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The Continuing Appeal of Anti-Imperialism

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This review of J. Sakai's *Settlers, Mythology of the White Proletariat* was published in the January/February 1995 issue of *Prison News Service* (#49).

Kuwasi Balagoon was a New Afrikan anarchist member of the Black Liberation Army, captured by the State after the ill-fated 1981 Brink's holdup carried out by the Revolutionary Armed Task Force. He died of AIDS while in prison.

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Great works measure up, inspire higher standards of intellectual and moral honesty, and, when appreciated for what they are, serve as a guide for those among us who intend a transformation of reality. "Settlers, the Mythology of the White Proletariat", caused quite a stir in the anti-imperialist white left and among nationalists of the Third World nations within the confines of the U.S. empire as well as anarchists and Moslems of this hemisphere. In short, among all of us who are ready and willing to smash or dismantle the empire, for whatever reasons, and whatever reasoning. This is in spite of the fact that it is a Marxist work, because it isn't out of the stale, sterile, static, mechanical mode of the vulgar sap-rap that has carried that label.

Its historical recounting of the sequence of horrors perpetrated against non-white people, from the beginning of Babylon to the recent past, has not been discounted publicly, to my knowledge, by anyone, including the cheap-shot artist who offered an underhanded review of it in the *Fifth Estate* called "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism." [Editor's Note: This review was written by the

late Freddy Perlman, and is also available as a pamphlet.] Mythology should serve as a reminder (to anyone who needs one), of the genocidal tendencies of the empire, the traitorous interplay between settler-capitalist, settler-nondescript, and colonial flunkies. The flaws and short-comings of the IWW, which marked the highest point of revolutionary conscientiousness among whites here, the fraud carried on by the Communist Party USA, and assorted other persistent offenders of common sense and common decency. To my amazement, a couple of white anti-imperialists I know had started the book without finishing, complaining that it was old hat, but I've heard nothing particularly new from them and I suggest that they take special note of detail, and I'll remind them that this work is so accurate as to be able to serve as files on people who will say anything to support a position that doesn't support real action.

Not being one to take figures verbatim without cross-checking, and believing that class struggle or war within the white oppressor nation would be a prerequisite for complete victory of the captive New Afrikan, Mexicano, Native and Puerto Rican nations, I decided to cross-check with the most authoritative work available to me and perhaps anyone, "The Rich and the Super Rich", by Ferdinand Lundberg. This was necessary, I felt, in order to get a clear picture of the material conditions of white folks. This in order to investigate white Americans' interest in revolution. Professor Lundberg used two graphs to illustrate his point: "Most Americans — citizens of the wealthiest, most powerful and most ideal-swathed country in the world — by a very wide margin own nothing more than their twin household goods, a few glittering gadgets such as automobiles and television sets (usually purchased on installment plans, many at second hand) and the clothes on their backs. A horde, if not a majority, of Americans live in shacks, cabins, hovels, shanties, hand-me-down Victorian eyesores, rickety tenements and flaky apartment buildings.."

The second and third tables help us to make things out a bit clearer; it shows that 25.8% of households had less than \$1,000 to

their collective names and the third showing us that 28% of all consumer units had a net under or less than \$100. With 11% with a deficit and 5% holding at zero, a total of 16%. This goes on to show that 35% of all households had a net worth of less than \$5,000. Is this affluence?

It certainly looks like a good case for classic class struggle, with the evidence that Lundberg gives us. Sakai warns us, however, “most typically, the revisionist lumps together the U.S. oppressor nation with the various Third World oppressed nations and national minorities as one society.”

In this light, the figures check out. New Afrikan income, which today averages 56% of white income and stood at about the same or less in 1953, makes up a disproportion of the deficit, zero, under-a-thousand and under-five-thousand dollar consumer units. Definitely more than 10% of them, which was our percentage of the population. If we could make a sensible judgment, we’d have to say that the combined captive nations: New Afrikan, Mexicano, Puerto Rican and Native, or about one sixth of the population as of 1981 all make up a disproportionate amount of the consumer units with deficits, and below \$5,000. This forms a cushion for the white population.

Sakai points out that, “the medium Euro-American family income in 1981 was \$23,517, and “that between 1960 and 1979 the percentage of settler families earning over \$25,000 per year (in constant 1979 dollars) doubled, making up 40% of the settler population.” We may have had a general idea from neighborhood walks, but Sakai gives us an idea of the extent.

This extent, and the “conspicuous concentration of state services — parks, garbage collections, swimming pools, better schools, medical facilities and so on” and the fact that “to the settlers’ garrison goes the first pick of whatever is available — homes, jobs, schools, food, health care, governmental services and so on.” Not to mention racism within settlers, puts to rest an idea of a multi-racial

class struggle that includes whites. “Nation is the dominant factor, modifying class relations.”

Lundberg who overlooked the national factor in the economic tables he based his argument on, notes that “in the rare cases where policy is uppermost in the mind of the electorate it is usually a destructive policy, as toward Negroes in the South and elsewhere. Policies promising to be injurious to minority groups such as Negroes, Catholics, foreigners, Jews, Mexicans, Chinese, intellectuals and in fact, all deviants from fixed philistinish norms, usually attract a larger-than-usual supporting vote,” or mandate if you will.

“Approximately 10% of the European-American population has been living in poverty by government statistics. This minority is not a cohesive, proletarian stratum, but a miscellaneous fringe of the unlucky and the outcast: older workers trapped by fading industries, retired poor, physically and emotionally disabled, and such families supported by single women.”

How many of this group of whites will side with the revolution, how many whites will come to view their interests with the long-term interest of those of us who prefer to live on a living planet, and how many will fail to equate their quality of life with 50,000,000,000 hamburgers is anyone’s guess.

However, it’s a small wonder why white anti-imperialists have been giving me blank stares whenever I’ve mentioned class struggle to them.

The left in this country is very small, by whatever way you might want to look at it. If you define left as those of us who stand for a decentralization of wealth and power — taking the question is completely out of the realm of bourgeois civil rights and rightfully includes the independence of captured nations, which is part and parcel of the decentralization of wealth and power — the left is microscopic.

We are left with ourselves. Left in homes that police drop bombs on from helicopters, and without any shared sense of outrage. We are left where murders by police and other racists are commonplace

and for the most part celebrated. Left in the ghettos, barrios, and other reservations.

Let’s not forget that New Afrika has a class problem. That not only do police, but politicians, poverty hustlers and representatives from the established Black publishers and churches, move up in the world when they join the ranks of the oppressors. The oppressors never have a problem finding Black leaders to condemn their blatant disregard for life, like that which took place in Philly [when police bombed a home with eleven Black people, including four children]. We only have established leaders to draw us into the ranks of a Democratic Party without being able to introduce as much as one Black plank into a white platform. Leaders who beget other leaders like Mayor Goode [a Black mayor who was thought of as being a victory for Black people].

Where I differ with Sakai is the assertion that “building mass institutions and movements of a specific national character under the leadership of a communist party are absolute necessities for the oppressed.” What communist party is he talking about? I feel that we must build revolutionary institutions that buttress on survival through collectives, which in turn should form federations. Grassroots collective building can begin immediately.

In an epoch where New Afrikan nationalists and Marxists have voluntarily taken the defensive, without even a fraction of a blueprint of a party or consistent practices in the colony, it’s incredible that people outside the ranks and currents of those who believe in magic words aren’t encouraged to collectively take matters in their own hands, to build the collective institutions and superstructure of a superseding society. We must begin where we are, with each other and the time we don’t waste.

I think that the building of revolutionary collectives and forming of federations of collectives is the most practical and righteously rewarding process of preserving and enhancing life and developing the character of all nations. We can change ourselves and the world.