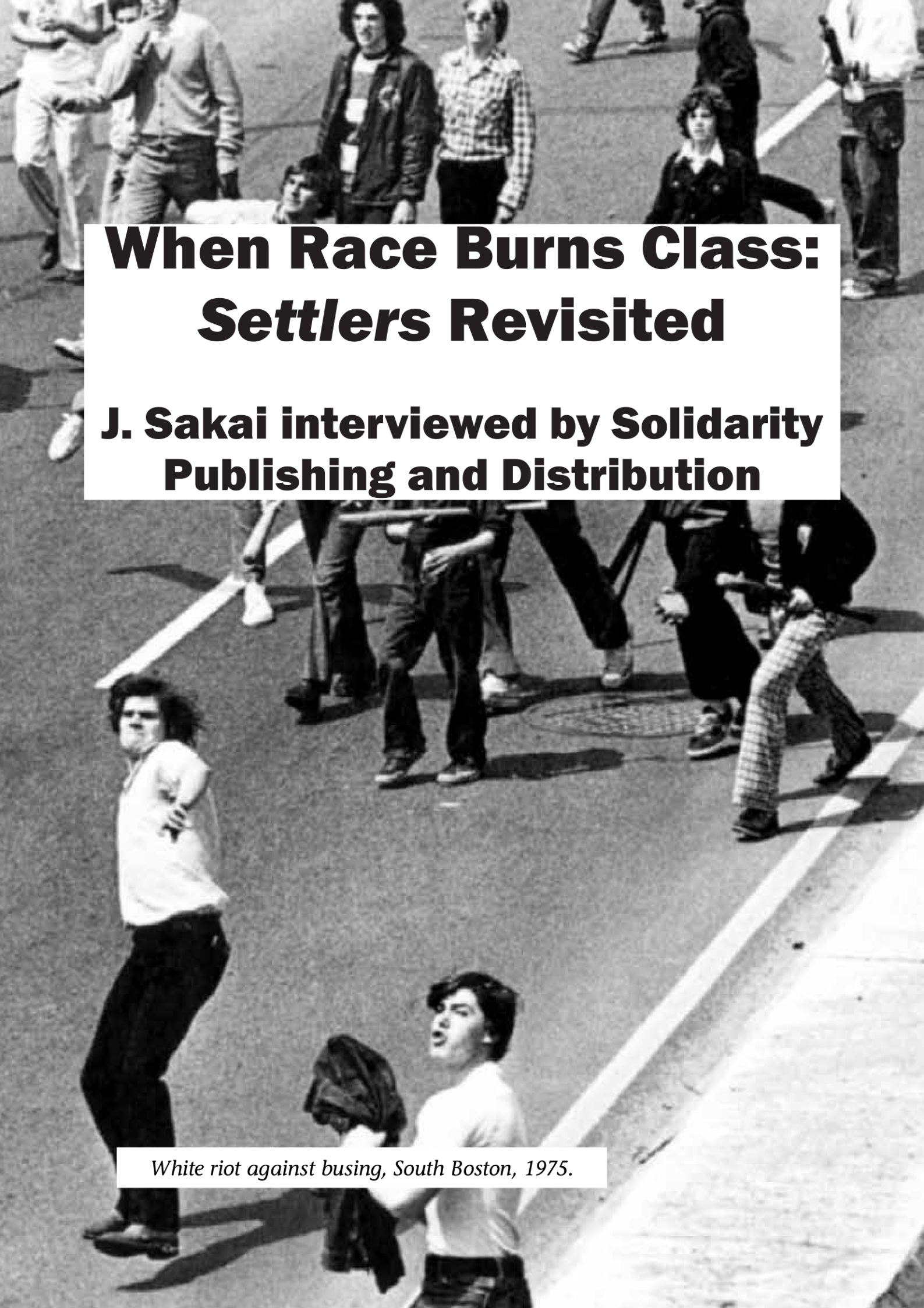
When Race Burns Class: *Settlers* Revisited

J. Sakai interviewed by Solidarity Publishing and Distribution



White riot against busing, South Boston, 1975.

When Race Burns Class: Settlers Revisited (2000)

Solidarity: *In the early eighties you wrote* Settlers: Mythology of the White Proletariat*, a book which had a major impact on many North American anti-imperialists. How did this book come about, and what was so new about its way of looking at things?*

J. Sakai: *Settlers* completely came about by accident, not design. And what was so "new" about it was that it wasn't "inspiring" propaganda, but took up the experience of colonial workers to question how class really worked. It wasn't about race, but about class. Although people still have a hard time getting used to that—it isn't race or sex that's the taboo subject in this culture, but class.

Like many radicals who struggle as organizers, i had wondered why our very logical "class unity" theories always seemed to get smashed up around the exit ramp of race? At the time i'd quit my fairly isolated job on the night shift as a mechanic on the railroad, and was running a cut-off lathe in an auto parts plant. The young white guys in our department were pretty good. In fact, rebellious counter-culture dope smoking Nam vets. After months of hanging & talking, one night one of them came up to me and said that all the guys were driving down to the Kentucky Derby together, to spend the weekend getting drunk and partying. They were inviting me, an Asian, as a way of my joining the crew. Only, he said, "You got to stop talking to those Blacks. You got to choose. White or Black."

ing dock, where a dozen brothers munched sandwiches and had an ongoing discussion. About everything from the latest sex scandal to whether it was good or not for Third World nations to be getting A-bombs (some said it was good ending the white monopoly on nuclear weapons, while others said not at the price of endangering our asses!). Plus the guy from the League of Black Revolutionary Workers in our plant area had recruited me to help out, since he was facing heavy going from the older, more established Black political tendencies (various nationalists, the CPUSA—which had great veterans, good shop floor militants—etc.). And why would i go along with some apartheid agenda anyway? Needless to say, the white young guys cut me dead after that (though they later came out for me as shop steward, which shows you how much b.s. they thought the union was).

That kind of stuff, familiar to us all, kept piling up in my mind and got me started trying to figure out how this had come about in the u.s. working class. So for years after this i read labor history and asked older trade union radicals questions whenever i could. Finally, an anarchist veteran of the autoworkers' historic 1937 Flint Sit-Down strike told me that the strike had been Jim Crow, that one of the unpublicized demands had been to keep Black workers down as only janitors … or out of the plants altogether. This blew my mind. That's when it hit me that the wonderful working-class history that the movement had taught us was a lie.

So i decided to write an article (famous writer's delusion) on how this white supremacy started in the u.s. working class. i didn't know—maybe it was in the 1920s?, i thought. So *Settlers* was researched backwards. i knew what the conclusion was in the mid-1970s, that white supremacy ruled the white working class except in the self-delusions of the Left. "No politician can ever be too racist to be popular in white amerikkka," is an amazingly true saying. *Settlers* was researched going back in time, trying to find that event, that turning point when working-class unity by whites had dis-

Black Reconstruction, Civil War, 1700s, 1600s, i kept going back and back, treading water, trying to touch non–white supremacist ground. Only, there wasn't any!

By then it was years later in our lives, and i'd been recruited into doing national liberation movement support work. And was reading Black nationalist writings. One day i caught a speech in which u.s. whites were referred to as "settlers," meaning invaders or interlopers, as in South Afrika and Rhodesia. Of course, white history always talks about settlers with the non-political connotations of pioneers or explorers or the first people to live in an area. (Native peoples didn't count as real people to eurocapitalism. They were part of the flora and fauna.) *This was a moment of the proverbial light bulb turning on in my mind!*

First chance i got, i asked the UN representative of an Afrikan liberation movement if he thought u.s. whites as a society, including workers, were settler oppressors in the same way as Rhodesians, Boers, or Zionists in Israel? He just said, *"Of course."* Upset, i demanded to know why he didn't tell North Americans this. He only smiled ironically at me, and i won't even bother telling you what certain Indian comrades said. So *Settlers* didn't involve any great genius on my part, just finally listening to the oppressed and what the actual historical experience said about class. Finally.

From there it was hard research work, but no conceptual leap at all to see that **in general in u.s. history the colonized peoples have been the proletariat**, while the white working class has been a labor aristocracy. This has been camouflaged in capitalist history by retroactively assigning white racial membership to various european immigrant peoples who weren't "white" at the time. For instance, when leading u.s. capitalists started the "Interracial Council" to promote patriotic nationalist integration during World War I, the "races" they wanted to bring together were the Irish race, the Welsh race, the Polish race, the Lithuanian race, the Hungarian race, the Sicilian race, the Rumanian

nationalities within the white race. Shows you how race is another capitalist manufactured product.

So groups who we think of as "white" today, were definitely not considered "white" in the past. Like in the Midwest steel mills just before World War I, when native-born American WASP men were all foremen and skilled workers—what was called "white man's work"—while the back-breaking laboring gangs were made up of "Hunkys," Eastern Europeans. Like immigrant Finnish workers, who weren't citizens, didn't speak English, weren't considered white but "Mongolian," who were oppressed like draft animals in small-town mines and mills in the Northern Midwest, and who made up something like 60% of the total membership of the early Communist Party. They wanted armed revolution right then, just like against the Czar, and most of them were actually imprisoned or deported. Wiped out as an oppressed class and national group. It's a long distance in real class from those oppressed revolutionary women and men to the middle-class pedants and would-be commissars of today's Left. *Settlers* goes through this real class history.

Solidarity: How is settlerism different from racism?

J. Sakai: This is a useful question, because people are confused about the two. Some people think that "settler" is just a fancy way of saying "white people," and that it's all just about racism anyway. Racism as we know it and settlerism both had their origins in capitalist colonialism, and are related but quite distinct. Settler-colonial societies started as invasion and occupation forces for Western capitalism, social garrisons usually in the Third World, as Western capitalism expanded out of Europe into the Americas, Afrika, and Asia.

Racism **as we experience it today** didn't exist before capitalism, which is why many revolutionaries see rooting out the one as requiring rooting out the other. To Europeans before modern capitalism the most important "races" were

century it was widely assumed by Europeans that even different European nationalities were biologically different, and had different mental abilities and propensities. Slavs were thought to be biologically different from Nordics, and Jews were thought to be an exotic race all by themselves.

Pre-capitalist and even early capitalist Europe was a lot different from our racial stereotypes. It wasn't that oppression and bigotry didn't exist. Obviously, for example, there was a long tradition of anti-semitic and anti-Romany persecution in "Christendom." But the whole context of "race" was unlike what we usually think of. i was astonished to learn that in early 18th-century Germany, a leading philosopher, Anton-Wilhelm Amo who lectured at the University of Halle and the University of Jena, was a Black German (born in Africa, he also signed his name in Latin as "Amo Guinea-Africanus" or Amo the African). Or that Russia's greatest poet, the 19th-century aristocratic Pushkin, was Black by American standards. And nobody cared. And in the time of Marx and Bakunin, the major leader of early German radical unionism was also very visibly Black, and his part-Afrikan heritage accepted.

Well, what we've been saying all along is that "race" in modern capitalism was originally changed from an undefined difference into a disguise for "class." Capitalism, after all, always prefers to restructure class differences in drag of some kind (all the better for their manipulations). Like Northern Ireland, where there is supposedly a "religious" or "ethnic" bloody conflict between Catholic Irish Republicans and Protestant Loyalists.

Actually, this has been an up-front *class* conflict between British capitalism's historic settler garrison population (the Prots) and the historic colonial subjects (the "Catholics"). Both sides European, both "white." The Northern Ireland Protestant settler working class has always had relative privilege, including the best jobs (sound familiar?). Belfast's traditional blue-collar "big employer," the Harland & Wolff ship-

workers that the shipyard union called a pro-imperialist political strike in the 1970s, closing down the yards, to oppose granting any democratic rights at all to Irish Catholics. (Now, of course, the obsolete shipyards are going out of business, and a globalized British imperialism has much less need for their loyal Unionist servants).

The"Orangemen" settlers in Northern Ireland have hated the Irish with just as much crazed viciousness as white u.s. workers hate the oppressed. Irish revolutionary Bernadette Devlin McAliskey picked up on this same comparison in real class when visiting the u.s. in the 1970s. She said afterwards:

> "I was not very long there until, like water, I found my own level. 'My people'—the people who knew about oppression, discrimination, prejudice, poverty and the frustration and despair that they produce—were not Irish Americans. They were black, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos. And those who were supposed to be 'my people', the Irish Americans who knew about English misrule and the Famine and supported the civil rights movement at home, and knew that Partition and England were the cause of the problem, looked and sounded to me like Orangemen. They said exactly the same things about blacks that the loyalists said about us at home. In New York I was given the key to the city by the mayor, an honor not to be sneezed at. I gave it to the Black Panthers."

So settler-colonialism usually has taken racial form, but it doesn't have to. In fact, one of the newest examples—the Chinese capitalist empire's Han settler occupation of Tibet—is all Asian.

What we never should lose sight of is that these may be socially constructed differences—but they are *real*. There's a certain trend of fashionable white thought that claims that race (or nation) is nothing more than a trick, an imaginary construct that folks are fooled into believing in. So we even

"given up being white" (i can hear my grandmother saying, "More white foolishness!" with a dismissing headshake). Needless to say, they haven't given up anything.

Race as a form of class is very tangible, solid, material, as real as a tank division running over you … tank divisions, after all, are also socially constructed! About another form of this same white racist game—white New Age women deciding to play at "becoming Indian"—Women of All Red Nations used to wearily suggest that if they really really wanted to "become Indian" they should live on the rez—the u.s. colony—without running water or jobs, without heat in the winter or education for their children, with real poverty, alcoholism, and violent oppression.

So both racism as we know it and settlerism each had their origins in capitalist colonialism and are related, but are also quite distinct. Settler-colonial societies have a specialized history, because they started as invasion and occupation forces for Western capitalism. Usually as social garrisons in the Third World, as Western capitalism expanded out of Europe into the Americas, Afrika, Asia.

Solidarity: Some critics have argued that your book suggests that "racial issues" should take precedence over "class issues" …

J. Sakai: This liberal intellectual polarity that "race issues" and "class issues" are opposites, are completely separate from each other, and that one or the other must be the main thing, is utterly useless! We have to really get it that race issues aren't the opposite of class issues. That race is always so electrically charged, so filled with mass power, precisely because it's about raw class. That's why revolutionaries and demagogues can both potentially tap into so much power using it. Or get burned.

You can't steer yourself in real politics, not in amerikkka and not in this global imperialism, without understanding

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tion. And vice-versa. Those who do not get this are always just led around by the nose, the manipulated without a clue—and it is true that many don't want any more from life than this. But wising up on race only means seeing all the class issues that define race and charge it with meaning. **Why should it be so hard to understand that capitalism, which practically wants to barcode our assholes, has always found it convenient to color-code its classes?**

When i started high school way back in the daze, it was up North and in theory there was no segregation. But our city school system had five intellectual levels or "tracks"—from the highest college-prep track to the lowest remedial vocational ed track. In a high school that was 85% Black, the top college-prep track never had more than one or two New Afrikans. In fact, those classes would literally close for Jewish holidays. When we started high school all of us non-white types were automatically assigned to the bottom two tracks, which we could only rise out of by "achievement." Those two "colored" tracks (although there were a few hillbillies in them, too) were non-academic, which meant that after four years of attendance you "graduated" high school—but instead of a diploma you only got a paper "certificate of satisfactory attendance." This was real good for getting you your slave job as a porter or at the garment factory—my first fulltime job, the summer i was 14—but in fact you couldn't qualify for college with it even if you had somehow managed to get literate.

So college education and middle-class careers just "accidentally" happened to be legally forbidden to most New Afrikans in our city. Everyone knew this who wanted to, it was just a fact of life. So much so that when i started working for the neighborhood gang council (some small gangs not the later big vice-lords and cobras and D's) as a nerdy ten-year-old, the leader said that they wanted me to go on to graduate from high school since none of the rest of them

school). Of course, now neo-colonial capitalism has had to get much slicker and share some loot, create neo-colonial bourgy classes.

Starting a new movement, a new radicalism, we need a better map of class. Which means we need to see what's really happening with race just for starters. *Settlers* did that for u.s history, particularly for the Black-Indian-white main structure of colonial capitalism here, but that's only a beginning. An outline not a full map. It might be good to come at this from a different angle than the customary Black/white situation. Let me use an obscure example from my own life in which race and even anti-racism played out a different kind of subtle class politics.

A number of years ago, i was trying to help a group of young Chinese-American activists on an anti-racist campaign. This was an interesting case of how a pure "race" issue only fronted for class politics. Now, these folks were "paper Maoists" in every worst way you could think of—and all my friends know that i'm someone who has warm feelings for the old Chairman. Not only did they have what Mao once called "invincible ignorance," but were also arrogantly full of Han nationalism. They did have physical courage, at least. Their project was to protest the sports racism in the famous industrial town of Pekin, Illinois—which was originally named in the 19th century after Beijing, and whose high school sports teams were colorfully named "the Chinks"! (Capitalism, what an ever-amazing civilization—what next? *"Auschwitz! The Perfume!"*)

Every week a few carloads of young Asian protesters would arrive in Pekin to picket the high school and city hall, hold television news conferences, and keep the issue simmering in the news. You see, the small flaw in the campaign was that all the protesters had to be imported from New York and Chicago. There were only eight Chinese families in town, and all were refusing to have anything to do with the anti-"Chinks" campaign (not wanting to lose their livelihoods,

By accident, not in any political way, i had casually met two vaguely liberal young white guys there. One was a teacher in that very high school. The second was a UAW (United Auto Workers union) shop steward at the nearby giant Caterpillar tractor assembly plant, which was Pekin's main industry. So i thought maybe they could be persuaded to get some local people to take a moderate wishy-washy public stand, anything just to give the Chinese families some local community cover if they wanted to speak out (there was zero local support of any kind, including all the unions and churches of course).

When i suggested it to this Maoist group, there was a moment's startled stony silence. Then the leader barked, "We do not work with white people!" Discussion over. So, is this a good example of that error of "racial issues taking precedence over class issues"? i know some radicals might think that, but they'd just be getting faked out.

First off, to those activists running it, "race" was *not* what was central to their thinking. After all, if those Asian American dudes had really been into either "race" or anti-racism they might have started by organizing and working with the local Asian families. They might have tried to help find some survival strategy for these families, who couldn't just drive off into the sunset after each press conference (being an isolated Asian family in a heavy white racist scene is no joke, obviously). This is just a normal problem in anti-racist work, which folks had to deal with all the time in small towns in 1960s Mississippi, for instance.

It also wasn't true that those Chinese-American leftists "didn't work with white people." They did that all the time, when they wanted, and these Han nationalists even argued for the "revolutionary" nature of the white working class. What i came to realize was in that situation they didn't want any broad community support for the Chinese families there, or to let others into "their" issue. Because they had a really different agenda. Which was to get sole public credit for this and other anti-racist issues, so that their little Maoist "party"

American communities. Later, when they thought it necessary, they even used physical violence and death threats to drive other Asian groups away. They intended to be the people in ethnic power, in effect like replacing the tongs. These "paper Maoists" had a pure class agenda, alright, only it was a bourgeois agenda. Although they themselves might have honestly believed what they did was "revolutionary," they had anti–working class politics hidden by "anti-racism" and left people of color talk.

And this Maoist group really did get their Andy Warhol–like "15 minutes of fame," becoming large in part because the *more* dishonest and destructive their "anti-racist" maneuvers became, the *more* support they got from white middle-class liberals and "progressives" (coincidentally?). i mean, from many white social-democrats, those white anti-repression "experts," academic leftists, etc. Those types that subject us to those endless droning lectures about "the working class" (which they aren't in and don't get, of course). As a sage comrade of mine always says, *"Like is drawn to like"* even if their outward appearance is very different.

This is a more difficult, easy to slip and fall on, even dangerous way of seeing things than radicals here are used to. But either we learn it well or we're lost in this post-modern decaying civilization. **That dead left way of thinking about "race" and "class" not only isn't radical, it's corrupt and anti–working class.**

Why the giant United Auto Workers local down there near Pekin never saw anything wrong with Asian children being forced to go to school in a white supremacist haze, surrounded by constant references to "the Chinks," was just business as usual for the labor aristocracy in America. In the 1960s and 1970s all those government regulated American unions fought even elementary Civil Rights tooth and nail. Including the most liberal, including those run by white "socialists" like the East Coast garment workers and West Coast longshoremen.

1970s were literally barred from the industry for life by the dictatorship of the settler "socialist" labor bosses of the ILWU. As outrageous as it may be, those "socialist" union dictators could just issue orders that this New Afrikan or that Chicano was not to be allowed to work on the docks again ever. Oh, they *loved* Martin orating and marching non-violently far off in Washington, but they fought Civil Rights inside their industries & unions every bitter step of the way (it's also true that in places, in Detroit, San Francisco, Flint, New York City, there were small handfuls of maverick white socialists and anarchists who sided with the Black and Latino workers even against their own white Left).

The funny thing is that for all the constant "Marxist" blah-blah about government unions as "main roads of the class struggle," in our lifetime the AFL-CIO unions have been on the wrong side of just about every major mass movement. That's why they have been back-slapping with Pat Buchanan and helping to legitimize white racism in the current anti-WTO campaign. i guess because that's their job.

Many people conveniently forget that these business unions were rebuilt to conform to tight capitalist laws, are constantly u.s. government regulated and monitored, have involuntary "membership," and are about as democratic as the USSR (which had elections, reforms and repairs, too, before it broke down under the mismanagement of primitive capitalist empire). Once workers' "unions" were free associations, were wild, were outside bourgeois law and part of a counter-culture of the oppressed, but these genetically modified creations only use the same name.

Solidarity: Speaking of white workers, another criticism I have heard is that you are denying that there even is a white working class in the United States. Would you say this is an accurate reading of your work, or are people missing the point?

the u.s. A large one, of many, many millions. From offshore oil derricks to the construction trades to auto plants. But it isn't a proletariat. It isn't the most exploited class from which capitalism derives its super profits. Far fucking from it. As a shorthand i call it the "whitetariat." These aren't insights unique to *Settlers*, by any means.

Unfortunately, whenever Western radicals hear words like "unions" and "working class" a rosy glow glazes over their vision, and the "Internationale" seems to play in the background. Even many anarchists seem to fall into a daze and to magically transport themselves back to seeing the militant socialist workers of Marx and Engels' day. Forgetting that there have been many different kinds of working classes in history. Forgetting that Fred Engels himself criticized the English industrial working class of the late 19th century as a *"bourgeois proletariat,"* an aristocracy of labor. He pointed out how you could tell the non-proletarian, "bourgeois" strata of the English working class—they were **the sectors that were dominated by adult men**, not women or children. Engels also wrote that the "bourgeois" sectors were those that were *unionized*. Sounds like a raving ultra-leftist, doesn't he? (which he sure wasn't)

So that this is a strategic and not a tactical problem, that it has a material basis in imperialized class privilege, has long been understood by those willing to see reality. (The fact that we have radical movements here addicted to not seeing reality is a much larger crisis than any one issue.)

Solidarity: Don't some of the benefits of living in an imperialist metropole trickle down even into some of the internal colonies, causing some of the distorting effects of settlerism to be replicated within, for instance, the non-white working classes within the United States?

often understood this, although the official "Marxist" Left has always worked to silence them.

Way back in the 1970s two Detroit auto workers wrote a short pamphlet about politics, addressed to *"fellow workers who have begun to wonder whether they are going to spend the rest of their lives just hustling for more money …"* What was so striking about this was the authors, James Boggs and James Hocker, who between them had over fifty years experience in the plants. Strikes, militant factory caucuses, revolutionary organizations, Black nationalism, mass ghetto rebellions, they had taken part in it all. One of them, James Boggs, had been a close comrade and co-author of the Pan-Afrikan revolutionary historian C.L.R. James. Boggs was one of the leading working-class theoreticians of the 1960s Black Revolution.

The role of the white racist construction trades unions back then, who were used by the u.s. government as their unofficial goon squads to beat up Anti–Vietnam War protesters, was infamous. But Boggs and Hocker don't let their fellow factory workers escape responsibility, either. They remind them (and the rest of us) that all the AFL-CIO unions, even the liberal ones, *completely backed* u.s. military aggression in Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Nor did it stop there, since Boggs and Hocker saw a direct relationship between the opportunism of all the unions and the opportunism of a bribed u.s. working class. What was so refreshing was that Boggs and Hocker expressly rejected the time-worn and worn-out "radical" argument that u.s. workers are free from all sin (sort of like the ultimate condom of immaculate conception), since supposedly "it is only sell-out by the union bureaucracy which has kept the workers in check."

> "Workers coming into the auto plants today receive economic benefits undreamed of by their predecessors. These benefits tie workers to the company, par-

> them a vested interest in the system which exerts a growing influence on how they view the social reality around them. More and more they think only about their own interests. They worry only about how to 'get mine' or, at best, 'get ours'."

The two pointed out how auto workers in Detroit refused to fight for better mass transit, because, although they know how much poor people need this, *"they also think that adequate public transportation might mean fewer jobs for them."*

> "This opportunism is clearly demonstrated in dealing with the most important issues of our time, such as the war in Indochina and the inflation caused by the war.

> "The war in Indochina took the lives of thousands of youth in this country, many of them sons of working class families. But it was the workers and their organizations who demonstrated enthusiastic support for the clearly illegal war perpetrated by the United States government, even when other groups in the society, especially students, were showing by their actions increasing distaste for the war.

> "Many workers, when challenged individually, would deny that they supported the war. But at the same time they refused to take any actions to exhibit opposition to the war and clearly were hostile to the students who opposed the war. The attitude of most workers was 'The President knows best' and in any case what mattered was their jobs—even if their job was making bombs or napalm to burn up the Vietnamese …"

These guys were seriously pissed off at their own class, at their brothers and sisters, and not afraid to lay it all out. But saying that u.s. industrial workers are not as a whole

Boggs and Hocker, who worked in the Detroit auto factories that were Black-majority, are definitely not just exposing the "whitetariat" alone but Black workers as well—isn't the end of the road. i'm not saying that we should forget about working-class organizing. **What i am suggesting is that radical working-class politics here needs different strategies than the traditional Left has understood.** Everything that we've discussed just clears away all the middle-class left underbrush, so people can see the actual path before us and get down to work. *Settlers* didn't directly deal with all this, naturally, since it's historical analysis of the oppressor class structure and history.

Solidarity: Would you say that organizing within the present-day white working class is hopeless?

J. Sakai: We need to talk about how people unthinkingly objectify the working classes. It never occurs to anyone to believe that the metropolitan middle classes are going to overthrow the system that privileges them. No one says, "The white doctors and professors and managers are the revolutionary class." Yet, without any big fuss or posturing, middle-class radicals just organize in those classes when and where they can, all around themselves. Students just form issue groups in even the most elite universities. Teachers try to open minds to social justice, while even some doctors volunteer to serve in refugee camps or argue with the majority of their criminal profession about being healers not rip-offs or stock market addicts. For better or worse, success or defeat. No big political deal, it's just living the life, the meal that's set before us.

But when it comes to the working classes, whoa, then it's all this ideological ca-ca. To believe what we're told, no one should want to organize or educate workers unless they can be sure that the entire class is "bound for glory" as the main force for revolution! (which you won't see here in this life-

revolutionary answer—which they aren't unless your cause is snowmobiles and lawn tractors—or they're like ignorant scum you wouldn't waste your time on. Small wonder rebellious poor whites almost always seek out the Right rather than the Left.

There's an underlying assumption that revolutionary movements worldwide share, that's always there for us, that we are part of the working classes. That we live our lives in these communities, hold those jobs, try to live productive lives not just do capitalist bullshit, struggle within these class situations. We're talking in a wide arc here, maybe, but to a point: to how we need to build movements that have the learned skill of the recognition of reality. That understand revolutionary politics as more than abstract ideology, in more than an academic or reform movement way.

If radicalism can build small counter-currents of liberation in the overwhelmingly corrupt middle classes, why should similar work be questioned in the white working-class communities? What i am fighting is the slick "Marxist" or "anarchist" opportunism, which sees aligning with the white settler majority and reform politics as the absolute necessity.

Malcolm X and Women's Liberation, ACT-UP and Wounded Knee II, Anti–Vietnam War draft card burning and radical ecology, were all shocking to the majority of North Americans. Radical threats to "the American Way of Life"—and loudly condemned not only by the majority but more specifically by the white working class—these political offensives by the few turned everything upside down. Because in the metropolis, radical and democratic change can only come *against* the wishes of the bribed majority. That may be tough to swallow for white folks, but reality is just reality.

This obsession with needing a social majority has nothing to do with being "practical." What it has to do with is bourgeois and defeatist thinking.This is like the left thinking that could not build a *practical* anti-fascist movement in Weimar Republic Germany during the 1920s and 1930s,

thing, because that German Left was too preoccupied with fantasies of either seizing or getting elected into state power for itself.

That Left was too lost in delusions of success almost within their hands, delusions of maneuvering together a majority, to bother even really understanding fascism coming up fast in their rear-view mirror. The urgent need was to organize a working minority to counter fascism in a much more radical way. Not by trying to defend liberal bourgeois rule. All the real things that had to be done by scattered German anti-fascists later after the Nazis were put into power—such as to survive politically, to significantly sabotage the war effort, to rescue Jews and Romany and gays, to build an underground against the madness of the Third Reich—all these things were attempted bravely but largely unsuccessfully, because they had to be done too late from scratch. This is a much larger subject, too large to dive into now, but it is on the horizon, like the smoke of a distant forest fire.

Solidarity: Are the settler societies of North America different from the racist and imperialist countries in Europe in any kind of fundamental way which should be important to anti-fascists?

J. Sakai: Which takes us into somewhat different ground. i'm not knowledgeable enough on European politics—or on Canada—so that i could do a list of point by point comparisons. What i'd like to do instead is to talk about u.s. society, and readers themselves can see if the comparisons make any sense. And, yes, i've run into young fascists of the "stormtrooper" variety, with their gray semi-waffen SS uniforms, open veneration of Hitler, open talk of "mud races," etc. i still think that fascism here has been very influenced by its birth within a settler society, instead of being just some lame copy of the German experience. Just as Israeli settler neo-fascism has a very different language and public look

talist form).

The most conspicuous difference between Europe and North America was class in the outward form of race. In the centuries before World War II, the overwhelming mass of the European populations were poor and in misery. They were the proletarian classes, the laborers, poor peasants, and oppressed industrial workers. But in the settler colonies and nations, the lowest classes, the proletarians, were the natives, the conquered, or the imported colonial laborers. While white settler workers were automatically, from birth, no matter how poor, a whole level up. As W.E.B. DuBois remarked about poor white workers in the post–Civil War South. Thanks to imperialism. Which is why the mass of French *colons* in Algeria solidly supported imperialism against the Algerian people. Why millions of working class and poor whites in the segregationist u.s. South were more than willing to help police and kill and terrorize Black people. And even today, a century and more later, if we left it up to the white majority, the u.s. would secede from NAFTA and the WTO all right—and fly the Confederate flag!

In many settler societies, historically the white population not only supported the police, in part they were the police. **Unlike in Old Europe, where in general the masses of people were kept disarmed and landless, in settler colonies often the entire euro-male culture revolved around common and cheap access to land and rifles and the bodies of the oppressed.** Posses or militias or "Committees of Correspondence" or lynch mobs of armed men enforced the local settler dictatorship over Indians, Latinos, Afrikans, Asians, New Afrikans, women, etc. And white men of all classes joined in, to affirm their membership in the most important "class" of all. **Settlerism filled the space that fascism normally occupies.**

So in the 1920s and 1930s large fascist movements arose in Old Europe out of the bitter class deadlock in war-torn societies. But in the u.s. then, while there were little-noticed

(enough to fill Madison Square Garden in Manhattan on one occasion), there was **no mass movement for fascist seizure of power itself.** Nor was the ruling class close to implementing fascism. The sputtering flareups of attempted fascist coups by ruling class elements against the reformist Roosevelt New Deal (Colonel McCormick's *Chicago Tribune* newspaper calling for the assassination of the President, or the DuPont-Winchester half-baked plan for the seizure of Washington using suborned u.s Marines) were easily shrugged off. There was major u.s. imperialist support for Italian, Spanish, and German fascism before and even during World War II, as opposed to support for fascism at home. Fascism was distinct from racism or white supremacy, which were only "As American as apple pie."

Neither the ruling class nor the white masses had any real need for fascism. *What for?* There was no class deadlock paralyzing society. There already was a longstanding, thinly disguised settler dictatorship over the colonial proletariat in North America. In the u.s., settlerism made fascism unnecessary. However good or bad the economic situation was, white settlers were getting the best of what was available. Which was why both the white Left and white Far Right alike back then in the 1930s were patriotic and pro-American. *Now only the white Left is.*

The white Left here is behind in understanding fascism. When they're not using the word loosely and rhetorically to mean any repression at all (like the frequent assertions that cutting welfare is "fascism"! i mean, give us a break!), they're still reciting their favorite formula that the fascists are only the "pawns of the ruling class." No, that was Nazism in Germany, maybe, though even there that's not a useful way of looking at it. But definitely not here, not in that old way.

The main problem hasn't been fascism in the old sense—it's been neo-colonialism and bourgeois democracy! The bourgeoisie didn't need any fascism at all to put Leonard Peltier away in maximum security for life or Mumia on

American Indian Movement like it was deer hunting season, while white America went shopping at the mall—all without needing fascism. And the steady waterfall of patriarchal violence against women, of rapes and torture and killings and very effective terrorism on a mass scale, should remind us that the multitude of reactionary men have "equal opportunity " under "democracy," too. They don't need fascism—yet.

Right now under neo-colonial "democracy," the system of patrolling and confining the Black Nation is at a fever pitch. Every known narcotic is being shoved and shoveled onto the streets of the Nation like it was confetti at parade time—coke, heroin, malt liquor, Bud, crack, commodified sex, you name it. The huge 2-million-inmate u.s. prison system contains the largest single Black community of all. One out of every four Black men in Washington, D.C. is in jail, prison, on parole or probation, or awaiting trial—i.e. under direct supervision by the law enforcement system. Even Ronald K. Noble, the new Secretary General-designate of INTERPOL, has written that he regularly gets stopped, questioned, and sometimes even searched by u.s. police (in Europe, too, of course). And if the top law enforcement official in the capitalist world gets routinely stopped as a Black man for u.s. racial police checks, guess what happens to the unemployed, to young working-class Black men.

The old Black industrial working class has been largely wiped out, and warlord armies and gangs given informal state permission to rule over much of the inner city at gunpoint. A few years ago i went home with a comrade. When we got off the bus, all the passengers started walking home down the middle of the street. My friend explained that all the sidewalks were "owned" by one or another dope gang or dealer, reserved for their crew and customers. You walked in the street or you got taken down by a 9mm. While the new Black middle class takes itself out of the game, flees the old communities and disperses itself into the suburbs. Why would capitalists need fascism? "Democracy" is doing the

America has at the same time become the conscience of the world lecturing everyone else on human rights. "How sweet it is!" (Guess Leonard Peltier must be a prisoner in China).

But i am not saying that the situation is static, or that past history isn't being razed and rebuilt. All variants of capitalist metropolitan societies are becoming slowly but surely more alike, Quebec and Raleigh, Tokyo and Frankfurt, as capital expands, develops, and merges. While Western European farmers complain about McDonalds and agrobusiness, they willingly accept the most significant "Americanization"—the replacement of Western European labor with Algerians, Turks, Albanians, etc. Throughout Europe the proletariat has been pushed outside of national boundaries socially—just as euro-settlerism once did in the Third World—and is being redefined as Arab, Filipino, Algerian, Turkish, Albanian, Afrikan, and so on.

And, as Arghiri Emmanuel has noted, imperialism is gradually abandoning its own kith and kin, its settler societies. We first saw this in Kenya in 1960, where the British settler colony was unceremoniously dumped after the Mau Mau Rebellion in favor of an Afrikan neo-colonial regime. Then in Algeria, where French imperialism gave up on what had by their laws been an actual province of France—and left a million French Algerian settlers to lose their farms and homes and possessions, to flee in a frenzied mass evacuation. Capitalism has no loyalties, after all, only interests (to paraphrase a famous statesman). It was only then that the *colons* and their military sympathizers sought an end to French bourgeois democracy, to start a new fascist interlude. Even in North America settlers are being told by imperialism to move over and make room for new immigrants from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Afrika. To pay the bill as the state gives back some land and reparations and tax concessions to Native nations. And they certainly hate it!

So there is a certain convergence, of settler and non-settler metropolitan societies becoming more alike. In the u.s. the

cism—so far. But white mass politics is not confined to taking phone calls from the ruling class. Far from it.

Solidarity: How do you view the rise of the Far Right, specifically the American Far Right?

J. Sakai: We can see that neo-fascism is a growing factor in u.s. politics. Still marginal, but already more significant than,say, white Marxism. The Far Right is politically strong enough, represents so much mass sentiment, that its momentary electoral champion—Pat Buchanan—has become the hero of some trade unions and the closet ally of white socialists and anarchists in the anti-WTO campaign. And again, to understand this dynamic we have to lay aside 1930s political formulas and take the social reality in a fresh way. Were Timmy McVeigh and his comrades "tools of the ruling class" when they dusted the federal building in Oklahoma City? Does finance capital & the big bourgeoisie pull the strings behind the Militia Movement as it spreads doctrines of tax resistance, seizing federal land, and targeting the imperialist

than they are to believe that! The old "pawns of the ruling class" 1930s analysis of European fascism does not apply right here in the old way.

This is too big a subject for me to go into fully here, but the broad outline is obvious. The Far Right is growing steadily, moving on the offensive, as white settler society itself is fragmenting and being forced to gradually give up its old national form under immense pressures from the new global imperialism. In this fragmentation, some sectors and classes of the old settler society are now more open to neo-fascism in their desperate search for a new civilization for themselves in which they will still be masters of the land.

While in Europe the much larger fascist current has manifested itself by violent attacks on immigrant labor and on defending the concept of the old nations, in the u.s. the New Right is primarily concerned with attacking the u.s. state itself, using both armed struggle and mass political organizing, and founding new self-governing cults and societies. That is to say, it is an emerging revolutionary movement, albeit still a small one. The Left has little daily contact with the fascists, because they are in different classes and live in different geographic areas and are in *diverging* societies.

In the best guerrilla fashion, this New Right is bypassing the major cities, with their massive Third World populations, corporate economies, and large state machinery. Rather, their focus is on winning de facto power inside the marginalized white male populations. Romeoville, Illinois rather than Chicago. Prisons rather than Ivy League colleges. *Theirs is a re-statement of the early settler vision*, of setting up independent outposts of a racially-cleansed culture, on re-pioneered white land. With heavily armed bands of once-again-masculine white men pushing out the mercenary u.s. authorities. For a period of time we could see both white fascist Right and the white Left—working in geographically separate cultures on this vast continent—grow without impinging on or really clashing with each other. Both mostly white "Free Mumia"

federal agents from Western lands.

The old Right of the 1920s Klan or 1960s White Citizens Councils or Minutemen or Jewish Defense League were patriotic & pro-u.s.a. They saw themselves as "saving" the traditional America, and often cooperated closely with and were led by local business, police, the f.b.i., and government officials.

In a major reversal, the new Far Right is radically anti-American. It sees their white male settler empire of *"America from sea to shining sea"* as really lost. Its cities taken over by the sub-human millions of the "mud races," its economy drained by the "Jew banks" and the alien corporate economy, its culture polluted by hostile genetic contaminants, its once-proud citizens increasingly without rights and dictated to by the shell of the former "u.s. government" which is now the "Zionist Occupation Government." And while the masses of conservative euro-amerikans are not yet fascist, neither are they anti-fascists.

And the hard-core of the new Far Right is very fascist, since neo-fascism represents the basic ideology that the aspiring white "lumpenbourgeoisie" need to restart and reorganize a part of settler society as their own private fiefdom. The u.s. constitution just doesn't work for them. Just as Tudjman and Milosevic, who once were Yugoslavian patriots and "socialists" when that met their class interests, turned to neo-fascism and genocidal ethnic nationalism to be "born again" as the local "lumpenbourgeoisie" under global imperialism.

Take the David Duke phenomenon. As we all know, in 1990 Louisiana state representative David Duke ran for the u.s. senate. **In losing Duke still won a large majority of the statewide white vote, some 55–57%. His highest percentage of votes came from white workers with incomes under $15,000 a year.** This despite the fact that Duke was and is notorious not "merely" as a racist, but as someone who has spent his entire adult life as a very public neo-nazi organizer, propagandist, and leader. He was

the churches, civic and business organizations. The entire media machine kept exposing and criticizing him, repeatedly running old photos of him in his American Nazi Party uniform. Yet, if it wasn't for the Black voters, David Duke—naked fascist agenda and all—would have emerged as one of the most powerful politicians in the u.s. senate. You can see why granting Black people the vote was so important to u.s. imperialism—and why the white masses were carefully never given a chance to directly vote on it!

For sure, the growth of fascism here has many class contradictions of its own, and their Aryan future is far from certain. But it is significant that while the masses of euroamerikans are not fascists, *being neo-fascist* is quietly acceptable to many of them. Today the radical future is dividing into those who—whatever their strategies and ideologies—recognize that fact, and those who still wish to avoid facing it.

Because in the metropolis, radical and democratic change can only come *against* the wishes of the bribed majority. That may be tough to swallow for white folks, but reality is just reality.