

# China: Trial of Bo Xilai's wife ends quickly

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The speedy conclusion last Thursday of the trial against Gu Kailai, the wife of former Chongqing party secretary Bo Xilai, has cleared the way for a show of unity prior to the upcoming 18th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) congress and change of top leadership.

Gu conveniently confessed at an Intermediate People's Court in Hefei city in Anhui province to murdering her British business partner, Neil Heywood. The only charge was intentional homicide, despite extensive allegations of corruption surrounding the case. By focussing solely on Gu and the issue of murder, CCP leaders are hoping to bury factional differences within the party as President Hu Jintao prepares to hand power to the "fifth generation" leadership.

The airing of corruption allegations threatened to become a focal point for discontent within the working class, amid a slowing economy and rising unemployment. Few details of the case have been revealed. A courtroom source told the British *Daily Mail* that Heywood allegedly told Bo: "If you do not give me £13 million, you will be destroyed."

The alleged threat no doubt implied that Bo's corrupt dealings would be publicly exposed. Allegations surrounding Bo range from financial kickbacks for approving major industrial and real estate projects to rumours that he traded in human organs from executed prisoners.

According to a US-based dissident magazine *External Reference*, Bo took 1 billion yuan in bribes during his term as Chongqing party secretary just for promoting party officials. Gu reportedly owned properties in Hong Kong, Singapore and the US, and laundered as much as 8 billion yuan (\$1.2 billion) overseas. Business ally, Xu

Ming, the billionaire owner of the huge Dalian Shide Group, was also detained after Bo's arrest in March.

To eliminate Heywood's threat to expose the family's corruption, Gu and her aide Zhang Xiaojung allegedly lured Heywood to a Chongqing hotel last November, where Gu had a drink with him. After Heywood became drunk and started vomiting, he asked for water. Gu allegedly gave him a bottle laced potassium cyanide, causing death within minutes.

Four police officers involved in the cover up of the murder have also been put on trial, including Guo Weiguo, Chongqing city's former deputy police chief, and two senior detectives. Heywood's death was initially put down to alcohol poisoning.

The cover-up unravelled after former Chongqing city police chief, Wang Lijun, tried to seek asylum in the US consulate in the city of Chengdu in February. Wang claimed to have evidence not only of Bo's role in murdering Heywood, but of his corrupt practices. The trial of Wang is reportedly to start this week in a Chengdu court.

The outcome of Gu's trial was a foregone conclusion, determined by the top CCP leadership on the basis of political and factional considerations. In return for avoiding the death penalty, Gu has offered information on others allegedly involved in corruption. Who is to be implicated and on what charges will also be determined by CCP factional politics. Gu is yet to be sentenced.

All of the circumstances surrounding the case are mired in intrigue. According to Hong Kong's *Ming Pao Daily*, Wang, on behalf of Bo, was wiretapping a hotline between Chongqing political and legal affairs committee secretary Liu Guanglei, who was monitoring

Bo, and President Hu Jintao's office. Beijing detected Wang's activities, including his intention to flee to the US consulate, but did nothing to stop him.

Wang's "treason" then became the pretext for exposing Bo, a rising political star poised to take a seat in the powerful Politburo Standing Committee at the upcoming party congress. He was removed as Chongqing party secretary over the scandal and is under detention at an unknown location on the vague charge of committing "a serious violation of party discipline."

Bo's removal was used to justify the shutting down of several neo-Maoist websites, including *Maoflag* and *Utopia*, which advocated his policies—a greater role for state in the economy along with limited social concessions, such as public housing for rural migrant workers. Bo also attempted to build up a base of support by cracking down on organised crime in Chongqing and reviving the public singing of Mao-era songs.

The dominant CCP faction, however, was opposed to Bo's populism. In announcing Bo's removal in March, Premier Wen Jiabao warned that populist appeals and criticism of the regime's pro-market agenda threatened to unleash "a historic tragedy" comparable to the social upheaval of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

Bo's policies have nothing to do with socialism, but rather are only a variant of China's "state-led" capitalism. His aim was to create the conditions, including the supply of cheap labour, to attract international corporations such as Hewlett-Packard, Foxconn and Ford to establish production bases in Chongqing. These companies formed partnerships with local state enterprises and governments that took a share of the profits.

Amid a deepening global economic crisis, foreign capital is demanding an end to all barriers to profit and thus access to areas of the Chinese economy previously dominated by state-owned monopolies. It is no accident that Bo's fall in the wake of a key World Bank report, issued in conjunction with China's State Council, calling for a new round of pro-market restructuring.

Bo's removal also came amid sharp divisions in the Chinese leadership over how to react to the Obama

administration's increasingly aggressive efforts to undermine China's economic and military position in Asia. Sections of the Chinese military have been pressing for a more active response to the US "pivot" to Asia.

Several generals have been sidelined, including former Chinese President Liu Shaoqi's son, Liu Yuan. In the preface to a book earlier this year by an academic who has promoted Bo's "Chongqing model", Liu called for a "militaristic culture" as part of efforts to counter the Western containment of China. He declared that "history is written by blood and slaughter" and denounced the current leadership for selling out the country. "Actually, the party has been repeatedly betrayed by general secretaries, both in and outside the country, recently and in the past," he wrote, without naming anyone.

Significantly, Liu and other generals connected to Bo are still listed among the delegates due to attend the upcoming CCP congress, indicating that the faction supportive of Bo still retains significant support within the party, state apparatus and the military. At this stage, by limiting Gu's trial and not making it the starting point of a wholesale purge, the current leadership appears to be seeking unity as it seeks to install its candidates as the next party leaders.



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