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EDITORIAL

## WORK—AND DIE!

By DANIEL DE LEON

“I ’VE seen a good deal in the papers lately about the length of the bread lines and the thousands of men who are out of work,” said Street Cleaning Commissioner Edwards; “well, there needn’t be any bread lines for a few days at least if the men really want to work,” he added; and he issued a call for 10,000 men to shovel snow at 25 cents an hour.

There can be little doubt that Commissioner Edwards is to-day complacently patting his capon-lined belly as a demonstrator of the theory that poverty is not involuntary; that he who wants work can always get it; and that it is only the idle and shiftless who stock the bread lines. There can be little doubt Commissioner Edwards will even back up his conclusion with statistics. The needed 10,000 men did not respond. Several thousand did. Of these not a few quit early. Many more thousands didn’t care to work, “were too lazy.”

Commissioner Edwards may be left to enjoy his self-complacent conclusions. The incident furnished by him is more important.

Man wants work—in order to live, not as a means to hasten his death. Man wants work—not for the sake of work, but for the purpose of laying up wealth after having restored the tissue expended on work. There is a statute in the State that punishes attempt at suicide. If mere bodily exertion is “work,” then the suicide worked. The work that kills the worker is not the work he can be understood to hanker after. And yet, that is the work that 10,000 victims of capitalism were summoned to do, and which their declination to undertake is construed as an evidence of their being lazy.

To shovel snow at a temperature close to zero, with the cutting wind blowing a gale, with one’s feet in the slush—may be, is “healthy exercise,” as Commissioner Edwards put it. But, then, to expect this work of a man without furnishing him the

proper clothing, shoes and head-cover, is, as absurd as to expect a soldier to enter a campaign in his bares. To shovel snow is “healthy work”; but it is tissue-consuming work. To demand such work at 25 cents an hour—ininitely less than required to restore the expenditure of tissue—is to decree suicide.

No wonder the 10,000 men were not forthcoming.

The “opportunity to work” offered by Commissioner Edwards differs only in degree from the “opportunity to work” offered by the capitalist class. It is a Ukase of Death—not instantaneous, but death, all the same,—to the proletariat.

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

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