

Scandals grow in wiretapping of ex-French President Sarkozy

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Investigations of illicit funding of right-wing UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) party of former President Nicolas Sarkozy have exploded into a major scandal on the eve of France's March 23 municipal elections.

The factional battles of a discredited ruling establishment have brought to the surface the political criminality, fascist sentiments, and imperialist brutality permeating the entire ruling class. Attempts to exploit these scandals by France's unpopular ruling party, the Socialist Party (PS) of President François Hollande, also backfired, amid revelations that it lied about its role in investigations it manifestly hoped to use to discredit its opponents.

The picture that emerges is devastating:

*On February 27, *Le Point* reported that UMP president Jean-François Copé, a controversial Sarkozy stalwart who has advocated making appeals to the neo-fascist National Front's (FN) voter base, steered contracts for UMP events to a firm, Bygmalion, owned by several of his friends. This firm then allegedly overcharged the UMP to the tune of €8 million.

*On March 5, the satirical weekly *Canard enchaîné* revealed that Patrick Buisson, a Sarkozy counsellor with close ties to the neo-fascists, made hundreds of hours of unauthorized recordings of discussions with Sarkozy administration officials. Extracts appeared in the press showing Buisson to be, unsurprisingly, a foul-mouthed and reactionary figure who boasted of having a "royalist" culture.

*On March 7, *Le Monde* revealed that Sarkozy and two of his former ministers and top aides, Claude Guéant and Brice Hortefeux, had been under a judicial phone tap since the spring of 2013. Investigative magistrates examining allegations that former Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi financed Sarkozy's 2007

election campaign spied on discussions between Sarkozy and his lawyer, Thierry Herzog, of how to influence the Court of Cassation, France's highest appeals court.

They launched an inquiry into the suborning by Sarkozy's team of state prosecuting attorney Gilbert Azibert. Sarkozy and Herzog reportedly discussed how to get Azibert a sinecure in Monaco in exchange for influencing the Court of Cassation's decision on whether or not to hold Sarkozy's diary of meetings for 2007-8 as evidence in yet further investigations. These are the role of l'Oréal billionaire Liliane Bettencourt in funding Sarkozy's election campaign, and the €285 million state-funded bailout of businessman Bernard Tapie, a friend of Sarkozy.

In a major setback for Sarkozy, the Court of Cassation ruled on March 11 that his diaries could be used as evidence.

*The claims of PS Justice Minister Christine Taubira that she was unaware of the wiretapping of Sarkozy until *Le Monde* published its report proved to be lies. Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault subsequently admitted that he and Taubira had been notified over a week before, on February 26. Embarrassingly, the judicial reports Taubira brandished at a press conference in which she denied that she had been notified of the wiretapping were in fact letters from prosecutor Eliane Houette and advocate general Philippe Lagauche, notifying her of the wiretap.

There is no question that the allegations against the Gaullist UMP are serious and, given the history of the party, credible. It has accepted illicit payments of oil funds from France's former African colonies for decades, maintained illicit ties to figures of the financial aristocracy such as Bettencourt, and it is developing ever-closer ties to French fascist forces.

The PS' attempts to profit from the UMP's scandals are, however, hypocritical to the core. It is implicated in all the crimes of which the UMP stands accused. It supported Sarkozy's drive for war in Libya in 2011 that destroyed the Gaddafi regime and, as the Elf affair revealed in the 1990s and 2000s, it has received a large share of illicit African oil funds. (See: France: Elf verdicts reveal state corruption at highest levels.) Hollande himself launched two wars in Africa last year, in Mali and in Central African Republic.

As for the multi-billionaire Bettencourt family, which barely escaped having its assets confiscated for its collaboration with the Nazis during World War II, it was a close supporter of PS President François Mitterrand, as well as of right-wing politicians. Ties between the PS and fascist forces resurfaced under Hollande, when Budget Minister Jérôme Cahuzac was forced to resign for tax evasion last year. It had emerged that Cahuzac had long-term continuing political and financial relationships with FN circles.

What these political and financial scandals raise is not the corruption of one or another bourgeois party, but the historic bankruptcy of imperialism and the capitalist class. Facing deep economic crises, rising international tensions, and the unpopularity of its own domestic agenda of social austerity, French imperialism is impelled by powerful class forces to legitimize its plunder of the world at large and the working class at home, by promoting fascism and war.

In particular, the sudden wave of investigations of the UMP by a PS-led judiciary—emerging shortly before elections the PS fears it could lose very badly—strongly suggests that the PS is seeking to discredit the UMP with right-wing voters, pushing them towards the FN.

It recalls nothing so much as PS President François Mitterrand's electoral strategy from the mid-1980s, seeking to keep power despite his unpopularity by splitting the right-wing vote between the Gaullist UMP and the FN. After his "austerity turn" of 1982-3, Mitterrand took definite measures to promote the FN. He pressured TV channels to give Jean-Marie Le Pen more air time and changed electoral rules so that the FN could win 36 deputies in 1986.

This strategy was made possible by the collaboration of the PS' Stalinist and pseudo-left allies, who continued to support the PS under Mitterrand, despite his attacks on the working class and his encouragement

of the FN—whose implications are becoming ever more evident. Based on the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left forces, the FN poses as France's only opposition party and is growing rapidly. It is now predicted to take several municipalities in the upcoming elections.

Significantly, the FN has been fairly circumspect in its reaction to these affairs, particularly after the Buisson tapes revealed contacts between Sarkozy administration officials and former FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen during the 2007 presidential election.

FN leader Marine Le Pen indicated that she feared more potentially compromising revelations. She applauded Sarkozy's lawsuit aiming to place Buisson's tapes under seal. "When an affair of state is involved, it means that there are recordings out there," she said. "It [Sarkozy's lawsuit] will let the courts place under seal recordings which otherwise could get into foreign hands, hostile hands."

These events underscore that the FN has already established itself, due to the fascist shift in the politics of the entire bourgeoisie, as a key component of the political establishment.



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