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## France

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# Nazi-communism on trial in Barbie case

by Thierry Lalevée

The trial of former SS officer Klaus Barbie, which opened on May 11 in the French city of Lyon, is expected to be remarkable in many ways. Considered the most important trial of a Nazi war criminal since that of Adolf Eichmann in Israel in the early 1960s, the Barbie trial is also considered to be the last of its kind. Because of the 20-year statute of limitations, Barbie cannot be judged for his war crimes against the French Resistance, for which he was twice condemned to death *in absentia* in the 1950s. But he will be tried for Crimes Against Humanity, such as his personal involvement in the arrest, deportation, and murder of thousands of French Jews. Topping the list of crimes, was the arrest of 44 Jewish schoolchildren, all of whom died in concentration camps.

Whatever sentence is decided, Barbie, now 73 years old, will most likely die in jail. Extradited from Bolivia in February 1983 to France, he has already been operated on twice. On the pretext of his bad health, and the fact that he is a Bolivian citizen, named Klaus Altman, his pseudonym for 30 years, Barbie withdrew from the court-room on May 13, the third day of the trial. The trial, which is expected to last until early July, will continue without him.

There are several important issues involved. Through Klaus Barbie himself and his numerous crimes, it is the entire Nazi regime which will be once again in the dock. Barbie was the chief of the Gestapo, the political police of the SS, in Lyon from 1942 to 1944. In his first statement on May 12, Barbie predictably argued that he was "not the chief of the Gestapo, but one among some 120 others"—an argument which carried little weight, as a few hours later he denied even being the accused Barbie.

Barbie's activities since the end of the war are also expected to be raised in the course of testimony. The story will once again be told, of how Barbie was recruited by American intelligence services in the immediate post-war days, and smuggled to Ibero-America, at a point when French intelligence was on his trail. During the last 30 years, Barbie has served as a military adviser to numerous military governments, notably that of Bolivia's "cocaine colonels." Ultimately, the mention of these activities will bring to light the

connection between drug smuggling and certain intelligence networks in the Western hemisphere.

## The peculiar Jacques Vergès

However the most remarkable element may be the case of his lawyer, Jacques Vergès. Sure of the fate of his client, Vergès announced in several pre-trial interviews that his defense would aim at attacking the French State and society. According to his own declarations, his line of argument will aim at proving that the French State has no political or moral rights to judge Barbie for Crimes Against Humanity, given its own record of war crimes in Indochina and Algeria. Vergès is expected to bring as witnesses, several former members of the Algerian Liberation Front, to describe the torture inflicted on them by the French police and army. He will also argue that Barbie's crimes could only have been perpetrated in full cooperation and collaboration with French elements who sided with the Nazis against the Resistance. In this way, Vergès is aiming to destroy what he calls "the myth of the Resistance," and has let it be known that he will have new revelations on "who the collaborators were." The immediate political target is all too obvious, given that the present French government, headed by Jacques Chirac, draws its legitimacy from the Gaullist movement and the anti-Nazi resistance.

This strategy is not new for Vergès, who, just two months ago, was the lawyer for international terrorist George Ibrahim Abdallah. However, his deliberate provocations may backfire. In the days preceding the trial, Vergès's career was carefully analyzed and exposed in the media. Two interconnected issues emerged: first, his long-standing association with Soviet-sponsored organizations, and his friendship in the early 1950s with Aleksandr Shelepin, then leader of the Soviet student organization, later chairman of the KGB; second, his association with the Nazi International, represented by Lausanne banker François Genoud.

What was known only to a few before, is now widely acknowledged: that Soviet agent-of-influence Vergès has worked with the Nazi International for at least three decades. When it was revealed that Barbie could not pay the lawyer's fee, Genoud's name came up—but the implication was denied by Vergès, who asserted that he was defending Barbie free of charge. The end result is that much of the "Vergès myth" has been exposed. In an interview with a French weekly, Vergès warned anyone who would want to go after him: If I were to be killed, he said, I have taken precautions. There is a list of names of those with whom I want to share either paradise or hell. I know that I have enough friends, that I will not have to wait too long to meet these people again.

A direct death threat, and perhaps the first public acknowledgement by Vergès that his friends are murderers. But that was known anyway. Indeed, a few years before he had defined his philosophy of Man by stressing that "crime is the difference between man and animal. When we become a criminal, we either become Man or God."

Barbie could not have chosen a more suitable lawyer.