

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy sentenced to three years in prison

Pierre Mabut
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On Wednesday December 18, the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) had his final legal appeal rejected and was definitively sentenced by the Court of Cassation to a three-year jail term. Two of those years will not be served, on condition of good behavior, and the remaining year has been reduced to the wearing of an electronic bracelet for that period. Sarkozy has been found guilty of “corruption” and “influence peddling” mainly in connection with his electoral campaign contributions.

The electronic bracelet wearer is normally obliged to stay home under surveillance with his/her movements limited to a defined perimeter of one’s domicile. Sarkozy’s limits have not yet been set by the judges.

Sarkozy has announced that he intends to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights against the French State, claiming his democratic rights were infringed upon by the State’s wiretapping of his private, privileged discussions with his lawyer which led to his initial conviction.

The ruling that a former head of state of France is a criminal underscores the illegitimacy of the French capitalist regime. The bourgeois newspaper of record *Le Monde* admitted that it was “an earthquake in the history of the French Fifth Republic, the first time an ex-French President has been dealt such a severe punishment.”

In reality, the ruling marks the second time, after the conviction of former President Jacques Chirac on embezzlement charges in 2011, that a former French president is condemned to prison. Chirac’s prison term was however entirely suspended by the courts. Sarkozy’s was not, and in that sense the ruling against him marks a new stage in the official recognition of the criminality of the French political system.

Indeed, the undemocratic 1958 constitution of the

Fifth Republic grants the president vast powers in terms of the launching of war, police repression, and dictatorship. The president can repeatedly dissolve parliament, arrange foreign policy at his own discretion, and can invoke powers to suspend parliament and the judiciary to rule unchecked, effectively as a dictator. The fact that these powers repeatedly were wielded by criminals is a warning of the enormous danger of dictatorship posed by the French capitalist regime.

The case against Sarkozy dates back to charges laid in 2014 when evidence came to light of his attempt to bribe a high-ranking judge at the Court of Cassation, Gilbert Azibert, for feeding him information about an ongoing enquiry into illegal electoral campaign contributions from Liliane Bettencourt, the multi-billionaire heiress to French cosmetics empire L’Oréal.

The now 70 year-old Sarkozy, ex-right-wing leader of the former UMP Gaullist party, now renamed the Republicans and reduced to a rump in the National Assembly, faces in total five legal cases brought against him. He is charged with falsifying invoices relating to his election campaign expenses for president in 2012: the so-called Bygmalion affair, the latter being the publicity agency charged with running his campaign.

Next January sees the opening of his trial for receiving illegal donations from Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to finance his 2007 election campaign. If found guilty, Sarkozy faces a heavy penalty of 10 years jail and five years of disqualification from public office.

In 2012, the *Mediapart* online investigative magazine published two documents purporting to show a €50 million contribution from Gaddafi in aid of Sarkozy’s 2007 election campaign. This contrasted with the €20

million officially declared for the campaign's expenses.

Sarkozy, during his term as president he played a central role in launching the criminal 2011 NATO war of aggression which destroyed Libya, reducing it to a country beset by warlords and Islamist militias. It should be noted this was supported by all of the pseudo-left who make up today's New Popular Front, and especially the Pabloite New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA). After leaving office in 2012, Sarkozy called for "rapid action of the international community" to intervene in Syria for regime change; again with NPA support.

As a pillar of the French establishment, Sarkozy has played a major role in the suppression of struggles by the working class and youth. Already in 2005 as Minister of the Interior, he suggested that working class neighborhoods be cleaned out with "high pressure hoses" after mass urban riots in response to the police killing of two youth.

In 2018, when current President Emmanuel Macron was under siege from the mass mobilization of the "Yellow Vest" movement in 2018, Macron called upon Sarkozy for his advice. While demonstrators were being beaten to pulp by the riot police and dozens lost their eyesight and limbs, Sarkozy advised "respect for law and order."

A spokesperson for Macron's office commented on the judgment against Sarkozy, saying that "the two men have a mutual respect for each other."

Another example of President Sarkozy's vile attacks on oppressed workers and nations was a trip he made to the French colonial possession of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean in 2010. He said: "I have come to help Mayotte develop itself, but let's be clear about one thing, there are rights and duties; among duties there is respect for law and the State representatives and police who have the heavy responsibility to enforce the law."

In 2011, he incorporated Mayotte into the French State machine as a fully-fledged French department, but all the investment necessary was and has been absent. All the island's social crises are now blamed on clandestine immigration from the Comoros. Because of his and all French governments' failure to invest in economic development and social care, the 350,000 impoverished population has just been decimated by the cyclone Chido, leaving possibly thousands dead and

over half of makeshift housing destroyed.

In the recent period, Sarkozy has sought to shore up his position by signaling his support for far-right forces.

In a BFM-TV interview he approved of Trump's strategy of appealing to "the nation's greatness" and "the national flame," attributing Trump's victory to speaking about "America to Americans." In line with most of the rest of the French political establishment, Sarkozy defends the line that "Israel has the right to defend itself." His son, Louis, brazenly supported the Gaza genocide, saying, "let them die, Israel is doing Humanity's work."

Such remarks underscore that the ruling against Sarkozy will not change the antidemocratic and politically criminal course of the French capitalist regime, that flows not from the actions of individual heads of state like Sarkozy or Macron, but from the criminalization of the entire ruling class—revealed by bloody imperialist wars and support for genocide on the part of all the NATO imperialist powers. This cannot be stopped via the courts, but only by the mobilization of the working class in struggle against imperialist war, fascism and capitalism.



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