

Ivory Coast elections bolster French recolonization plans

John Marion
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On December 11, the West African country of Ivory Coast held its first legislative elections in 11 years, with all 225 seats in the National Assembly at stake.

The balloting follows disputed presidential elections which, earlier this year, resulted in the installation by imperialist powers of Alassane Outtara as president. (See “Former IMF economist installed as Ivory Coast president”)

The Constitutional Council of the former French colony did not declare Outtara the winner until May 6—nearly a month after previous president Laurent Gbagbo was captured on April 11 by French special forces acting under orders from French President Nicolas Sarkozy and with the political support of the US. The raid was carried out with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and attack helicopters that bombed Gbagbo’s compound.

This aggression was the last in a long line of interventions by France in its former colony, to which it dispatched troops in 2002. During the months between the November 2010 elections and the installation of Outtara in May, French and UN troops seized the Felix Houphouet-Boigny airport and stood by while Outtara’s forces massacred Gbagbo supporters in the western town of Duékoué.

Gbagbo is now being brought before the International Criminal Court in The Hague, for crimes allegedly committed by his government after the 2010 presidential elections. While Outtara has promised punishment of guilty parties “in every camp,” none of his own partisans have been arrested.

Gbagbo is the first former head of state to be tried by the ICC, but belongs to a long line of former stooges of the imperialist powers who are deposed on “humanitarian” grounds after outliving their usefulness.

America and France have now turned to Outtara and the legislative elections to safeguard their interests.

Only 36.5 percent of the country’s 5.7 million registered voters turned out in to vote in the December 11 elections, which were little more than window dressing for the rule of French—and behind it, US—imperialism. Outtara’s Rally of Republicans (RDR) took an absolute majority with 127 seats, while the Ivory Coast Democratic Party (PDCI) of former president Henri Konan Bedie received 77.

Gbagbo’s Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) boycotted the elections.

The Ivorian legislature has just one house, to which deputies are supposed to be elected every five years. However, no legislative elections had been held since 2000, under conditions of civil war and rebellion in the north of the country.

The Ivorian Constitution, in effect since August 2000, gives the Assembly a list of powers common in bourgeois democracies—the authority to establish rules for issuing money, laws governing national and local elections, policies on teaching and scientific research, laws governing union and property rights, and organization of national defense.

However, it also gives the country’s president authority to temporarily enact by “ordinance” laws that he cannot get passed in the Assembly. He can impose a national budget through this means if the Assembly does not pass one within 70 days of its introduction.

Having won a majority in the Assembly, Outtara will be able to keep up a democratic facade without having to resort to such measures. A former deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, he is well known and closely tied to global finance capital.

The French daily *Liberation* reported that the RDR’s victory is likely to increase tensions between it and the

older Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI). The RDR originally split from the PDCI in November 1994, but made a pact with it last year that the PDCI would get the prime ministership in the event of an RDR win. Instead, Outtara has retained Guillaume Soro, a former rebel in the north of the country, as his PM.

Liberation quoted a Burkinabe observer who described Outtara and Soro as “accomplices,” who work together so that “Outtara assures the resumption of economic activity, and Soro takes care of reforming the army and security.”

Under Gbagbo, who had close ties to the French Socialist Party and the social-democratic Socialist International, the interests of global finance capital were well represented in the country. A May 2007 US diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks noted that Ivory Coast had lowered its corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 27 percent the previous year. The cable enthused that “the government does not use tax, labor, environment, or health and safety laws to impede or distort investment” and that it “actively encourages foreign investment through mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, takeovers, or startups.”

Diplomatic cables from the US embassies in Paris and Abidjan document close collaboration between French and US diplomats on manipulation of Ivorian politics. They also document secret meetings between Outtara and French officials at the Elysee palace in 2009 and 2010.

In a February 2010 cable, a French official tells the “Africa-watcher” from the US embassy in Paris that the government of France “must visibly recede into the background.” The plan was not to reduce France’s role but to hide it, out of fear that there would otherwise be violence against the 14,000 French citizens in Ivory Coast.

French Foreign Minister Francois Fillon has since given press conferences in which he rejects the term “recolonization” but talks about “consolidating economic relations” and promises celebrations of Bastille Day in Ivory Coast.

Yet another cable describes the announcement of Outtara’s candidacy in 2007: “Ouattara noted that there are no problems between Cote d’Ivoire and France and invited French citizens who ‘wrongfully’ and ‘disgracefully’ had to depart Cote d’Ivoire to return if they wanted to.” He announced his candidacy in Paris

rather than Ivory Coast, a choice the US embassy found “interesting.”



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