

# French U.S. Spy Case May Hamper Pompidou

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PARIS—Over the years scandals have so regularly besmirched the French counterespionage organization that the latest cause celebre was greeted by a cartoon suggesting that a washing machine was needed to handle the growing volume of official dirty linen.

Involving a sometime French spy charged with smuggling 96 pounds of heroin into the United States last spring, the scandal has been connected by the press with a whole series of unsavory real estate frauds involving the ruling Gaullists.

The question of whether the scandals involve a CIA maneuver to embarrass its French counterpart or rivalries within the French organization is—and promises to remain—as murky as the plot of a cheap spy thriller.

But what is immediately at stake is the reputation and political future of President Georges Pompidou and the Gaullist party, grown in-

creasingly nervous with every new scandal and the approach of the 1973 legislative elections.

What is also at stake—as it has been for years in France—is the role of any counterespionage and intelligence operation in a Western democracy.

Tying odd ends of seemingly unconnected cases into one irrefutable plot has always been an honored intellectual pastime in the land of Descartes whose citizens have a natural penchant for the conspiracy theory of history.

But the current spectacle of official and unofficial spies calling each other names, complete with charges of high treason answered by \$200,000 slander suits, smacks of *deja vu*.

Beyond the morose delectation occasioned by such wayward Gallic James Bonds is the knowledge that the French spy organization has defeated all attempts at serious reform ever since its Free French beginnings in World War II London.

More than 13 years of

Gaullist rule have contributed to an attrition of vigilance, especially since Gaullists have always had a weakness for clandestine operations and questionable operatives.

The Service du Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionnage—pronounced *sdeck*—has suffered through an American period, followed by the traumas of the Algerian war, hostility to the United States and the end of once close links with Israel, only to be told to mend its American fences during the past year or so.

The previous low-water mark in the service's history occurred in 1965 when agents of the "swimming pool"—as SDECE headquarters in Paris is called after a nearby sports center—were implicated in the mysterious kidnaping and death of Mehdi Ben Barka, a leftist Moroccan politician in exile.

At that time no fewer than 13 separate police and intelligence organizations were identified, and the French people became ac-

See SCANDAL, H7, Col. 1

## SCANDAL, From H6

quainted with the distinguishing characteristics of the "barbouzes" — or bearded ones, as spies are called in argot.

It was not entirely surprising to learn that among Ben Barka's abductors were common law criminals who during the wartime occupation had worked for both the Germans and the Resistance.

Earlier, during the closing days of the Algerian war, the Gaullists recruited barbouzes from like back-grounds in their fight against the Secret Army Organization terrorists determined to keep Algeria French.

Despite the barrage of detailed charges and countercharges made public in the past two weeks, SDECE itself has never seen fit to publish the results of the reform carried out at Gen. de Gaulle's orders after the Ben Barka affair.

However, a Paris newspaper reported that of the swimming pool's 1,500 operatives 596 were then purged with 473 of them returning to the armed forces whence they had come.

An official National Assembly report on SDECE complained that low pay was discouraging recruitment, a failing which may help to explain why so many "barbouzes" seem to get into serious trouble.

Symptomatic of such apparent financial problems were the cases of Roger DeLouette, the center of the present scandal, and Andre Labay, arrested here earlier in the fall for drug trafficking. Both had worked for SDECE.

Quite apart from the "war

of the clans" within SDECE, which is real enough, the organization's real weakness is in cutting the umbilical cord with its agents once they have ceased being useful.

There have been some cases to suggest that unemployed "barbouzes" exercise sufficient leverage on their former employers to afford a certain license in finding other means of support which are not always above board.

The three gangsters involved in the Ben Barka case for example, had run houses of prostitution for a long time and were allowed to disappear abroad with an ease the government found embarrassing.

The question has been raised of how SDECE is financed beyond its rather stingy budget appropriations.

During the French Indochina war, a French air force plane regularly landed behind Vietminh lines to collect the opium harvest. Theoretically, the operation was to deprive the enemy of an important source of financing but it remains unclear even today what the French authorities did with the opium. (Similarly, the French press has accused the CIA of doing much the same with Laotian and Cambodian opium.)

Inevitably, the name of Jacques Foccart has been mentioned again in this case as it was in the Ben Barka affair. Foccart is nominally secretary general of the French-African Community — an organization which has had no legal existence for these 11 years — but his real business is ensuring that all goes relatively smoothly in former French black African possessions.

His organization reputedly employs many "barbouzes."

More open to question are such purely Gaullist unofficial organizations as the Committees of Republic Defense and the Civil Action Service which anti-Gaullists have charged involve former "barbouzes" in all kinds of skulduggery, including drug trafficking.

Theoretically, they are a kind of Gaullist internal police to provide protection for Gaullist politicians and

workers during election campaigns.

There is apparently well-founded speculation that much of the French exploitation of the scandals is linked to the legislative elections now on the horizon.

Many Frenchmen agreed with Gen. Pierre Billotte, a former defense minister and Gen. de Gaulle's wartime chief of staff, who claimed that SDECE was "no longer in the republican order" and called for its "dissolution."

But his statement was undercut by the knowledge that Billotte had hoped to take over as the boss of SDECE and had been turned down.

Nonetheless, his words struck a deeper cord than those of Defense Minister Michel Debre, who is technically responsible for SDECE. He said the whole DeLouette affair was only worth printing "on the 15th page of a third-rate paper and then only in small type."