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EDITORIAL

OVERALLS AND LEISURE.

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WHILE the Wise Men of old came from the East, in these unregenerate days it would seem that only from the West can pure, unalloyed wisdom flow. In the Los Angeles *Times* of November 13 Gen. Harrison Gray Otis's book reviewer makes the startling allegation that the "real leisure class wear overalls and carry picks."

Writing newspaper articles takes time. Writing libellous articles against the Labor movement hinged on the fact that one's printing plant blows up, as a consequence of one's own reckless neglect or criminal conspiracy, may take a great deal of time. Yet the writer and publisher of such articles does nothing for society. As far as society is concerned, he is an outsider, adding nothing to its wealth but only taking from it, living upon it without replenishing the store he depletes—the career of a parasite, a "man of leisure" par excellence.

And this creature has the hardihood to hold up to Labor the mockery that the "real leisure class wear overalls and carry picks." What the toil of the pick and shovel man is, everybody knows. It is ten hours a day, in sun or drizzle. It is to have a foreman at your elbow, continually swinging the whip of threatened discharge and unemployment over your back. It is to lose your identity and individuality in a brass tag or an epithet. "No. 10, you — — — — —, hustle that load in quick, or you'll get your time!"—and you hustle. It is to consume so much body-tissue in the course of the day's work that nobody will take the job unless it is the last thing on earth he can find to do.

But that is not all. As man lives not by bread alone, so a "leisure" class must not be judged by its work alone. Real "leisure" implies education, social advantages and pleasures, travel, cultured tastes, artistic home surroundings, relief from the carking cares of to-morrow. Of all the sages Gen. Otis (or his book reviewer) is the

first to discover these in the home of the workingman. The workingman's education—it is dulled in school by underfeeding, and nipped short to meet the cost of living. The workman's social pleasures—they are confined to the most inexpensive and unattractive. The workingman's travel—it is done without enjoyment, feverishly and worryingly, in search of a job. The workman's culture—it is killed by the poverty-stricken surroundings in which he is brought up. The workman's freedom from anxiety—like the deep sea fish which explodes when brought to the surface, the workman would now be in danger of collapsing if the accustomed load were too suddenly lifted off him. It surely takes the “hustling West” to produce a man who can see a “real leisure class” in that.

If, however, he sincerely does, it were easy to prove. All these gentlemen of the Otis type are on the hunt for culture, affluence, and all the good things that leisure implies. If then, the “real leisure class” is that which “wears overalls and carries a pick,” let them all forsake their newspaper offices, brokerages and stock exchanges, don the blue denim, and shoulder the lusty steel. Why do they hesitate?

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