

Bo Xilai denies corruption charges

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The trial of Bo Xilai, former Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo member and Chongqing party secretary, which began last Thursday, concluded on Monday without an immediate verdict.

Bo rejected all the charges against him, including allegations of accepting bribes worth \$3.6 million from two businessmen. At the end of the trial, the prosecutor insisted that because of Bo's denials, "he doesn't meet the standards for a reduced sentence, so should be punished severely in accordance with the law." A verdict could be announced in coming weeks. Bo is likely to be sentenced to between 15 years and life in prison.

Before the trial, it was widely speculated that Bo had struck a deal with the leadership of President Xi Jinping for his trial to proceed in a similar manner to last August's hearing against his wife, Gu Kailai. In exchange for leniency, she confessed to murdering their business associate, British citizen Neil Heywood, in November 2011. Gu received a suspended death penalty, rather than immediate execution.

In an attempt to give the Bo trial some legitimacy, the authorities provided a supposedly live update via an official microblog, featuring edited video footage of witnesses' testimony. Bo's defence statements at the Jianan Intermediate Peoples Court were also shown on television and news sites. It was an attempt to portray the trial as an example of China's "rule of law" being applied to fight corruption, rather than a political prosecution against a major factional figure.

According to the reports published by the state media, Bo's wife Gu admitted that Bo knew of bribes from two businessmen, including a \$3.5 million mansion in France, in exchange for Bo, then mayor and party secretary in Dalian, giving business preferences to their companies. Xu Ming, a tycoon from the Dalian Shide Group, also testified against Bo, as did Bo's former police chief Wang Lijun, who said Bo was well aware

of the bribes he received via his wife and son.

Bo, however, repudiated earlier admissions of taking bribes, made during an internal party investigation, saying he was placed under "illegitimate pressure." Bo declared his wife's testimony was "laughable" and alleged that she had organised the bribes behind his back. Ultimately, the trial ended with a claim by Bo that Wang Lijun had sought to defect to the US in February 2012, because Bo discovered an affair between his wife and Wang.

The court transcripts were heavily edited. For instance, Bo was accused of fabricating Wang's medical records while Wang was hiding in a US consulate. Bo insisted that he was following "superior orders"—a reference that was included in an early version of the transcript and later removed.

Despite the presence of hundreds of police and plainclothes agents, dozens of people turned up at the court to protest against the trial. Scuffles and confrontations broke out between the police and protesters. Agence France Press reported: "A large banner claiming Mr Bo was being politically persecuted was ripped down by police, while other supporters unfurled Mao Zedong posters." Several demonstrators were detained.

It seems that Bo calculated that if he admitted wrongdoings he would destroy any possibility of a political comeback. Until last year, he was a rising political star, poised to join the most powerful Politburo Standing Committee, and even take the post of general secretary at last November's party congress.

Bo represents a faction within China's ruling bureaucracy and capitalist class, especially those who have much to lose if some of the world's largest state-owned companies are dismantled and privatised under Xi's plans for another wave of pro-market reform.

Bo was also appealing for support from neo-Maoist groups, which had long viewed him as a figurehead.

They promote illusions, especially among layers of older employees laid off from the state-owned enterprises in the past two decades, that a figure like Bo in the “party centre” could secure a “fairer” distribution of wealth under a “state-guided” market economy.

Bo had to be removed, but not because of his corruption, which is endemic within the regime. Former premier Wen Jiabao’s family, for example, was exposed by the *New York Times* last October for having amassed a fortune of at least \$2.7 billion. The real agenda was to politically discredit Bo and sections of the bureaucracy and business elite who would lose out in the plans drawn up by Wen and his successor Li Keqiang to open up the remainder of the state-dominated sectors, such as finance, to international capital.

These plans are an attempt to prop up faltering economic growth, because China’s export-led expansion over the past two decades has begun to break up since the 2008 global financial crisis. Alongside Bo’s trial, China’s state media is promoting a “free trade zone” just established in Shanghai, affording it the same significance as China’s first “special economic zone” in Shenzhen in 1980. The new zone is set to be the testing ground for the free conversion of Chinese yuan, and the free movement of goods and personnel, with the ultimate aim of allowing international investors into China’s bond, debt and share markets.

With huge job losses set to occur under the combined impact of slowing economic growth, and industrial consolidation and privatisation, President Xi’s leadership fears that Bo’s stance could trigger broader opposition from the working class against the new bourgeoisie that has emerged out of the CCP’s policy of capitalist restoration since 1978.

There are also concerns in global financial circles. The *Wall Street Journal*, the mouthpiece of American finance capital, said that Bo’s trial exposed “three core claims of the Communist Party:” a united national leadership, the institutionalisation of selecting leaders and that “an open struggle for power like that seen during the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution can never happen again.”

Mao’s initial attempt to mobilise millions of student youth for the purpose of removing his factional rivals in

the late 1960s, under the slogan of stopping “capitalist roaders,” unexpectedly unleashed a massive rebellion of the urban working class that plunged the country into near-civil war. Mao was only able to restore order by deploying the army to suppress the entire movement, paving the way for capitalist restoration under Deng Xiaoping.

The *Wall Street Journal* said such a scenario was not “far-fetched,” noting that former Premier Wen “warned of the possibility in March 2012,” just as he announced Bo’s removal from office. Wen warned that “a historical tragedy like the Cultural Revolution may occur again.” Bo, days before he disappeared, told reporters that “a new capitalist class” had been created in China. In reality, Bo is part of this new bourgeoisie, but with business interests and policies that are tactically different from those of the new Xi-Li leadership.

The Chinese leaders and their international counterparts are worried that the sharp rifts in the CCP hierarchy could open up opportunities for the working class to enter into social struggle against the entire oligarchic elite.



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