Mass protests erupt after Mubarak verdict in Egypt

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4 June 2012

Mass protests erupted throughout Egypt after the verdicts in the trial of ex-dictator Hosni Mubarak and several of his top aides were announced Saturday.

Soon after presiding judge Mohammed Refaat announced a life sentence for Mubarak and his former interior minister, Habib El-Adly, while acquitting all other defendants, tens of thousands of protesters poured into the country's streets and squares.

In Cairo a large crowd of protesters gathered on Tahrir Square, the iconic center of the Egyptian revolution, demanding justice for the martyrs and the "execution of the killer." Protesters described the trial and the verdicts as a "farce" and a "political play" orchestrated by the US-backed Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta, aiming to whitewash the regime.

During the mass uprising of workers and youth, which led to the ouster of long-time dictator and US-stooge Hosni Mubarak last February, over 1,000 protesters were killed by Mubarak's thugs. After removing Mubarak from his post and formally taking power, the Egyptian army junta continued to deploy the police and security forces against the population. It regularly cracks down on protests and strikes and has sent over 12,000 workers and youth to military trials.

Before popular anger exploded, Refaat cynically began the court session with a praise of the revolution and the "great people of Egypt." He claimed that the judges in the case were unbiased and that the truth was the only standard for their judgment. While he described Mubarak's rule as "thirty years of pitch-black hopelessness," Mubarak himself, who lay on a stretcher wearing black sun-glasses, his two sons Gamal and Alaa, and the other defendants were brought into a cage inside the courtroom.

After Refaat declared that Mubarak and El-Adly had received a life sentence, he acquitted both of them of any graft charges and declared that the prosecutors had presented no evidence that either he or his aides had directly ordered the killing of protesters. Refaat explained that Mubarak and El-Adly were only guilty because they failed to stop the killings.

The judge then acquitted all other defendants, including four of El-Adly's former deputies Hassan Abdel-Rahman, deputy interior minister and head of state security, Adly Fayed, deputy interior minister and head of general security, Ahmed Ramzi, head of the Central Security Forces and Ismail El-Shaer, former director of security in Cairo.

Two other interior ministry officials, Osama El-Marassi and Omar Faramawi, both directors of security for the Greater Cairo provinces, were found not guilty. Marassy and Faramawy were not even charged with killing protesters, but with failing to anticipate the uprising and secure Egyptian property and the economy during the protests.

Refaat also dismissed corruption charges against Mubarak, his two sons, and business tycoon Hussein Salem, who is currently in Spain.

After Refaat finished the sentencing, those present in the heavily secured court room, including attorneys representing the families of the martyrs, chanted angrily: "The people demand the cleansing of the

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judiciary." Clashes between protesters and Mubarak supporters erupted inside and outside the courthouse.

Amir Salem, one of the main attorneys representing the martyrs' family, condemned the verdicts "as a political ruling of the first order." He said that Refaat handed the justification for the acquittal of Mubarak and El-Adly in the Court of Cassation, the highest criminal appeals court in Egypt, "on a silver platter."

Salem explained: "In spelling out this ruling, the judge said that there had been no evidence of the crime, neither was there evidence of links or testimonies that show that the crime had been committed." He added that on this basis, the Court of Cassation "should immediately order their acquittal."

In the coastal city of Alexandria, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in front of the Al-Qaed Ibrahim Mosque, demanding a retrial and shouting for the "downfall of the regime." In the Upper Egyptian governorate of Assiut, thousands of protesters took to the streets, chanting: "The military council manipulated the uprising."

In Suez, one of the epicenters of the revolution where the first three martyrs died, protesters packed the city's famous Arbaeen Square. Tamer Radwan, who lost his brother during the uprising, expressed the mood of the angry crowd saying that many people feel that they have been duped. "They lied to us. They told us that this was a real trial, but all this was nothing more than a play and this is the last part of the play," he said.

He added, "We will have a new revolution and this time we will do it right. We will get justice once and for all."

During the day crowds swelled in the squares amidst growing anger over the fraudulent trial. Several bourgeois politicians headed to Tahrir Square to try to keep protests from exploding into a challenge to the junta and its "transition to democracy."

Mohamed Mursi, the candidate of the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood (MB), tried to capitalize on the verdict, promising that he would form a criminal justice and prosecution team to bring better evidence against former regime officials. He tried to present himself as a "revolutionary candidate" compared to Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under Mubarak, in the run-offs of the Egyptian presidential elections scheduled for June 16-17.

In a press conference Mursi claimed to be "a revolutionary until the revolution's aims are realized," stressing that "the continuation of the revolution is the true guarantee for clean elections and a transfer of power."

The remarks by Mursi are a mixture of deep cynicism and blatant lies. Like Shafiq, Mursi and the MB are deeply hostile to the democratic and social aspirations of the Egyptian masses but represent the financial and economic interests of competing sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie. After SCAF took power last February, the MB collaborated closely with Mubarak's generals and US imperialism, to try to bring the revolution to a halt. They supported a law banning strikes and protests and opposed all the mass protests against military rule.

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