

# A devastating insight into Zionism: *Louis Theroux: The Settlers*

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Louis Theroux: *The Settlers*, a Mindhouse Productions for the BBC, is available on iPlayer in the UK for the next 11 months here.

Louis Theroux's documentary on Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank, made amid the Gaza genocide, paints a devastating picture of the ultra-nationalist religious fundamentalist movement. It brings out its role as the Israeli state's advanced guard in the ethnic cleansing and mass murder of the Palestinians.

There has been predictable outrage from Zionist apologists precisely because the documentary speaks to a wider sense of anger internationally at the escalating genocide in Gaza.

This is Theroux's second documentary on the ultra-nationalist settlers. In 2011, making *The Ultra Zionists*, he described them as being "on the fringe of a fringe in terms of their outlook and beliefs," while enjoying "a degree of support from the Israeli state."

That year, the Netanyahu government faced mounting protests across the whole of Israeli society against economic conditions. Conscious of the Arab Spring, the government approved thousands of settlements on occupied Palestinian land to offset this protest movement.

Today, fascist settler parties are in government and are playing a determining role in Benjamin Netanyahu's murderous regime. The settlers provide an essential social base for militarism and social reaction.

Theroux's documentary, though focused on the West Bank, also showed the ethnic cleansing colonialist programme for Gaza. Daniella Weiss, the far-right "godmother" of the settler movement, boasted of having 800 families ready to move into Gaza, saying, "Our mission is to settle Israel."

She shows Theroux a map of the "Greater Israel" she means, encompassing Lebanon, Jordan, and parts of Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Palestinians in this region should leave and go to other countries, she declares.

When Theroux says that not thinking about other people at all seems "sociopathic," she laughs. "This is normal," she insists.

This is the real policy of Zionism. In Nablus, in the occupied West Bank, Theroux is asked by an Israeli soldier, "How long are you going to be in Israel?"

Texas-born settler Ari Abramowitz carries his gun at all times, including in the synagogue. He calls the Bible "a land deed to the West Bank." Showing Theroux around, he insisted that the Palestinian people "don't exist".

At one point we see Weiss's car break from an escorted convoy of settlers and rabbis and head towards Gaza. Her gesture, she said, was to show the accompanying rabbis that Gaza is not "beyond reach." One rabbi, Dov Lior, is shown calling for Palestinian "savages" and "camel-riders" to be "cleansed."

Zionist apologists have tried to protest that focusing on extremists manipulates the narrative, with financier and self-proclaimed "ardent Zionist" Ben Goldsmith describing them as about as "accurate a representation of the whole as Tommy Robinson is of UK society."

Theroux replied that Weiss has "enormous clout within the Israeli cabinet and... the protection of the army."

And as *Haaretz* journalist Etan Nechin told Goldsmith, settlers' "representatives are literally sitting in the government and control everything from the police to treasury."

Netanyahu's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has pledged that Gaza will be "entirely destroyed." Netanyahu himself, echoing the Nazi "final solution," has said the "concluding moves" of this programme were underway.

Weiss boasts, "We do for governments what they can't do for themselves." Abramowitz places this in a wider geopolitical context, calling the settlers the tip of the spear of America.

Theroux summarises the settler movement as

“Advanced by ideologues, backed up by those in power, and accountable only to god.” He has written that the settlers are “a bellwether for where society may be going in countries across the west.”

As the documentary was airing, he noted in a *Guardian* opinion column, the settler National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir was being hosted at Mar-a-Lago. Drawing the connection between these fascist governments, he writes that “a film about extreme West Bank settlers isn’t simply about a region of the Middle East.”

The settlers are the stormtroopers implementing government policy. We see the fascist Ben-Gvir addressing a triumphalist jamboree promoting settlement in Gaza and forcing Palestinian emigration. A protester asks, “Do we want to be a colonising country?” Theroux’s film answers this question in the affirmative.

Under Israeli law, initial settler incursions, “outposts,” are nominally illegal, only becoming “settlements” when granted state recognition. (They remain illegal under international law). Settlements like Evyatar, shown shortly after it received legal recognition, are then provided with a military base, extending the colonialist military occupation.

Hebron, in the West Bank, has around 700 settlers under military protection, and Palestinians are excluded by checkpoints from ever more areas. Theroux notes that these mean his guide, local peace activist Issa Amro, cannot go to the visitor centre of his own town.

When Theroux suggests that under international law her actions might be considered a war crime, Weiss dismisses it as a “light felony.” Abramowitz insists “some things... transcend the whims of legislation.”

In Tuwuni, Theroux and his guides shelter in a shot-up house when an Israel Defense Forces patrol from the neighbouring military post drives past. The green lights of rifle laser sights play over the windows. Theroux suggests calling the police. His guides reply, “What police? They are one regime.”

*Haaretz* reported that Issa Amro has been subject to settler and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intimidation since the film. His house was raided by masked assailants.

Theroux is repeatedly asked for his passport “for checking.” In Hebron, a masked soldier attempts to manhandle Theroux away from a checkpoint, saying the IDF are “above the police.” The usually calm Theroux says sharply, “Don’t touch me.”

At one point, Weiss denies there is any such thing as settler violence. Any violence by settlers was purely

defensive against Palestinian attack, she claims, before physically pushing Theroux to provoke a reaction to legitimise physical escalation. “Do something!” she insists. Later she says, “I hoped you push me back.”

Former *Jewish Chronicle* editor Jake Wallis Simons is another who suggested the filming was manipulative in presenting “settler joviality with a backdrop of smoking Gaza.” But that is the backdrop, and Theroux films Zionist tourists going to a viewpoint just to watch Gaza burn.

Simons also accused Theroux of peddling stereotypes by showing “the worst Jews” he can find. Hardly. If the opportunity existed to show the “worst” people to be found in Israel, then Theroux would have shot his documentary in the Knesset.

The efforts to present *The Settlers* as an example of BBC and media “bias” against Israel is, of course, ludicrous. Millions know this and millions more are beginning to draw the same conclusion.

Month after month, opponents of the Gaza genocide have been denounced as “antisemites” by the media, the Starmer Labour government and the Tories before them, subjected to police attacks, arrests and other forms of victimisation. In February, following a protest campaign by Zionists, the BBC dutifully pulled from its iPlayer platform a documentary showing conditions in Gaza.

This is why Theroux felt obliged to tread carefully, admitting that “the ongoing displacement and intimidation of Palestinians is more severe than we could capture.”

Anyone shocked by his film just hadn’t “been paying attention”, he wrote. “I’m glad we were able to show as much as we did. I also wish we could have shown much more.”

Theroux deserves credit for getting as much past the censors as he has—he noted how the theme of many messages he has received has been, “At last, mainstream British TV is saying something about what is happening.” And also for his concluding appeal in the *Guardian*, “I encourage people to read and consume more on the subject.”



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