owen. In point of morals he might as well have been speaking under the conditions for material happiness which prevailed in the Stone Age.

A contrast between Owen and Hayes points to the fact that there is no hope from capitalism. The older it gets the more inveterately reactionary become its upholders.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded February 2010

slpns@slp.org