

WSWS interviewed by US radio on dash for African oil

6 September 2002

Chris Talbot of the *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to George Wilson of XM radio about the major oil companies' growing interest in Africa and its connection to the US preparations for war in the Middle East.

Based in Washington DC, XM radio is a digital satellite radio station with coast-to-coast coverage in the US. George Wilson hosts an hour-long programme that discusses social, political and economic issues entitled *GW on the Hill* on the station's African-America talk channel.

By way of introduction Wilson read out the first paragraphs of a recent article from the *World Socialist Web Site*. The article, *Threat of Middle East war spurs grab for West Africa Oil*, analysed the growth of investment by the major oil companies in West Africa where substantial oil reserves have been discovered offshore.

"With a US-led war on Iraq looming that could disrupt oil supplies from the Middle East for many years to come, the question of securing alternative sources has become a vital concern for both the US and Europe," the article states.

"Industry lobbyists have stepped up their calls for the US to diversify its own oil sources, while the Bush administration is attempting to dominate all the oil-producing regions of the world as a means of applying leverage to its economic rivals.

"This has spurred on a grab for West Africa oilfields by the major powers. Africa contains 7.2 per cent of the world's proven reserves of oil—76.7 thousand million barrels—more than the proven reserves of North America or the former Soviet Union. The area of sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly, the Gulf of Guinea, has seen a big increase in oil exploration and production in recent years, and is now attracting the attentions of the major oil companies."

Asked to explain the oil companies' involvement in West Africa, Talbot said, "There is an enormous increase in investment in a whole number of other countries down the west coast of Africa. Of course there's already a lot of oil coming from Nigeria and Angola, but now there's big investment in other countries as well."

Wilson asked whether this investment would benefit the local people. It would only benefit a tiny elite, Talbot explained. "Our assessment is it's not going to benefit any of these countries," he continued. "If you look at, for example, Nigeria—the income of the population has declined on average by 1.5 per cent a year for the last 25 years."

Talbot outlined the scale of investment taking place in West Africa. Big US companies like ChevronTexaco and ExxonMobil are involved and are investing \$10 billion a year in this region. "That's a lot of money in Africa," Talbot said.

He explained that it is easy to transport oil across the Atlantic from West Africa to the US and, since much of this is offshore oil, there is no problem about political instability in the country itself.

Wilson was particularly interested in Cameroon, a country he had visited. Talbot described how the population of this extremely poor country would get no benefit from a World Bank backed project which is building an oil pipeline to carry oil from Chad to the coast of Cameroon.

Talbot was also asked about changes in the US stance towards Sudan. Talbot said that since the Sudanese have collaborated in the US-led "war against terrorism" the Bush administration is considering allowing Sudan to export oil to the West. "At the moment most of their oil goes to China and Malaysia," he explained. "Talisman, a Canadian company, is involved in getting oil from Sudan. They have been under a lot of pressure

to pull out, but even that looks as though it could change. Talisman has refused to make a statement about whether they will pull out or not.”

What was the position of socialists on these developments, Wilson wanted to know? Talbot said, “A very small number of billionaires will benefit from the profits of these oil companies—stock holders in the US. The position of socialists is that the vast majority of working people, both in Africa and the US, have no real control over these companies and get very little out of them. That should change. Oil production and all areas of production should be in the hands of working people. They should benefit from the huge amounts of wealth that are generated.”

“We are talking about a development that could only happen on a world scale, because it’s a global economy. We’re for socialism on a world scale. The working people should democratically own and control the wealth.”

Asked about the focus of the WSWS over the next few months, Talbot explained that in particular it would be opposing the war against Iraq and the increasing militarism of the Bush administration.

“The Bush administration seems to be hell-bent on war,” Wilson agreed. Talbot stressed that this was an extremely reckless trajectory and that internationally there was massive opposition to the bombing of Iraqi civilians. The socialist perspective was to unite working class people against a war that is being fought for the domination of the world’s oil and other resources.

Wilson thanked Talbot for his time and invited his listeners to read the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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