

upon thousands had been killed, and many of the survivors had been mutilated.⁷ Time seemed to be running out for the government: the RUF was 20 kilometers from Freetown, and international staff there had been evacuated.⁸ With the situation desperate, Strasser had contact with Executive Outcomes (EO) in March 1995

The contract drawn up between EO and the Strasser government is interesting not only for its content but for the manner in which it came about. Some accounts maintain that Strasser called EO directly, having read about EO in *Soldier of Fortune* and *Newsweek* magazines.⁹ However, others recount the involvement of the companies Heritage Oil and Gas and Branch Energy. According to one article:

Tony Buckingham, the CEO of Heritage Oil and Gas, helped introduce EO to the Freetown government and Michael Grunberg, a major shareholder in Branch, negotiated EO's contract.¹⁰

The 'Branch' referred to is 'The Branch Group, a British multinational holding company.' The Branch Group is part of the Plaza Group, which also includes Diamond Works and Heritage Oil and Gas. The article goes on to say that Buckingham played the same role when EO was involved in Angola.¹¹ Both allegations are confirmed by a report in *The Namibian* that:

Buckingham was described in the DiamondWorks prospectus of February 1997 as able to provide or to assist with 'facilitating introductions for an organisation known as Executive Outcomes to certain governments', with Grunberg assisting in this regard.¹²

Buckingham is also alleged to have signed the contract between EO and the Sierra Leonean government, along with Strasser.¹³ The contract itself, originally for about \$20 million and one year only, starting in May 1995,¹⁴ specified that EO would 'combat and destroy the 'terrorist enemies of the state'; [restore] international security; and [help] build and maintain an economic climate where new investment could be attracted and allowed to flourish.'¹⁵ The cost of EO's services is estimated to have totaled \$35 million over 21 months.¹⁶

This fee was not easy for the Sierra Leone government to pay, and \$19.5 million of it is still due, now part of Sierra Leone's debt.¹⁷ That half of the fee is outstanding has prompted speculation that EO was compensated for its services in some other way. Indeed, EO's chairman, Eben Barlow, said in an interview, 'Africa is Africa, understand, and we don't work for free.'¹⁸ EO's links to mining companies, whatever their extent, led suspicions, published in *Jane's Intelligence Review* that EO had been granted 'mining concessions, soon sold to BE [Branch Energy].'¹⁹ Officials at Plaza 107 and DiamondWorks Ltd.²⁰ requested that *Jane's Intelligence Review* publish a correction furnished by them 'to clarify the position.' However, their correction indirectly confirming some of the suspicions, states:

Branch International, Heritage Oil and Gas, Plaza 107 and Sandline International are not associated companies of Executive Outcomes or any of its related entities. Neither is there a financial or operational/business link as was suggested in the article. At no time has Branch Energy Ltd bought, or otherwise obtained, mining concessions in Sierra Leone or elsewhere from Executive Outcomes or any of its