The Continuing Appeal of Anti-Imperialism

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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 shortcomings 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...”
life and developing the character of all nations. We can change ourselves and the world.

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. "Na-
tion is the dominant factor, modifying class relations."

Lundberg who overlooked the national factor in the eco-
nomic 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 philis-
tinish 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 minor-
ity 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 revolu-
tion, 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 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 representa-
tives 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 con-
demn their blatant disregard for life, like that which took place
in Philly [when police bombed a home with eleven Black peo-
ple, including four children]. We only have established leaders
to draw us into the ranks of a Democratic Party without be-
ing 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 un-
der the leadership of a communist party are absolute necessi-
ties 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 im-
mediately.

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 instit-
tutions 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