Let $\Sigma$ be a compact connected oriented 2-manifold of genus $g$, and let $p$ be a point on $\Sigma$. We define a space $S_g(t)$ consisting of certain irreducible representations of the fundamental group of $\Sigma \setminus p$, modulo conjugation by $SU(N)$. This space has interpretations in algebraic geometry, gauge theory and topological quantum field theory; in particular if $\Sigma$ has a Kähler structure then $S_g(t)$ is the moduli space of parabolic vector bundles of rank $N$ over $\Sigma$.

For $N = 2$, Weitsman considered a tautological line bundle on $S_g(t)$, and proved that the $\left(2g\right)^{th}$ power of its first Chern class vanishes, as conjectured by Newstead. In this talk I will present his proof and then outline my extension of his work to $SU(N)$ and to $SO(2n + 1)$.