

**Mary- Alice Waters and Martin Koppel. *Capitalism and the Transformation of Africa: Reports from Equatorial Guinea*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 2009.**

Excluding an Introduction and a "Reporter's notebook," this book is a collection of six reports by the above authors and a speech by a diplomat (the Cuban ambassador to Equatorial Guinea). The authors are editors of two left-wing magazines, *New International* (Waters) and *Militant* (Koppel). Waters is also the founder of Pathfinder, a left-wing publishing company; Koppel is the Spanish language editor of the company. Both are supporters of the Cuban revolution. The reports are based on the authors' findings in two trips to Equatorial Guinea in 2005 and 2008 and were originally published in *Militant*.

As Mary-Alice Waters wrote in the Introduction, this book is "a spotlight [on] the transformation of the instruments of production and the new class relations emerging today in Equatorial Guinea." The book focuses on the period from the mid-1990s, when oil and gas were discovered in commercial quantity in the continental shelf bordering the two main parts of the country—the continental region (Mbini) and the island of Bioko. But it begins with a brief historical background. This country, they report, was a Spanish colony, and Spain's main activity in the colony was plantation farming. Spain did not bother to develop the country socially and in physical terms. The country became independent in 1968 but was misruled under its first president (Macias Nguema). In 1979, it was rescued by its current leadership, which is headed by Obiang Nguema. Until oil and gas were discovered, it was one of Africa's least developed countries—a country of peasant farmers, illiterate, without modern infrastructure, without industry, and without skilled workers. There are about five ethnic groups in the country. One, the Fang, is predominant. Ethnicity is a politically salient factor in the country's affairs.

Since the discovery of oil, the authors continue, much has changed in the country. Foreign, mainly United States, oil companies were licensed to produce the oil. The wealth from oil is being used to develop massively infrastructure and establish educational and health facilities. It has also attracted large numbers of foreign experts, workers, and business people. Rather grudgingly, the authors acknowledge that the changes wrought by oil have raised the standard of living of the general population and given them hope of a prosperous future. They further

report, however, that activities in the oil industry have widened class differences and established new forms of domination. Concerning class differences, the authors often draw attention to contrasts between the neighborhoods and standards of living of staff of foreign oil and construction companies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, those of the majority of the citizens of the country, as well as artisans and traders from other countries. They blame such differences on capitalism. But they express the hope that, as the activities of capitalist companies increase the number of the world's proletariat, Equatorial Guinea's workers will help to bring about a global socialist revolution.

Aside from the activities of oil companies, the authors report extensively on the activities of Cuban health workers in Equatorial Guinea. Under an agreement with Cuba, about 160 Cuban health workers serve in Equatorial Guinea's hospitals and train its doctors in the country's newly established university as well as in Cuba. The Cubans are paid just a living wage. The authors report that, unlike the oil workers, the Cubans live amidst those they work for, and are not distinguished from them on the basis of wealth. Cuba, they stress, is not in this country to exploit the country, but to help its people develop their capacity to be self reliant.

We conclude by stating that this is not an academic study. It belongs to the category of books that would be classified as journalism. It is needful to add, though, that it is good journalism. It provides reliable basic information about contemporary Equatorial Guinea, information that would be of much value to any reader who is not familiar with the country. However, many readers that are not left-inclined would find many of the comments of the authors — comments that downplay the contributions of capitalist firms and exaggerate those of socialist Cuba — rather disquieting.

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