

# A Political Storm That Might Pull Down the French Presidency

by Christine Bierre

A scandal has erupted in France, implicating President Jacques Chirac (RPR, neo-Gaullists) and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (Socialist Party), which has the ugly potential to bring down the government, and discredit the institutions of the nation. The scandal has broken out at a time when institutional forces in France are more and more openly challenging the unipolar strategic policy of the Anglo-American elites.

The manner in which the crisis broke, is typical of intelligence operations, like the British-steered "Clean Hands" prosecutions which dismantled Italy's post-war political institutions, or, more recently, those directed against former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. The method is the same: revelations are made of alleged corruption on the part of the person or persons, press campaigns follow, with investigative material, and judicial proceedings are opened up, leading to indictments, convictions, and jailings; or, those targeted resign and disappear from political life.

Although there is no material evidence to identify foreign forces as behind the scandals, it is clear that it is the Anglo-Americans who would have everything to gain from a significant weakening of the French government. Increasingly over recent years, France has come to represent a position of outright opposition to the core policies of the Anglo-American financial oligarchy, and has thereby provoked furious attacks from Margaret Thatcher, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and other figures of that establishment.

In a briefing to the French diplomatic corps in September, Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine issued an explicit denunciation of the economic and strategic policies of the Anglo-American elites worldwide. Védrine also attacked U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's pontificating on "democracy," at a June 25-27 international conference in Warsaw, and rejected her proposal for a "club of democratic states" (see Mark Burdman, "French Foul Up Albright's 'Democratic' Fascist Scheme," *EIR*, July 7, 2000).

Worse, from the standpoint of these forces, is the fact that France is increasingly coordinating policies with powerful independent countries including China, Russia, and India, exerting leverage to block or sabotage Anglo-American initiatives. It was China, Russia, and France's opposition to the national missile defense program which encouraged President Clinton to postpone the decision to launch the program. It was also Russia and France which first challenged the United

Nations embargo on Iraq, by sending planes into Baghdad Airport.

## The Videotape Scandal

On Sept. 22, the leading French daily *Le Monde* published the transcript of a videotape which had been made by Jean Claude Mery, a former RPR executive member who died in 1999, who was in charge of collecting funds for the party from Paris region real estate and construction companies. Mery produced the videotape on May 14, 1996, while he was already under examination by the judges for accepting kickbacks from those real estate firms. The message on the tape confirmed an open secret: that the RPR, under the leadership of Mery and Michel Roussin, who served as chief of cabinet for Chirac both as Prime Minister in 1986 and later on as Mayor of Paris, had organized the system of corruption in the public real estate markets in the Paris region. Mery describes how, in 1985, when he first took responsibility for dealing with the real estate companies for the RPR, the kickbacks paid by those companies to the RPR, in exchange for construction contracts and renovation of all public housing and schools in the Paris area, were "limited" to 300,000 francs per year. After he had reorganized the system, the sum had reached FF 35-40 million per year!

Mery, who feared for his life because of what he knew, asked Arnaud Hammelin, president of a small TV documentary company, Sunset Press, to tape his testimony and to make it public in case something happened to him. Mery died in June 1999, and last September, Hammelin decided to give the videotape to *Le Monde*, which proceeded to publish it.

Although much of the material in the tapes was already known, what is new and damning is that 1) for the first time, the entire corruption system is described by its author; 2) the role of Roussin, a close collaborator of Chirac, is brought to the fore; and, 3) the entire system was organized on behalf of then-Paris Mayor Chirac. In fact, Mery reports that in October 1985, he personally delivered to Roussin, in Chirac's presence, FF 5 million in cash, paid by a subsidiary of the Compagnie Générale des Eaux.

Mery reports also that the system was organized in such a way that all the parties got some of the loot. Thus, in one case, the Communist Party received FF 1 million and the Socialists FF 3.5 million.



French President Jacques Chirac (left) and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin are targets of a scandal that is threatening the stability of the French state, because of recent challenges to Anglo-American unipolar rule.

Hours after *Le Monde*'s publication of the Mery tape, the weekly *L'Express* revealed on its website that former Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn had received the original master of the tape when he was still Finance Minister, as part of a deal between the Treasury and fashion magnate Karl Lagerfeld, negotiated by Lagerfeld's lawyer, Alain Belot, also a former collaborator of Strauss-Kahn and former lawyer of Mery. As a result, Lagerfeld's taxes were reduced from FF 300 million to FF 40 million. For several days, Strauss-Kahn found himself at the center of a media storm, suspected of having withheld the tape from the authorities investigating the Mery case, in order to use it later for blackmail purposes against Chirac. The investigating magistrates immediately seized the opportunity to raid Strauss-Kahn's offices and home to look for the videotape, and place Strauss-Kahn under investigation for "obstruction of justice" and for corruption in the Lagerfeld negotiations, even though such deals are common at the Finance Ministry. Strauss-Kahn claims that he misplaced the videotape and, indeed, the judges were not able to find it.

Prime Minister Jospin was also suspected of having known about the videotape. The first damage control measures taken by Jospin, in an attempt to save his government, involved breaking with Strauss-Kahn. He and the top leadership of the Socialist Party (PS), demanded in public statements that Strauss-Kahn collaborate fully with the judges and clear himself in the affair. Throwing Dominique Strauss-Kahn to the wolves, however, will not entirely save Jospin's Socialist Party.

### The State Is Tottering

The enemies of France must have rejoiced to see the results of this scandal. In a matter of hours, President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin were at each other's throats, in a

rare display of disunity at the highest levels of the state.

Not knowing where the attack was coming from, Chirac and his camp first lashed out against Jean Tiberi, the current Mayor of Paris who has decided to run for another term, against the wishes of the RPR leadership. Tiberi has been threatening to use his knowledge of illegal financial practices in the RPR, to blackmail Chirac and the RPR leadership. Later, when the involvement of Strauss-Kahn came to light, Chirac tried to attack the Socialist Party in an attempt to hide his own role in the affair.

Jospin reacted in a more dignified way, calling on Socialist Party members of parliament, who had assembled in Lyon for a meeting, not to allow their attention to be distracted from the essential point: the task of governing.

His appeal for rationality did not, however, prevent his advisers from making incendiary statements to the press, such as, "They have unleashed the dogs, now we're gonna fight."

### Will the Government Survive?

Recognizing the terrible consequences that this brawl has had both at home and abroad, Chirac and Jospin decided on a truce. According to *Le Canard Enchaîné*, which appeared in the first week of October, two polls had been decisive in prompting them to make such a decision. According to one poll, 70% said they wanted Chirac to provide an explanation of the scandals, and another showed that 54% would not like to be presented with the choice, in Presidential election run-offs, between Jospin and Chirac.

At the height of the scandal in the last week of September, relations between the two heads of the executive had so deteriorated, that it seemed that early elections would be required to reestablish trust in the leadership. But both Chirac and Jospin realized, that their popularity had sunk so low — Jospin had dropped 16% in popularity, and Chirac 10% — that they would make a poor showing in elections. Both thought that the later such elections were to take place, the better; they could gain time to recoup their images.

The trouble for Chirac and Jospin does not end here. There are legal cases that could blow up in their faces, and elements of the judiciary are out like hounds on the scent of blood.

At this point, Chirac's name could pop up in at least five cases currently under investigation, all related to illegal fundraising practices, dating back to a period when the law provided no framework for the financing of political parties: a case of fictitious jobs for RPR members paid for by the Paris municipality, and four cases of corruption related to market valuations for construction of low-cost public housing, public

schools, modernization of public buildings, and real estate markets.

The situation is similar for Jospin, whose name could emerge in two cases, including one involving kickbacks allegedly given by the Socialist Party to large supermarkets. A close friend of Jospin, a fundraiser for the Socialist Party, is directly targeted by this scandal. Jospin could also be implicated in a scandal involving the student social security organization, the MNEF.

### **A Ruling for Immunity**

In principle, Chirac, as President, is protected from any juridical investigation, according to a finding by the Constitutional Council, which was issued when Roland Dumas (PS) was still its president. The finding of France's highest constitutional court, was that the President of the Republic, while in office, is not liable for alleged crimes or misdemeanors committed before his term in office. No prosecution could begin, until after he has left office. However, the French Supreme Court, which is the body that would decide such cases, has declared that it does not feel bound by this opinion. Although it would be very unusual for these two institutions of the judicial system to be at loggerheads, because they both represent the interests of the French establishment at the highest level, it should not be ruled out entirely, if all hell breaks loose.

Furthermore, the finding of the Constitutional Council has already been questioned by experts, and by the public. In a poll conducted by the Sofres Institute, and published by *Le Monde* on Oct. 5, Chirac seemed to fare well: 49% said that they believe the entire Mery affair was "political manipulation" against Chirac, 34% believe that it was "much ado about nothing," and 16% were indifferent to the entire case. However, 80% said that they thought that the President must testify if summoned by a judge; 72% said that the President should be ready to provide explanations to the French public, and 71% said that they considered the idea of immunity for the President of the Republic "not normal."

On Oct. 8, the stakes were raised. Raymond Forni, the president of the National Assembly, the third-highest state official, called on Chirac to explain himself either before the judges, or before the population. Days later, pandemonium broke out in the National Assembly, when a parliamentarian from the Green Party launched an assault against Chirac's "immunity" as President. He was followed by other parliamentarians, members of the Socialist Party. In response, some RPR deputies demanded explanations from Jospin, regarding reports that his former Finance Minister, Strauss-Kahn, had been in the possession of the famous Mery videotapes. Jospin, joined by Justice Minister Elizabeth Guigou, nipped the debate in the bud, making clear that such a debate would not take place in that form.

Following this eruption, the Presidency and the Prime Ministry came to some agreement for a truce — at least temporarily.

## **Queen's Britain Goes To Pot**

by Mark Burdman

During the week of Oct. 9, Queen Elizabeth II made one of her regular "walkabouts" in Britain, meeting her subjects, and trying to demonstrate that, despite evidence to the contrary, she is a human being. But events took an unusual turn, when she was presented, by one admirer, with a marijuana plant. The next day, the media in Britain highlighted photos of Her Majesty holding the plant in her hand.

Buckingham Palace reacted with great haste, to insist that the Sovereign had been totally surprised when presented with this gift, and had not known it was marijuana. The Palace, of course, is super-sensitive, that such photos might convey the impression that "the Queen pushes drugs," and then, people around the world will start wondering, why a million or so slanders of Lyndon LaRouche have appeared in the international media in the past couple of decades, falsely attributing this quote to LaRouche.

Alas, all the denials from the Palace had a somewhat limited effect. It gave various commentators in the U.K., the opportunity to remind their readers that Elizabeth II's ancestor, Queen Victoria, had regularly used cannabis, in the 19th Century, supposedly for "medicinal reasons."

Beyond this, the walkabout incident came amidst a gigantic campaign in Britain, among the political class and others, to legalize cannabis, as a stepping-stone to wider drug legalization. For many, Her Majesty's holding a marijuana plant aloft seemed to be a deliberate stunt. One Scottish influential told *EIR*: "This was no mere accident. She probably goes into the back rooms, and smokes from time to time."

### **'Legalize All Narcotics Substances'**

During October, Britain has been in a state of frenzy, over legalization of marijuana/cannabis and other drugs. This unhinged state of mind is not entirely surprising, given that the world is in a period of wildly exacerbating global financial and strategic crises. One characteristically British reflex, although one that is by no means shared universally in the country, would be to dive into the worst depths of degeneracy. The more diabolical elements in the Establishment would see such a conjuncture as the present, as the perfect opportunity to launch a global opium war, on the model of what was done to China in the 19th Century, including against the British population itself. Legalizing drugs would also be important, in their view, to provide new sources of funds, to feed the