

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy sentenced to one year in prison

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Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was sentenced yesterday to three years in prison, with two years suspended, for corruption and influence peddling in the so-called “wiretapping” affair.

The revelation of criminal actions by the highest representative of the French state is a further blow to the legitimacy of the entire political regime. Sarkozy had sought to bribe a magistrate to suppress the fallout from the Bettencourt affair, named after the billionaire Bettencourt family with a fascist past. The affair exposed the family’s financing of large portions of the French political establishment, and implicated the entire state apparatus.

The imposition of a prison sentence on a former President is unprecedented under the Fifth Republic. The judges concluded that Sarkozy’s actions had undermined the legitimacy of the ruling class and its regime. The National Financial Prosecutor’s Office (PNF) had requested a four-year sentence, with parole after two years, against the former head of state, and declared that the presidential image had been “damaged” with “devastating effect” by the case.

Along with Sarkozy, his lawyer Thierry Herzog and former high-ranking magistrate Gilbert Azibert were also sentenced to three years, with two years suspended. Herzog was banned from practicing law for five years. However, the judges stated that his sentence could be reduced if he agrees to wear an electronic bracelet. Sarkozy has ten days to appeal, and his lawyers have already announced that he will do so.

Christine Mée, the lead judge in the case, explained in her statement that the “corruption pact” between Sarkozy and Herzog, made over a secret phone line under a different name, required “a firm legal response.” She said: “The acts are particularly serious, having been committed by a former president of the Republic. He used his status and his political and diplomatic relations to

reward a magistrate who served his personal interests.”

Mée continued: “This case has seriously undermined public confidence by suggesting that proceedings before the Court of Cassation [the highest criminal and civil court in France] do not always involve a conflict before independent magistrates, but may be subject to hidden arrangements designed to satisfy interests.”

Yesterday, Sarkozy gave an interview to *Le Figaro* to proclaim his innocence. “I have received many statements of support from French and foreign observers,” he said, adding that he would appeal, if necessary, to the European Court of Human Rights. “It would be painful for me to have to have my own country condemned, but I am ready to do so, because it would be the price of democracy.” He is to speak at 8pm tonight on the TF1 public broadcaster.

The so-called “wiretapping” affair dates from 2014. At the time, the PNF was investigating claims of Libyan financing of Sarkozy’s 2007 election campaign. Sarkozy had been accused of “receiving Libyan funds,” “illegal campaign financing” and “criminal association.”

Investigators discovered an unofficial, secret line between two mobile phones in the name of Paul Bismuth, on which Nicolas Sarkozy and Herzog were exchanging information. The issue in this case was whether Nicolas Sarkozy tried, through Herzog, to help Gilbert Azibert get a job in exchange for information about Sarkozy in the Bettencourt affair.

The Bettencourt affair erupted in 2010, after *Mediapart* published revelations about Sarkozy. The testimony of an accountant suggested that billionaire Liliane Bettencourt, who died in 2017, had illegally financed his 2007 election campaign.

The accountant, Claire T., explained that she had withdrawn 50,000 euros a week from Bettencourt’s accounts. “Part of it was used to pay doctors, hairdressers, small staff, etc.,” she said. “And another part was for politicians ... Dédé [Liliane’s late husband, André

Bettencourt] used to distribute it widely. Everyone came to get in on it. Some got up to 100,000 or even 200,000 euros.” She also quoted Patrice de Maistre, Bettencourt’s financial adviser, who told her that 150,000 euros would be needed to finance Sarkozy’s campaign.

These allegations directly implicated Sarkozy’s labour minister, Eric Woerth, who was treasurer of his election campaign, but Sarkozy himself has since been cleared in the affair.

Sarkozy faces numerous other scandals, against the backdrop of bitter conflicts in the ruling elite over who is to run in the 2022 presidential elections. Sarkozy briefly ran in 2017. He is now due to appear in court as early as March 17 in the Bygmalion affair, on suspicions of illegal financing.

Others indicted in these cases include Woerth, former Secretary General of the Elysée Claude Guéant, and former minister Brice Hortefeux. The PNF also confirmed on January 15 that it had opened an investigation of “influence peddling” and “laundering” against Sarkozy in connection with his consultancy activities in Russia.

The corruption exposed by these affairs can only be fought against, in the final analysis, through the independent struggle of the working class against the capitalist state. Behind the various cases and the multiple charges are unmistakable political crimes that are the doings of not only one man, but an entire social order. The policies pursued in Europe over three decades since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 have criminalised the European capitalist class.

Liliane Bettencourt’s father, Eugène Schueller, founded L’Oréal and financed the fascist group *La Cagoule* in the second half of the 1930s. *La Cagoule* spread terror through its violent attacks on Jews and communists. Since then, however, the family has played a large role in French politics, funding the major parties and their leaders. For the financial aristocracy, this is a small price to pay for the immense fortunes it has been able to accrue, at the cost of ever more brutal austerity aimed at the working class.

Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this policy is being pursued through European bank and corporate bailout plans worth more than two trillion euros. The funneling of vast sums of public money to the super-rich is financed through a policy of “herd immunity,” in which workers are forced to continue to work in unsafe conditions, to finance the profits of the corporations. This policy, which is opposed by doctors and medical professionals, has led to more than 800,000 deaths in

Europe.

At the same time, French imperialism advances its geopolitical interests through dirty neo-colonial wars, particularly in Africa, such as the 2011 intervention in Libya. The French pseudo-left New Anticapitalist Party and Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France backed the war and applauded the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi’s government by Islamist militias backed by Sarkozy.

Criminality and gangsterism underpin the policies of the financial aristocracy in France and internationally.

On 6 January, Trump attempted an unprecedented fascist coup d’état to overturn the outcome of the US elections. In France, the situation is not fundamentally different, even if the trade union apparatuses and the pseudo-left attempt to cover up the bankruptcy of the ruling class by hailing their “social dialogue” with the government and employers. While no capitalist leader has yet openly attempted a coup d’état, there is increasingly open criminality by all the leaders of the French Republic in the 21st century.

Jacques Chirac was the first president to be convicted for corruption in 2011, in the affair of the fictitious jobs at the Paris town hall. His successor has now been sentenced to prison. Under the Socialist Party presidency of Francois Hollande, the state conducted targeted killings of French citizens by the intelligence services.

Faced with explosions of workers’ anger against the policy of austerity and war, including in the “yellow vest” protests of 2018, Macron hailed collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain. He has pursued a policy of “herd immunity” in all but name. The coronavirus has killed more than 85,000 people, most of whom could have been saved through a scientific policy. Only a politically independent and international mobilisation of the working class will put an end to this murderous policy and the capitalist system that underlies it.



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