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EDITORIAL

OPPORTUNITY, ETC., WASTED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

REPRESENTATIVE Charles G. Edwards of Georgia delivered in Congress an impassioned address against a bill introduced by Representative William S. Bennet of New York, the purport of which is to reduce the representation from the Southern States from 82 to 52 members on the ground of the practical disfranchisement of the Negro in the States south of Mason and Dixon's line.

It must have taken Rep. Edwards fully an hour to say all that he did. He spoke of the "purity of the race"; of the "generosity of the Southern States towards their colored wards"; of the progress "unparalleled in history" made by the South in all the things that are requisite to "fulfill her own destiny and to better all mankind." He passed in review the history of the Carpet-bagger days when "Negro heels were planted on white necks"; when the debts of all the States subject to the Carpet-baggers was fiercely increased; when elections were held in the private chambers of the Carpet-bagger and his Negro tool. He admonished the North not to play with dynamite and enrage the noblest race that ever walked on earth; and he withered, or tried to wither Rep. Bennet.

It was time, labor, breath, eloquence, statistics—and opportunity wasted. None such arguments have the slightest effect. Indeed, from the report in the *Congressional Record* it would seem that the Republican members of the House who listened to the oration were few. Otherwise would it have been if the Hon. Edwards had said:

"You Northern employers of Labor who wish to deprive us, Southern dittos of representation in Congress need not overstrain yourselves in that direction. We will ourselves give you a helping hand to cut down our representation so as to exclude the working class in our borders. Yes we will help you, provided you are fair. Drop

your false pretence of representing the people of your several districts. Come from cover and admit that you represent only the capitalist class. So soon as you make the admission we will recognize you as being as candid and honorable as ourselves. We make no bones of it; and we recognize that, seeing the workers are excluded, we should not have the number of representatives that we now have. But if you admit that you are no better than we, then you should also cut down the number of your representatives. Both of us, representing the same thing, should not pad our constituencies with cattle whom we do not represent.

“So far, you have kept up appearances pretty well. But you are getting to the end of your tether. What are your ‘primary’ laws and such other devices but schemes to bar your workers from voting, or to compel them to vote as you please, which is the same thing? We of the South resort to other methods; the end is the same—the disfranchisement of the workers. So, then, drop your mask. Be as straight forward as we are. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and we shall speedily come to an understanding—the proportional reduction of the number of our members in the House.”

Had Rep. Edwards held language to this effect the harpoon would have entered the rhinoceros skin of the Northern Democratic and Republican Representatives, alike, and, instead of yawning while he spoke, or adjourning to the cloakroom where they swapped anecdotes, the Republicans would have listened in rapt attention—and squirmed—and dropped the Bennet bill.

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