

General Harrison Gray Otis on Labor

(Copyright, 1904, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

WASHINGTON, Feb. 5.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—My interview today is with an independent employer who has been successfully fighting organized labor for more than a decade and who has radical views as to labor and capital. I refer to Major General Harrison Gray Otis, the editor and chief owner of the Los Angeles Times, one of the great newspaper properties of the far west. General Otis has edited the Times for more than a quarter of a century. He has employed all sorts of labor, and in 1899 his office was filled with union men. They made certain demands, which Otis refused to grant. They struck, and Otis, whose education in fighting began with four years in our civil war, fought back. He filled his office with nonunion men. He was boycotted, but he continued to fight and has been fighting ever since, taking only one vacation, during which he was a brigadier general in the Philippines and on the firing line at the time of our Spanish war.

My first question was as to labor conditions on the Pacific slope. General Otis replied:

"In southern California, where I live, we have to a large extent industrial freedom. We are comparatively free from strikes, and as a result, perhaps, we are growing more than any other part of the state. We are building railroads, pumping oil, going out minerals and becoming rich. It is different in San Francisco. The labor situation there is bad and serious disturbances have been going on for a long time. The effect has been to paralyze industrial activity, cripple commerce and restrict manufactures. The losses amounted into the millions, and the greatest losses have been felt by labor itself because least able to stand them. There have been strikes, boycotts and frequent acts of industrial violence owing to the domination of the unions, and men have been persecuted, beaten, maimed and murdered for refusing to do their bidding."

"What do you think of the growth of the unions? Will they ever control the labor of the country?"

"I think not. They constitute only a small percentage of all the toilers, and the law-abiding majority will never surrender to the too often lawless minority. It cannot do so in the very nature of the case. Industrial freedom is as sacred as personal freedom, political freedom or religious freedom. My position is that every citizen has the lawful right to pursue undisturbed and unhampered any lawful occupation in a lawful way, and to be protected in that right by the whole power of the government if need be.

This is warranted by the constitution and the law, and nothing less than this will serve. As to the growth of the trades unions, that would not be a menace to the country if their tendencies were not so unreasonable and monopolistic as many of them have been in recent years. I have never opposed unions as such, but only their tendency toward lawlessness. As they are today, their domination would paralyze industry and be an intolerable despotism. The right not to join unions is as sacred as the right to join them, and it is not for one class of citizens to say what another class shall or shall not do in this regard."

"Give me your idea of the labor situation, General Otis."

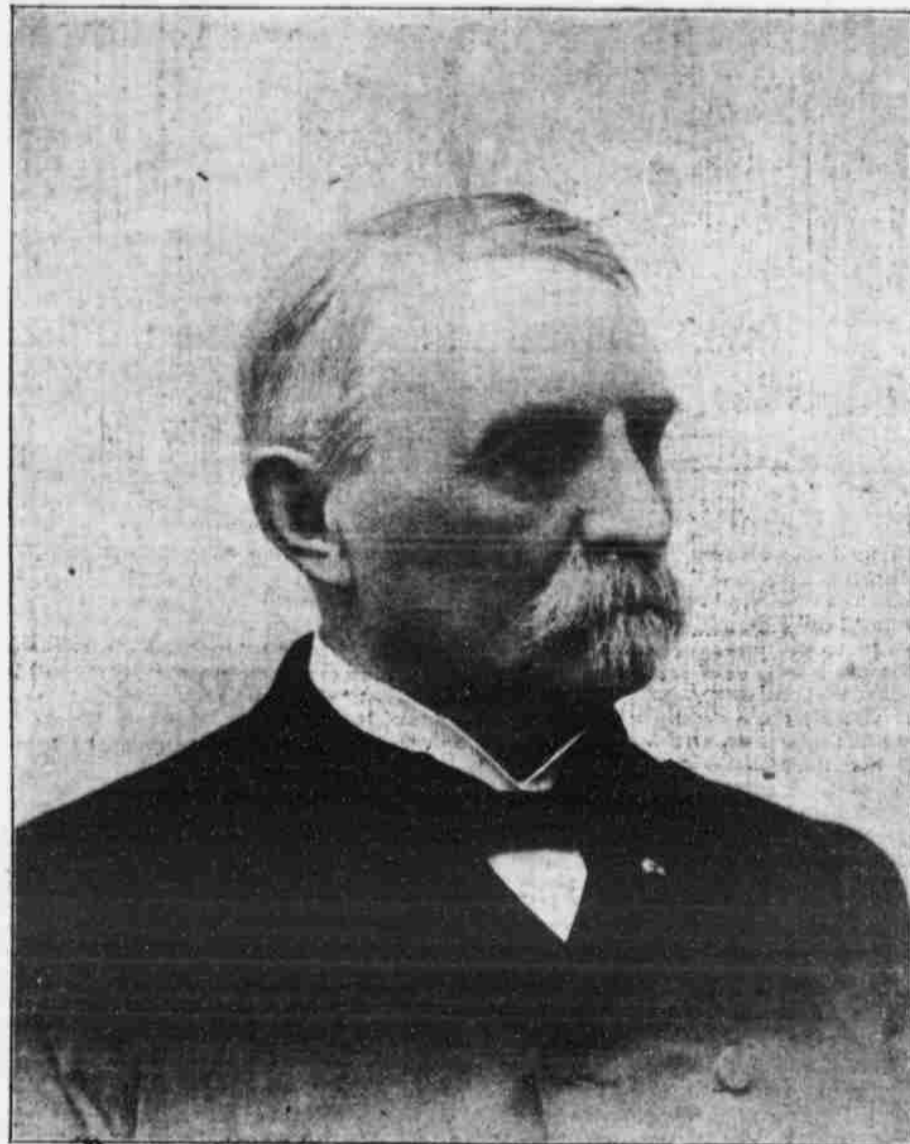
"It is abnormal, threatening bad!" was the reply. "It is a serious drawback to the progress of the country. The remedy lies in the enforcement of the laws as they stand. We don't need new legislation, but we must enforce the existing laws. The fundamental right of independent labor must be preserved and the liberty of all workmen protected. If it is not all well together, and the laboring classes most. What labor needs is to be protected from itself."

"What do you mean by that, General?" I asked.

"I mean that organized labor has so far drifted from the right lines that it is now the most bitter foe of its natural brother, unorganized labor, which it is wickedly attempting to crush. Capital is not the natural foe of labor, organized or unorganized, but organized labor is fighting not only the employers, upon whom it must depend for wages, but also all other classes of labor, which it can never dominate. It is the greatest enemy that labor has, and it is at the same time a menace to the country."

"Give me some of your own experiences in labor matters. How does it feel to be boycotted?"

"It is not pleasant," replied General Otis, "but one would feel worse as a slave. I will not deny that we were annoyed by the boycott, but I believe we made money by it, and, above all, we retained our own self-respect as men and as Americans. The story of our trouble began thirteen years ago, when we were confronted by a senseless strike in the Los Angeles Times office. The men in our composing rooms then walked out without any adequate cause or provocation. They crippled the office temporarily, but we refused to yield and stood fast against the boycott which was at once instituted. Our business was injured some-



MAJOR GENERAL HARRISON GRAY OTIS.

what for the first few months, and I might say for the first year. Nevertheless, the earnings of the paper slowly but steadily increased, and after the first year they increased rapidly. We refused to restore the strikers. We defied the boycott and spurned the boycotters. The people appreciated our action and the prosperity of the paper has been confessedly great. As it is now we pay the highest wages to our skilled and faithful workmen, and we have disbursed more than \$1,500,000 in gold for labor since the day we defeated that senseless and wicked strike."

"What, in a nutshell, are the rules which should govern in the relations of employers and employes?" I asked.

"In a nutshell," replied General Otis, "they are faithfulness, fidelity and devotion to duty on the one hand; goodwill, fair wages, reasonable hours and good treatment on the other hand, and fair play on both, without unwarranted interference by outside persons or organizations not properly concerned in the affairs of either workman or employer."

"I am a worker myself," continued General Otis, "and I maintain the right of my fellows to work and to make independent contracts with their employers. I should like to see every worthy man and woman in the land who wishes to work employed at fair wages and at regular, steady work. High wages for short and irregular periods give less money in the course of a year than continuous employment at a more moderate yet fair rate of pay. I believe that under right and free conditions in the labor market it is possible for every competent workman in the country to have work for 300 days in the year and be paid accordingly."

"What do you mean by right conditions?" I asked.

"I mean those in which the relations between the employer and his men are mutually satisfactory. Such relations should prevail whether the labor is skilled or unskilled, organized or unorganized. I mean that the workman should have good wages, that his family should be well nourished, well clothed and well housed and at the same time have enough for health, education and recreation. Such conditions are for the welfare and contentment of the people and a boon to the state."

"How about the length of the working day?" I asked.

"There should be no contention about that," said General Otis. "If the hour is made the unit and basis of labor, the problem would be practically solved. Then the number of hours to constitute a working day becomes a secondary consideration and can be adjusted without trouble. Such matters can be arranged by the parties immediately concerned on a flexible basis, to suit the requirements of the business and with advantage to all concerned."

"There is one thing that is very important," General Otis went on: "it is more important in many respects than wages or hours. This is that the owner has the right to control his establishment and the right to regulate the force and the output. He must be able to make a fair

profit on his product, whatever it is, besides earning the annual interest on the cost of the plant, an item never to be left out of the account. Unless he is given a free hand to accomplish these things he cannot do a safe and sound or growing business. He cannot thrive himself or enable his people to thrive for long. He cannot furnish the greatest need of labor, which is certainty and steadiness of employment, fair wages and repose."

"Have you ever been a laboring man, general?"

"Most emphatically so," replied General Otis. "I know what it is to work and so do all my business associates. I began life as a farmer's boy, learned to read in a log school house and grew up among people with whom industry, frugality and free labor were the rules of life. I am a laboring man still. For the past twenty years, during which I have been building up the Los Angeles Times, I have worked more hours daily than most of the men in my employ. I have never kept a record of my hours nor charged for overtime, though I have often put in from twelve to sixteen hours per day week in and week out. This, however, is merely a personal matter and of little importance in connection with the question."

"How will the great industrial combinations affect labor matters?" I asked.

"I see no reason why they should not be for the good of labor, provided the combinations are kept within the plain limitations of the law according to the wise policy of President Roosevelt. Great combinations can do great things. They can handle industrial problems which would be beyond single individuals or small capitalists. Great undertakings require great dynamic forces, immense machinery and enormous capital. They call for many workmen and create opportunity for wages. The real test is in the question as to whether the combinations are lawful or unlawful. Outside of this they should not be restricted. They should not be crushed merely because they are big any more than small operators and operations should be crushed because they are small. All are alike entitled to the protection of the law. Such combinations require some restraint, but that restraint should be the restraint of the law and not of public clamor."

"What do you think of the compromise and arbitration policy of the Civic Federation, general? I mean the policy advocated by Mark Hanna, Samuel Gompers and others?"

"I think there is more or less politics in it," replied General Otis. "It is more theoretical than practical. Mr. Hanna and his people, ignoring the fact that the law is ample to do justice to all, are trying to substitute a contrivance of their own for the settlement of labor controversies. The same amount of effort put forth in enforcing the constitution and the laws would have accomplished more good. Their basic, though unexpressed purpose, seems to be to cajole or force the employer to give way merely in order to stop the row. No such plan of settlement can be permanent, for it is not right. The side to give way in such

controversies is the side, whichever it may be, that has been proved to be in the wrong."

"How about the labor unions and the United States government?"

"There should be no labor unions among civil government employes," said General Otis. "You might as well draft them upon the army and navy. The government is and should be supreme, and it cannot take the risk of suffering labor unions to dictate to it in any particular. The labor unionist who enters the government service should at once drop his trade union alliances and acknowledge his allegiance to Uncle Sam only."

"You are connected with printing, general; how should the government act as to organized labor in the government printing office?"

"I have substantially answered that," was the reply. "I don't think the government should recognize any trades union, directly or indirectly, in the government printing office. President Roosevelt was absolutely right in the Miller case when he insisted on its being an open shop. He went to the core of the matter in that case and nothing less than the rules he laid down can prevail unless Uncle Sam intends to retire from the business of public printing, which he evidently has no notion of doing."

"How far should the government go in its protection of the nonunion man?"

"It should go the whole length needed to protect him in his right to work for whom and for what he pleases. The nonunion man has every right possessed by the union man. His rights are, in fact, superior to the union man's rights so long as he keeps himself within the limitations of the law; for the union man does not do that. He breaks out and undertakes to monopolize all labor himself and at the same time maltreats his nonunion brother. I can't see how any sane man can support the theory that the nonunion man or any man must join the ranks of organized labor in order that he may have the protection guaranteed by the constitution and the law."

"What do you think of the associations of capital now forming to keep representatives to deal with organized labor—I mean the walking delegates of the capitalists?"

"I don't think they should be necessary. They will not be when the conditions are normal and where the law authorities are watchful. I think the law should protect the employer if he is unjustly treated by organized labor, as it should also protect the employe in a similar situation. The employer has as much right to such protection of the humblest workman Associations of employers having for their object the protection of each other by lawful means are entirely proper. They are needed now more than ever before to deal with and check the aggressions of organized labor. They require the sinews of war to carry on their operations and must have authorized representatives just as other associations."

"If the capitalists and the labor unions combine, where will the consumers come in?"

"They will have to take to the woods," said General Otis. "But such a combination will never be made so as to effect any large class of consumers. It could not last. It would be impossible."

"What is to be the outcome of this conflict?"

"The country," replied General Otis—"I mean the people—will win and win tremendously when it comes to a direct conflict between the law and the labor leagues. I believe that conflict cannot be long averted. The American people will never yield to the lawless domination of the few. They will never surrender their clear, lawful, personal and industrial rights to the selfish demand of an aggressive minority. They will fight first, and when they fight they win." FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Pointed Paragraphs

Most of the fools in this world haven't got the money to part with.

When a girl poses as a beauty she is usually more ornamental than useful.

The average woman spends more time than money when she goes shopping.

An epicure is a person who doesn't enjoy the kind of food that agrees with him.

Every time a man doesn't say anything he lessens his chances of being called a fool.

The more wheels a man has the better off he is—if they are in his pocketbook instead of his head.

When an American girl is looking for a title she should not marry beyond her father's means.

Those who have no use for the lowly should remember that the lower jaw does nearly all the work.

A woman has certainly reached the limit when she's so homely that automobile goggles are becoming to her.

The older a man gets the more he appreciates the fact that he wasn't allowed to have his own way when a boy.

When a girl marries a man because he declares he couldn't live without her isn't she entitled to a life-saving medal?—Chicago News.