DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 233. NEW YORK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1910. ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

DUCK-IN-THUNDER WATSON.

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THE third of the Marxian theories, which *Watson's Jeffersonian Magazine* for this month "disembowels," and the "disemboweling" of which it now remains to consider is the law governing wages.

Watson's states: "Karl Marx contended that, under Capitalism, the wage of the worker tended downwards to the bare cost of living. He called this 'The Iron Law of Wages.'"

We shall not take advantage of Mr. Watson's betraying his unfamiliarity with Marx's works, as appears from the statement that Marx gave the name of "the iron law of wages" to the theory that the wage of the worker tends downward to the bare cost of living. Neither did Marx ever use the term "iron law of wages" to designate his theory; nor does the term "iron law of wages" apply to the Marxian theory. We shall not take advantage of the good ground the gentleman offers to dismiss him as a person who knows not what he is talking about, and his "disemboweling" as a mare's nest. That would be to allow our genial, tho' wrathful Georgian to run to waste. He can be put to good use—the use that teachers put ungrammatical sentences to. They thereby teach correct grammar.

The "Iron law of wages" is known in economics mainly through Lassalle. It was a pictorial sentence by which that great orator illustrated his theory of wages. According to his theory, seeing that supply and demand regulate prices, workingmen, being many, wages would go down; the privations that lower wages would bring about, would also bring about a decrease of proletarians; the decreased supply of workers would then bring wages up; the prosperity of higher wages would then result in an increase of proletarians; the increased supply would thereupon bring wages down again, back to where they were—and so on, in an endless, vicious and unbreakable circle. This Lassalle called the "Iron law of wages." The theory is partly made up of Malthusianism. It is untrue. It is rejected by Socialism. No Socialist talks of the "Iron law of wages."

The Socialist law of wages is an induction from the two sets of facts from which flow two economic laws, and from a third fact.

The first of these laws is the law of exchange value, or, value proper. The law of exchange value establishes that the measure in which goods, wares and merchandise, in short, commodities, are exchanged for one another is the amount of labor-power socially necessary to produce them. As the socially necessary labor-power to produce one commodity declines, the others remaining stationary, a larger quantity of the former equals the value of, and is exchangeable with the latter. If the labor-power socially necessary to produce them all either rises or declines, then the relative value of all remains unchanged.

The second law is that of prices. The law of prices establishes that, while in the long run the price fetched by commodities in the market coincides with their value, nevertheless, owing to the perturbations that the market is generally affected with, the price periodically rises above, or sinks below, the value of the commodity. These risings and sinkings depend mainly upon the relation between supply and demand: if supply exceeds demand, the price falls below; if demand exceeds supply, then the price rises above the commodity's value.

The fact, or third factor which determines the law of wages, is the fact that labor-power, under capitalism, is a merchandise. Numberless circumstances veil the fact. The veil is rent by a pregnant philologic principle. Let Mr. Watson conjure from his grave his patron saint and namesake, Thomas Jefferson, and ask him: "Tom, how is the labor-market to-day?" Tom would look blank. In Jefferson's time there was no such thing as a "labor market." Philology teaches that a thing, or its manifestation, must first exist; then it takes shape in a thought; thereupon it crystallizes into a word, or term. Language, accordingly, is a prime factor in sociology. The word, or term, that is current coin is the reflex of a thing in existence. "Labor-market" is such a current coin to-day. As the terms cattle-market, cotton-market, leather-market irresistibly denote that cattle, cotton, leather, etc., are commodities, so does the term "labor-market" irresistibly tear the civic-religious mystifications that veil the fact of labor-power being, under capitalism, a chattel, and, as chattel, subject to the laws of value and price that rule all other commodities.

From the synthesis of the two laws above mentioned and the fact just considered flows the law of wages.

"Wages" is the price that the commodity labor-power fetches in the market. In this law, however, is involved a sociologic storm, the approaching rumblings of which are the cause of Mr. Watson's deliriums.

It has been shown that supply and demand determine prices, causing price to fall below and rise above the value level. There is one commodity, however, with which the rise of price above the value level is exceptional, while almost permanent and increasingly so is the fall below that level, for the reason that that one commodity is the only one with which an increased supply does not denote a decreased value. That commodity is labor-power, the workingman.

With cattle, cotton, shoes, hats, etc., the less the quantity of labor-power socially required for their production, the lower will their value sink; and the sinking of their value, being the consequence of a decreased quantity of labor-power socially required for their production, is consequently accompanied by an increased supply. With all these other commodities an increased supply is, normally considered, a sign of decreased value. Otherwise with labor-power. The increase in the supply of labor-power in the market is, to-day, the consequence, exclusively, of the displacement of labor by improved methods of production, together with the consequent dis-classing of members of the middle class, and their being turned into proletarians. The "value" of labor-power, a partly physical, partly social magnitude, depending upon social conditions at a given time, is expressable in the term "standard of living." The aspiration to preserve, if he cannot improve upon that "standard," remains in the workingmen. But, remain as that aspiration may, the "standard of living," or be it the "value of labor-power" at a given time, is depressed by the increased supply of himself steadily dumped into the labor-market by improved methods of production. Accordingly, the supply of labor precedes and thereby forces down the decline of the "standard of living." A further consequence is the steady decline in the price of labor-power. The ultimate consequence is the inevitableness of the Social Revolution.

Not all the figures Mr. Watson may trot out from this spot, and that spot, and the other, can affect the robust general fact that the "standard of living" of our workingmen is steadily on the decline. Indeed Mr. Watson's fits of delirium are evidence thereof. A duck in the thunder of the storm that the Marxian law of wages explains and makes the knowing ready for, Mr. Watson feels bewildered, looks bewildered, and transfers to paper the bewilderment of his duck-in-thunder bourgeois soul.

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Uploaded February 2011

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