

WSWS journalist interviewed on Democracy Now! program

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World Socialist Web Site journalist Peter Symonds appeared January 5 on the *Democracy Now!* program, broadcast from New York City, to discuss the Asian tsunami disaster.

Democracy Now! is an independent news program, hosted by Amy Goodman, which is aired daily on more than 300 radio and television stations in North America—Pacifica, community and National Public Radio stations, public access cable television stations, satellite television—and on shortwave radio and the Internet.

Symonds was invited as a guest on the program following the posting of his article: “The Asian tsunami: why there were no warnings”, which appeared on the WSWS January 3.

The article noted that the official response in the countries affected by the tsunami “was disorganised and lethargic. The few who were aware of the dangers were hampered by lack of preparation, bureaucratism and inadequate infrastructure.” Moreover, Symonds argued that the failure to establish a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean was an indictment of the great powers, “which routinely wash their hands of any responsibility for the plight of the masses of South Asia.”

On Goodman’s program Symonds explained that no tsunami warning system existed in the Indian Ocean, “and as a result, the indications of the formation of the tsunami were either misread” or “were ignored.” He pointed out that “while certainly individual officers and individual meteorologists, individual officials are responsible for this, the main problem is that there was no system in place at all. The issue is why.”

Symonds insisted that primary responsibility for the failure to alert the population should not be placed on scientists, “the real responsibility rests with governments who failed to put in place what has been

called for, for years and years in some cases by these scientists themselves, the establishment of an effective early warning system in the Indian Ocean.”

Goodman herself noted comments by Thai meteorological officials who had held off issuing a warning about the tsunami for fear of being accused of frightening tourists. Symonds commented, “I think that’s very indicative of the sorts of pressures which have brought to bear on scientists and others who were involved in this area. It no longer becomes a matter of science, but it’s a matter of profit, and they’re subject to all sorts of pressures when it comes to making some sort of prediction.”

He concluded, “I suppose the main point that I was seeking to make in the article was that the fact that the early warning system had not been put in place is the product of the contempt which governments in the region hold for masses of ordinary people. But above all, countries who can afford such a system to pay for a system blithely ignored it for years.”

Readers can listen to the broadcast by going to <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/01/05/152213>. A transcript is also available.



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