

Attorney Steven Donziger reports to federal prison

Kevin Reed
29 October 2021

Environmental and human rights attorney Steven Donziger, who won a \$9.5 billion lawsuit against Chevron for polluting the Amazon rainforest in 2011, turned himself in to authorities at the Federal Correctional Facility in Danbury, Connecticut, on Wednesday to begin a six-month prison sentence.

Donziger was compelled to report to federal prison following a decision by the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York City to deny his request to delay the prison term or grant him bail pending his appeal of a vindictive and trumped-up criminal contempt of court conviction.

Responding to the appeals court decision, Donziger's lawyer Ronald Kuby said, "It is sadly typical of the degraded quality of justice in this case that the only way Mr. Donziger could prove he was not a flight risk was to show up and be imprisoned."

Following the appeals court decision on Tuesday, Donziger posted on Twitter, "After 100 pages of legal briefing, the appellate court today denied my release in 10 words. This is not due process of law. Nor is it justice. I must report to prison by tomorrow afternoon. We will get through this."

The imprisonment of Donziger is the latest episode in a lengthy series of retaliatory attacks on the attorney's basic rights by Chevron and the US judicial system for his successful lawsuit in the Ecuadorian courts on behalf of 30,000 farmers and indigenous people.

As reported here on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the activist attorney was sentenced to prison on October 1 after his conviction on six counts of criminal contempt in July by US District Judge Loretta Preska. During the sentencing hearing, Judge Preska expressed directly the bitter hostility of the US ruling establishment toward Donziger, "It seems that only the proverbial two-by-four between the eyes will instill in him any respect for

the law."

The vendetta of the New York federal courts against Donziger—which included more than 800 days of house arrest on the basis that he was a flight risk—stems from his steadfast exposure of the criminal practices of among the world's most powerful oil corporations in the drive for profit.

At the time of his sentencing, Donziger refused to back down, saying, "I have been attacked and demonized for years by Chevron in retaliation for helping Indigenous peoples in Ecuador try to do something to save their cultures, their lives, and our planet in the face of massive oil pollution. That's the context for why we are here today."

Acting transparently on behalf of the oil industry, Judge Preska pathetically parroted the false narrative that the attorney was a scofflaw, "Mr. Donziger spent the last seven plus years thumbing his nose at the US judicial system," she said. "It's now time to pay the piper."

In 1993, the Harvard Law School graduate Donziger became active in the fight against Texaco (acquired by Chevron in 2001) which had drilled and operated oil wells in an eastern region of the Ecuadorian rainforest from 1972 to 1992. When the company vacated the area, it left behind an environmental disaster with oil-contaminated land, rivers and streams.

Donziger originally brought the case against Chevron in New York City and, following numerous maneuvers by the oil corporation to avoid being compelled to clean up its "apocalyptic disaster," it was moved to the Ecuadorian courts in 2003. After the company exhausted all of its appeals, a guilty verdict was returned in 2011 by a provincial court against Chevron and damages of \$9.5 billion were awarded.

From that point forward, the US courts collaborated

directly with oil industry interests and launched counter-litigation against Donziger, framing him on a raft of charges including bribery of an Ecuadorian judge, coercion, witness tampering, racketeering, money laundering, wire fraud and extortion.

The unprecedented case against Donziger, presided over by US District Judge Lewis Kaplan, was based on the perjured testimony by a former disgraced Ecuadorian judge and rendered the judgment against Chevron null and void. It ended with Kaplan awarding \$800,000 to Chevron to be paid by Donziger.

The criminal contempt charge against Donziger is the result of the attorney's refusal to hand over his computer, phone and other electronic devices to the court based upon a petition from Chevron to Judge Kaplan. None of the court rulings against Donziger have involved a jury. Meanwhile, the New York state courts have successfully disbarred Donziger and made it impossible for him to earn a living as an attorney.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact