

Bourgi affair exposes French imperialism's criminal activities in Africa

Anthony Torres
22 September 2011

On September 11, lawyer Robert Bourgi revealed in a lengthy interview in the *Journal du Dimanche* that he acted as go-between for the secret financing of the main political parties in France by African heads of state.

Testimony from others, notably that of Loïk Le Floch-Prigent, CEO of the Elf oil company, had already revealed the existence of such funding (see: “France: Elf verdicts reveal state corruption at highest levels”). Bourgi’s statements shed further light on the illegal activities of French officials in the country’s former colonies. They show for all to see the links between the French state and imperialist policy in Africa.

Bourgi details how he received large sums of money from the African politicians, which he handed over to then-president Jacques Chirac and former prime minister Dominique de Villepin. In the interview Bourgi says: “Through me ... five African heads of state—Blaise Compaoré [Burkina Faso], Laurent Gbagbo [Ivory Coast], Denis Sassou Nguesso [Congo-Brazzaville] and, of course, Omar Bongo [Gabon]—contributed about \$10 million for the 2002 [presidential] campaign.”

Bourgi often hid this cash in *djembes*, African drums. Further on in the interview, the lawyer explained that throughout the 1990s he collected funds from several African heads of state, including Zaire’s brutal dictator, Marshal Mobutu Sese Seko.

His account confirms the existence of corrupt networks linking up French banks, oil companies and the military with various African régimes. These networks continued functioning after decolonisation in order to plunder the African masses—and also help oppress the French working class, by contributing to the imposition of reactionary governments such as Chirac’s.

Bourgi’s comments also confirm that these practices had

long been in existence. He presents himself as the successor to Jacques Foccart, the “Mr. Africa” chosen by President Charles de Gaulle to manage the relations of the new Fifth Republic—founded in 1958 by de Gaulle—and the newly independent former colonies.

He explains that Foccart, whom he calls his “mentor”, told him personally that these practices had been in existence “even during the time of presidents [Georges] Pompidou, [Valéry] Giscard d’Estaing and [François] Mitterrand ... In Libreville [the capital of Gabon] I often bumped into Mr [François] de Grossouvre, Mr Roland Dumas”, both close to Mitterrand.

This means that the secret networks have functioned under all the presidents of the Fifth Republic, from the first one, de Gaulle, to the current president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

It is entirely possible that Bourgi’s revelations were made public in the service of Sarkozy’s faction in the internal struggles within the French right. The *Journal du Dimanche* published an interview with Bourgi a few days before the acquittal of Villepin, who was being sued by Sarkozy in the Clearstream corruption affair. (See: “Villepin acquitted in France’s Clearstream trial”)

Bourgi’s statements also appeared just as billionaire businessman Ziad Takieddine, close to former French prime minister Edouard Balladur, was being charged for the illicit funding of Balladur’s 1995 election campaign in association with deals involving the delivery of submarines to Pakistan. Takieddine is also suspected of having organised negotiations in 2000 between Sarkozy and Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi.

In 2002 eleven French engineers, who had come to supervise the construction of submarines in Pakistan, were killed in a bomb attack. The families of the victims back the hypothesis that Takieddine had been an intermediary in the

illicit deals which financed the bribes paid to the Pakistan army and paybacks for Balladur's unsuccessful presidential election campaign. At the time Sarkozy was budget minister and was preparing Balladur's campaign.

In 1996, French president Chirac and Alain Juppé, his prime minister, announced the suspension of payments to Pakistan. The bomb attacks could have been ordered by Pakistani leaders in retaliation for the suspension of the arrangement (see: "France: Investigation of 2002 Karachi bombing implicates Sarkozy").

These various scandals expose the utterly criminal character of France's foreign policy, dictated by political and oil-industry cabals hostile to the French and African masses. This has taken on a special significance in the context of the global economic crisis and revolutionary revolts of workers in Tunisia and Egypt—to which France has responded by launching a series of imperialist wars and interventions in Africa.

The French bourgeoisie justified its military intervention in Libya by invoking the defense of the population against Gaddafi, with whom French and other Western leaders had had close relations. In fact, the aim of this intervention is to install a regime more amenable to the interests of French imperialism, which is under threat from the workers' uprisings in North Africa. The oil company Total, successor to Elf, hopes to obtain access to a large share of Libya's oil reserves.

France has also intervened in a civil war in the Ivory Coast to remove President Gbagbo from power. The French military bombarded his residence in Abidjan.

The activities of clandestine networks throughout the Fifth Republic, under Socialist Party and right-wing presidents alike, also expose the corrupt and fraudulent foundations of French bourgeois democracy.

It is not possible for the French working class to fight this situation by putting a bourgeois or petty bourgeois "left" government in power that would reform institutions by creating a Sixth Republic. These different parties are political satellites of the Socialist Party, which is fully involved in these imperialist networks.

A real struggle against French imperialism's criminal oil networks in Africa has to be based on the international working class, in a revolutionary struggle against all the Western imperialist powers in Africa.

It is worth pointing out the critical role of the "African connection" in the reactionary founding of the Fifth Republic. The dissolution of the Fourth Republic took place in 1958 after an attempted putsch in Algeria—during the war of independence against French imperialism—by military circles which were at the time supporting de Gaulle.

Various Gaullist politicians were then working to extend the influence of de Gaulle's party in North Africa. De Gaulle had maintained his links with the French imperialist structures since his stay in Africa as head of the pro-capitalist Resistance during the Second World War.

A demonstration in Algiers on May 13, 1958, organised by General Raoul Salan turned into an attempted coup against the Fourth Republic, while a landing of paratroopers in Ajaccio in Corsica put pressure on the French government, which resigned in favour of de Gaulle.

De Gaulle justified his setting up of the Fifth Republic by his decision to "seize the historic opportunity provided by the collapse of the parties to endow the state with institutions which, in a form appropriate to modern times, give it back the stability and the continuity of which it has been bereft for one hundred and sixty-nine years"—that is, since the French Revolution in 1789!

Indeed, the leading French circles in Algeria were soon to turn against him, notably during the 1961 generals' putsch against the vote of the French people in the referendum on Algeria's self-determination.

As is shown by the current scandals, French imperialism's international networks which played a central role in the setting-up of the Fifth Republic are still in business and acting in support of anti-democratic and anti-working class policies.



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