

NOTES ON "SETTLERS"

A group of activists and writers have produced *The Mythology of the White Proletariat* (aka "Settlers"), *Night-Vision*, and several other works. They have brought a lot of ideas together, and have stimulated discussion of U.S. history, primitive accumulation, the reconfiguring of nations, races, and classes in the epoch of the global economy, genocide as capitalist policy, and other important topics. Below I have reproduced their views on one question, the significance of class distinctions among European-Americans, the people they call "settlers." *Italics* as in original. I have made interjections in **boldface**.

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First the opening statement of the case:

Scientific investigation reveals that: 1) *The Euro-Amerikan masses, making up the base of an oppressor society, have throughout their entire history attempted to advance themselves primarily by further oppressing us--not by any class struggle.* 2) That during most of U.S. history the U.S. Empire's proletariat was a colonial proletariat, made up only of oppressed Afrikan, Indian, Latino and Asian workers. 3) While a white proletariat made up of immigrant Europeans did emerge in the early 20th Century, by the end of World War II it was literally dissolved by integration into the petit-bourgeois settler mass. Today there is no genuine white proletariat, but only a scattered minority of variously privileged white workers totally commanded by the petit-bourgeois consciousness of their settler community. ["Settlers," 3]

Who can dispute "scientific investigation?" A few definitions:

We hold that settlerism is the historic instrument created by the European ruling classes to safeguard their colonial conquests with entire, imported populations of European invaders. In return for special privileges and a small share of the colonial loot these settlers become the loyal, live-in garrison troops of Empire over us. [Ibid, 2]

For us the proletariat is the lowest, most oppressed and most exploited working class. It is a revolutionary class, a class in the epoch of imperialism whose interests are tied to socialism. We must recognize that imperialism has created, particularly in the oppressor nations, many wage workers who are in no way proletarian. [Ibid, 4]

But people from Africa were imported to the western hemisphere along with people from Europe. Why aren't they counted as "settlers" too? That must be where class analysis comes in. Here is another outline of history: The ruling classes imported from Europe and Africa laborers, soldiers, prostitutes,

and all the others necessary to clear out the indigenous inhabitants, transform the environment, and start the profit-machine turning. In the early period most laborers were neither free nor slave. As chattel slavery took shape it was limited to people from Africa, who were then defined as "black." People from Europe, exempted from slavery, were defined as "white," and the indigenous people, who, when they were not enslaved were treated as wild animals, were defined as "red." When slavery ended, the color line was reconstituted on a new basis: Being "white" meant citizenship, favored access to jobs, and a greater chance than others had to escape the proletariat. As necessary, the newly-arrived and newly-conquered have been assigned places in the racial hierarchy. The privileges of whiteness have led whites even of the laboring classes to identify their interests with those of their masters. Their willingness to do so has made them ideal garrison troops, more efficient and cheaper than any police force because their labor enriches their masters even while they help subjugate others. But however many escaped the laboring class, and whatever their racial interests, the class interests of the laborers of European origin and descent were identical to those of all other proletarians, and remain so to this day. Back to "Settlers":

So all sections of white settler society--even the artisan, worker, and farmer--were totally dependent upon Afrikan slave labor: the fisherman whose low-grade, "refuse fish" was dried and sold as slave meal in the Indies; the New York farmer who found his market for surpluses in the Southern plantations; the forester whose timber was used by shipyard workers rapidly turning out slave ships; the clerks in the New York City export house checking bales of tobacco awaiting shipment to London; the master cooper in the Boston rum distillery; the young Virginia overseer building up his "stake" to try and start his own plantation; the immigrant German farmer renting a team of five slaves to get his farm started; and on and on. While the cream of the profits went to the planter and merchant capitalists, the entire settler economy was raised up on a foundation of slave labor, slave products, and the slave trade. [Ibid, 8-9]

It is true that "the entire settler economy was raised up on a foundation of slave labor, slave products, and the slave trade." Of course the fisherman, the clerk, the overseer, the farmer were "dependent" on the system of slave labor; so was the child who tended a loom thirteen hours a day in a cotton-mill. Not only that, the slave was "dependent" on the mill worker and fisherman. Ever since the division of labor, human beings have depended on others for the things they need to live. The cotton does not care whether it was picked, nor the cloth whether it was spun, by a laborer who was whipped to work or driven by want, nor does the owner of capital care whether the laborer's subsistence takes the form of a peck of corn or a money wage, so long as it is exceeded in value by the laborer's output. Since in modern

society most producers are exploited laborers it follows that each group of laborers "depends" on the exploitation of others. To attempt to give this truism a profounder significance is to embrace the world view of the bourgeoisie, which holds that its mode of regulating the social division of labor is natural. "Settlers" continues:

For the privileges of conquest produced a nonproletarian society of settlers. The large majority of settlers were of the property-owning middle classes (insofar as classes had yet become visible in the new society): tradesmen, self-employed artisans, and landowning farmers. Every European who wanted to could own land. Every white settler could be a property owner. [Ibid 9-10]

This assertion is false. Let it be. We are impatient to get to the present.

Although there were Euro-Amerikan craftsmen and workers they never coalesced into a proletariat because they were too privileged and transitory in condition. [Ibid, 10]

In other words, even the very lowest layer of white society was lifted out of the proletariat by the privileges of belonging to the oppressor nation. [Ibid, 11]

Up until the mid-1800's settler society then was characterized by the unequal but general opportunities for land ownership... [Ibid, 24]

At the beginning of the 1800's it was still true that every ambitious, young Euro-Amerikan apprentice worker could expect to eventually become his own master, owning his own little business (and often his own slaves). [Ibid, 24]

At a certain point a change took place:

But by 1860... a majority of Euro-Amerikan men were now wage-earners. Working for a master or merchant was no longer just a temporary stepping-stone to becoming an independent landowner or shopkeeper. [Ibid, 24]

In this scene the new millions of immigrant European workers, many with Old European experiences of class struggle, furnished the final element in the hardening of a settler class structure. [Ibid, 24]

While there were many exploited and poverty-stricken immigrant proletarians, these new Euro-Amerikan workers as a whole were a privileged labor stratum. [Ibid, 24-5]

To this new layer of European labor was denied the gross privileges of the settler bourgeoisie, who annexed whole nations.

Even the particular privileges that so comforted the earlier Euro-Amerikan farmers and artisans--most particularly that of "annexing" individual plots of land every time their Empire advanced--were denied these European wage-slaves. But, typically, their petit-bourgeois vision saw for themselves a special, better kind of wage-slavery. The ideology of white labor held that as loyal citizens of Empire even wage-slaves had a right to special privileges (such as "white man's wages"), beginning with the right to monopolize the labor market. [Ibid, 32]

It is insufficient--and therefore misleading--to say that European workers wished to "discriminate against" or "exclude" or were "prejudiced against" colored workers.... Immigrant European workers proposed to enter an economy they hadn't built, and "annex", so as to speak, the jobs that the nationally oppressed had created. [Ibid, 32]

Why blame the Africans, Indians, Mexicans, and Chinese for capitalist accumulation? And who could be more subordinated to capital and more blinded to proletarian class interests than someone who thought that holding a racial monopoly over jobs in coal mines, steel mills, and logging camps was tantamount to owning property? Continuing with "Settlers":

In this period [post-Civil War] white labor, although still young, took definite shape. Euro-Amerikan labor increasingly found itself pressed to organize, to fight the employers, to demand from the bourgeoisie some relief from exploitation and some democratic rights. At the same time these white workingmen were also a part of settler society...

This was a middle position--between the colonial proletariat and the settler bourgeoisie--and it had its roots in the middle position of these white masses in the class structure. [Ibid, 47]

While white labor had tacked together a precarious political unity based on the commonalities of wage-status and settlerism, it was as yet so divided that it did not even constitute a class. In brief, we can point to four main aspects of this: 1) White workingmen were sharply divided by nationality 2) The upper stratum of workmen, which contained most of the native-born "Americans", had a definite petit-bourgeois character 3) Even the bottom, most exploited layer--who were largely new European immigrants--were politically retarded by the fact that their wages were considerably higher than in Old Europe 4) Immigrant labor did not constitute a single, united proletarian class itself because they were part of separate national communities (German, Swedish, etc.) each headed by their own bourgeois leaders. [Ibid, 47]

Thus the Irish, Polish, Italian, etc. immigrants had the honor of replacing Afrikans, Mexicanos, Indians and Asians as the

primary labor force of the U.S. Empire in the North. But the position of "native-born", Anglo-Saxon settlers changed little if at all. The "native-born" settler masses were still above the nationally-differentiated proletarians... [Ibid, 47]

In 1900 labor in Amerika was sharply divided into three very separate and nationally-distinct strata...

On top was the labor aristocracy of Euro-American workers... This "privileged stratum" of "native-born" citizens comprised roughly 25% of the industrial workforce, and edged into the ranks of their petit-bourgeois neighbors...

Below them was a new proletarian stratum just imported from Eastern and Southern Europe, who comprised 50-75% of the Northern industrial workforce. They were poorly paid and heavily exploited... The very bottom, upholding everything else, were the colonial proletariats of Afrikan, Mexicano, Indian and Asian workers. [Ibid, 54]

But the change was only temporary:

[In the 1930s] the major class contradictions which had been developing since industrialization were finally resolved....

The New Deal administration of President Franklin Roosevelt reunited all settlers, old and new. It gave the European "ethnic" national minorities real integration as Americans by sharply raising their privileges. [Ibid, 79]

The Euro-American proletariat during the '30s had broken out of industrial confinement... The victory they gained was the firm positioning of the Euro-American working class in the settler ranks, reestablishing the rights of all Europeans here to share the privileges of the oppressor nation. [Ibid, 84]

Those expansionist years of 1945-1965, when U.S. military and economic power lorded over the entire non-socialist world, saw the final promotion of the white proletariat. This was an en masse promotion so profound that it eliminated not only consciousness, but the class itself. [Ibid, 136]

[T]he deproletarianization of the white masses was a historic pacification... [Ibid, 136]

In these years the Euro-American workers moved upwards, increasingly handing over their places in basic industry to colonial workers. [Ibid, 136]

[A]t all times a numerical majority of manufacturing corporation employees within the continental U.S. are Euro-Americans (although this represents only a small minority of settler society). [Ibid, 137]

While there are numbers of Euro-American workers, they no

longer combine into a separate proletarian class. The old white industrial proletariat of the 1930s has been dissolved by promotion and privilege, and its place taken by the colonial proletariats. The abnormal and historically brief contradiction of proletarian class conflict within the settler garrison has been ended. [Ibid, 146]

The most comprehensive statement of what all this means for politics is the following passage:

On the mass level... a certain type of supra-class Euro-American community has been characteristic for over a century. It is a small home-owning, small-propertied community. In it the lower middle class, the labor aristocracy and other workers share the tight but generally comfortable life of the settler garrison. This is where community life is supported by the conspicuous concentration of state services.... In contrast to the reservation or ghetto, the settler community is full of the resources of modern industrial life....

We can see in such garrison communities, urban "ethnic" enclave as well as suburb, how the shared exceptional way of life materially and ideologically fuses together the masses. There, on the same block and street, the families of electricians and small retailers, truck drivers and schoolteachers, policemen and grill owners, book-keepers and telephone repairmen, white collar supervisors and factory workers, computer programmers and legal secretaries grow up together, go to the same schools together, and intermarry. Nominal class distinctions on a common level pale beside their supra-class unification as a settler mass...

The U.S. oppressor nation does have its own casualties and its broken remnants of the industrial past.... This minority is not a cohesive, proletarian stratum, but a miscellaneous fringe of the unlucky and the outcast... They are scattered and socially diffused....

The most significant fact about the real consciousness of the Euro-American masses is how anti-communal and private it is. Settlers recognize no common bond with the rest of humanity. That is why everything they build is perverted: why settler trade unions are anti-proletarian, and settler "Women's Liberation" is happy to exploit the women of other nations.... Euro-Americans don't even really care too much about each other. Lower taxes are more important than food for their own elderly. This is a diseased culture... [Ibid, 152-53]

There is a great deal of truth in the above, but it is not the whole truth. It cannot be refuted by argument, but that does not make it right. The listing of occupations in supposed harmony overlooks the tensions racking European-American life, tensions that lead white youth to dress in hip-hop clothes, start rock bands in their garages, and become the leading consumers of rap records. Put another way, to watch a single episode of the old TV series "Roseanne" is to enter more deeply into European-

American life than the "Settlers" analysis makes possible. It is to realize that (1) the people in the garrison are like most human beings in most times and places, as good as their circumstances allow them to be, willing to do the right thing if it isn't too inconvenient; and (2) their embrace of the white whale has led them to abandon their dreams, not realize them, and that they are not happy.

What to make of this? It depends on who we're talking about. If a black revolutionary group took the "Settlers" view of European-Americans, and concluded from it that nothing good could ever be expected from them, I would not argue, for it is undeniably true that no black movement ever failed, no black person was ever lynched, for underestimating the good faith of white folks.

But for people attempting to intervene politically among European-Americans, this stuff is a dead-end. I will not here dispute the "Settlers" version of history; it is admitted that so far neither white workers nor any other sector of white society have separated themselves categorically from the entire infamy. Perhaps they never will. As many people have pointed out, class is not a listing of individuals by occupation but a process whereby some people come to see they have common interests in opposition to the interests of others, and that these interests include the building of a new society. In the final analysis only events will determine whether any sector of European-Americans make up a portion of the global proletariat. In the meantime, for the relatively small number of European-Americans who are dedicated to the fight for a better world, and who think that revolution is necessary, what better use of their time, intelligence, and energy is there than the effort to crack open white society? And to do that, they need a theory that will point out the fissures in it, not deny their existence.

In subsequent works the writers restate their basic themes. I quote a few passages to show that they have backed away from nothing important:

There are many individual Euro-American workers but they do not make up a genuine proletariat. That is, settler workers are a non-exploited labor aristocracy... They might be called a pseudo-proletariat, in that individual settlers do work in factories and mines, but as a group they do not perform the role of a proletariat. Settler workers neither support their society by their labor, nor is their exploitation the source of the surplus-value (or profit) that sustains the U.S. bourgeoisie. [False Nationalism False Internationalism, 5]

Of course, there's a white working class in amerika.... The white working class is a particular kind of working class: one that is an oppressor class, by its very nature wedded to capitalism, and not a proletariat... ["Looking at the White Working Class Historically," 19]

Whether the white working class is going to make the rev or help liberate the Nation is no longer a "question." In reality, no one thinks so, no one acts and lives on that basis. Bloods aren't mad about it, for example, just it's not even a question to them. That's decided by history already. There's conflicts and irritants between the shrinking numbers of white workers and their imperialists, but it's just a minor thing, a leftover, like the dislike between WASPs and Italian-amerikans. It's not going anywhere. [Ibid, 21]

Night-Vision, the writers' latest product, contains good stuff on the expropriation of women as a source of primitive accumulation and the reconfiguring of nations in the modern epoch. It also offers a partial shift in its discussion of the white worker: once prosperous, they are now declared obsolete:

The imperialism of the multi-national corporations no longer needs either the white settler nation or the once-colonized but still intractable New Afrikan nation. [*Night-Vision*, 165]

If neither European-Americans nor African-Americans are any longer of use to the global ruling class, why then is the policy of genocide limited only to the latter? Wouldn't it make sense, if economy were the over-riding aim, to shed the costlier burden? In the 18th century, as slavery became the basis of agriculture in the West Indies, the "small whites" were pushed up into the hills or out altogether, many emigrating to the North American mainland. Is a similar outcome possible in present-day America? In South Africa, Palestine, and Ireland, even modest attempts to reduce the privileges of the favored "races" in order to promote a "native" bourgeoisie have met with fierce resistance and have by no means carried. And in those places, the privileged "races" make up a far smaller portion of the population than in the U.S.

The white workers are not dead yet. As *Night-Vision* notes, they will not accept their extinction without resistance. And that raises in a new way the specter of genocide. The fascists are appealing to the dispossessed among the European-American population, promising to restore the white race to its traditional position (or worse). Can anyone rule out the possibility of their coming to power, perhaps in coalition with a sector of the ruling class? Only revolutionaries can counter their influence among European-Americans, not on the basis of traditional social-democratic reforms, which *Night-Vision* rightly recognizes are played out, but on the basis of a universal vision that includes the renunciation of racial interests. But that is just the course *Night-Vision* declares in advance is doomed.
