

Ex-French President Nicolas Sarkozy denies influence peddling charges

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After being detained and indicted on corruption and influence peddling charges, former President Nicolas Sarkozy gave an interview to Europe1 radio and TF1 television Wednesday, denying the charges and attacking the French judiciary for being driven by “political ends”.

On Tuesday, Sarkozy was held for 15 hours in police custody before being interrogated by two judges early Wednesday morning. He was indicted on charges including violating judicial proceedings, active corruption, and influence peddling.

Investigators are charging that Sarkozy and his lawyer, Thierry Herzog, improperly offered to help get a prestige post in Monaco for Gilbert Azibert, a magistrate on France’s highest appeals court, in exchange for inside information about ongoing investigations into the financing of Sarkozy’s 2007 presidential campaigns.

Appearing for the first time in a primetime interview since he was defeated in the 2012 Presidential election against Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande, Sarkozy denounced his detention, saying “I am profoundly shocked by what happened.”

“No political official has been so thoroughly examined by magistrates and policemen,” he said.

Attacking the judiciary system and the PS government, he called the accusations “grotesque” and part of a politically-motivated campaign to humiliate him. “In our country, which is the country of human rights and the rule of law, there are things that are being organized,” he said. “The French people need to know what these things are and, in conscience and freedom, judge what to make of it.”

Sarkozy also questioned the legality of the intensive police wiretaps of his private communications—which both his government and the PS government have

deployed against the French people and the world’s population—asking: “Is it normal that my most intimate conversations were tapped?”

Sarkozy denied any wrongdoing. “I have never committed any act contrary to the values of the republic or the rule of law,” he said, claiming that he had “never betrayed the confidence” of the French people.

Sarkoz’s attempts to win sympathy notwithstanding, broad sections of population have concluded that the corruption allegations against Sarkozy are credible and that he is not being politically persecuted. According to a BVA poll for *Le Parisien*, “63 percent of Frenchmen believe he is being treated like any other citizen.”

The Sarkozy corruption scandal underscores the broad discrediting of the French political establishment. Beyond the issue of whether Sarkozy is corrupt, deep divisions are emerging in ruling circles over how to manage escalating popular anger with the PS’ austerity policies and imperialist wars, and the rising influence of the neo-fascist National Front.

Despite the PS’ unpopularity, Sarkozy’s opposition Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) is unable to benefit, as it is torn apart by scandals and factional conflict. As *Le Monde* reported, “Many local UMP elected officials, mayors, branch officials, some with many years in their positions, are angry about being constantly taken up by their voters on their party’s scandals, alleged financial irregularities, and secret loans.”

“The UMP is in a critical situation because of the scandals of recent months.” Conflans-Sainte-Honorine mayor Laurent Brosse commented. “Many people had joined thanks to Nicolas Sarkozy, because he was able to give an impulse. But there is a certain tiredness today.”

In ruling circles, there is deep concern at the

discrediting of the state. Judges, PS politicians, and sections of the media denounced Sarkozy for trying to discredit the judiciary by complaining about espionage directed against him. Françoise Martres, the head of the Union of Magistrates, criticized Sarkozy's remarks on Europe1: "Who is politicizing the justice system? Is it investigating magistrates who are trying to do their job serenely, or is it people who attack the justice system to try to discredit it?"

The PS government supported the case against Sarkozy, denouncing his defense. Prime Minister Manuel Valls said, "The facts are serious. This relates to magistrates, top ranking magistrates, a lawyer and a former president of the republic. But as head of government, I must respect the principles of the independence of the judiciary and the presumption of innocence."

He added, "These are investigating judges, independent judges, it's not the [public] powers that have demanded they carry out these inquiries, they are acting and working in an independent manner. If each time, for every affair, on each case that involves, or not, politicians there is this kind of polemic, we are undermining the very basic principles of the rule of law."

The Sarkozy affair deals yet another blow to the prestige of the presidency, the central institution of France's Fifth Republic. His predecessor, former President Jacques Chirac, was convicted on financial corruption charges in 2011, and Hollande is now the most unpopular French head of state since World War II and the collapse of the fascist regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain.

What is emerging, as even more perceptive bourgeois commentators admit, is a crisis of class rule in France.

"There is a feeling that the Fifth Republic has exhausted itself," said Christophe Barbier, chief editor of L'Express magazine told the *New York Times*. "Things can't go on like this," he added, predicting "an enormous cracking" of France's political system.

"In France, we only change the system when there is a revolution or a war," he added.



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