

EDITORIAL

## WATSON'S "CRYSTALLIZED LABOR."

By DANIEL DE LEON

**I**N *The Jeffersonian* of March 3rd, a sort of weekly installment of *Watson's Jeffersonian* monthly magazine, Tom Watson denies with his customary effervescence the imputation of the *Daily People* that he lives on "surplus value," that is, on the unpaid for value produced by his "Niggers," to use the Christian term which he applies to his colored workingmen. Mr. Watson denies the imputation on two grounds:

First, there is no such thing as "surplus value"; the term is "pure nonsense," "idiotic gibberish"; and

Second, he hires no Negro producers.

We promise ourselves the pleasure in a subsequent issue to make a front attack upon the "idiotic gibberish." This trip we shall flank that position by storming the second. The first can then be more easily blown up.

Mr. Watson's reasoning to prove that he does not live on surplus value because he hires no Negro producers is this: For thirty years he worked as a lawyer, a lecturer, and in other capacities. He worked very hard, he worked so hard that he "lost the art of taking a vacation"; with the money earned during those thirty years in the manner above indicated, he bought a tract of land; that tract of land he allows certain tenants to use; those whom he thus accommodates agree to pay him two bales of cotton for the sweet boon, and that cotton is payment for the use of Mr. Watson's "crystallized labor."

From this presentation of his own case, and we make no doubt the presentation is truthful, Mr. Watson should know best, it follows—

First.—We gave Mr. Watson credit for two things which we are, in honor to social science, bound to hasten to retract. We had been giving him credit for being up-to-date, a capitalist: we now see he is fully a hundred years behind, he is a

feudal junker; we gave him credit for using his workers in wage slavery: we now see he uses them in an even lower status, the status of serfs.

Second.—As a consequence of this, Mr. Watson, indeed, does not live on "surplus value." What does he live on?

When the property-holding class is still at the feudal stage its method of exploitation is cruder than when it has grown into a capitalist class. Under feudalism the serf is taxed a stated amount of his product by the feudal holder, and, if there is anything left, the serf is allowed to keep it for himself. Under capitalism, the wage-slave sells his labor-power for a given sum, normally speaking, he sells at the market value. The utility there is in his merchandise labor-power, the quality of that merchandise, which quality is what induces the capitalist to buy it, is that of yielding more wealth than its own value, or price. This additional value is called "surplus value." If the value, or price, of labor-power in the labor market is \$2 a day, then the utility of that labor-power to the capitalist who buys it is that it yields fully \$3 worth of wealth over and above its own cost, or value. This excess is called "surplus value." Under capitalism, the property-holder lives on "surplus value"; under feudalic conditions he lives on taxes. In other words, the capitalist lives on veiled extortion; the junker lives on extortion unveiled—Mr. Watson's case, as presented by himself.

Third.—Junker Watson's "crystallized labor" is a thing unique. It has a deliciously heathenish flavor about it, the flavor of one of the many miraculous talismans we are in childhood made familiar with through the Thousand-and-one Nights Tales—talismans that never diminish in efficacy, however much used. Other "crystallized labor" is consumed in use. The "crystallized labor" in a coat, the "crystallized labor" in a bale of cotton, all these "crystallized labors" wear out; they go the way whither goes the leaf of the rose and the leaf of the laurel. Not so Junker Watson's. His "crystallized labor" is perennial. Tenants may die and new ones may come, however long the figure of the bales of cotton which in the procession of the years the tenants may have worked themselves to a bone in order to pay Junker Watson for the use of his land, the shadow of that land, which he calls his "crystallized labor," never grows less.

Fourth and last.—Differently from the junkers of feudalism in its prime, who

were well aware, and boasted thereof, and considered the fact of their vacation a feather in their cap, Junker Watson is not aware that he is having his vacation.

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