

# Tunisian ruling seeks to exonerate Ben Ali police officials

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The trial of former president Ben Ali took place on June 14 in Tunisia. Ben Ali was standing trial along with 22 former enforcers of the Ministry of the Interior for the massacres at Thala and Kasserine. Twenty-two people died in these massacres between January 8 and 12, 2011, during the harshest repression of the workers' uprising seeking the fall of the regime.

Ousted president Ben Ali, who is today a refugee in Saudi Arabia, was condemned to life imprisonment in absentia. However, 10 of Ben Ali's collaborators at the Interior Ministry, including Moncef Krifa, the ministry's former director general, and Moncef Laajimi, former head of the anti-riot squads, were allowed to go free for lack of evidence. The 10 other accused were sentenced to prison terms of 8 to 15 years.

The trial unfolded in an extremely tense political and social context, due to the imposition of a curfew after the demonstrations by Salafist groups and Islamists of the governing Ennahda party. The Salafists considered several works of art exhibited at Marsa offensive to Islam.

Victims' families quite rightly interpreted the judgement as a cover-up.

One of the families' lawyers, Anouar el-Bassi, told AFP, "I fear that this judgement will create trouble." A June 14 article in *Le Point* reported the statement of the cousin of a youth killed at Thala: "The judge should have given a death sentence to all the accused."

The curfew was lifted on June 15, the day after the verdict. However, the authorities still forbid any street demonstrations, fearing the development of a movement in the working class opposing the verdicts and the ruling party that allowed the not guilty verdicts for the henchmen of the former regime. The Salafist groups cancelled their demonstration, thus obeying the

state's decision.

The Tunisian regime, led by the Islamist Ennahda party, is hostile to the social and democratic aspirations which drove Tunisian workers to struggle to overthrow Ben Ali. Ennahda covers for the crimes committed against the population by the Tunisian bourgeois state apparatus under Ben Ali. Ennahda, which is close to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, did not participate in the revolutionary movement of December 2010—February 2011. It aims to crush any movement of the working class, as testified by the legal decision of June 14.

The Kef court judge, Chokri Mejri (a civilian), defended himself before pronouncing his verdict: "We have tried to give a just verdict and we have not received any pressure from any institution. God and our sincere convictions have been our only guides," reported *Le Point*.

However, el-Bassi questioned the possibility of a judge being able to confront a man with 3,000-4,000 police backing him. *Le Point* states that the lawyer "repeats the recurring criticism, according to which the military judge did not have free rein in the face of pressure from the fearsome police machine still in place."

These events testify to the essential problem facing the Tunisian revolution: the revolution overthrew Ben Ali, but his regime remains largely intact. People responsible for the massacres have been promoted or transferred to other positions in the state apparatus.

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt led to the installation of regimes hostile to the revolution, because there was no revolutionary workers' party which fought for the creation of workers' states founded on a socialist policy in the Maghreb and beyond. In Tunisia with Ennahda, as in Egypt with the military junta, these regimes have benefited from the support of the petty

bourgeois “left”, which are also hostile to socialism and to the working class.

Ennahda was able to present itself as the only representative of social discontent and allowed the Tunisian bourgeoisie to save, through the judicial institutions, the heads of those responsible for the massacres of several hundred demonstrators.

The Ennahda regime is based on the same security and judicial forces as existed under Ben Ali. In an article entitled “In Tunisia, the revolution is being damaged by the absence of a transitional justice,” *Mediapart* reports the case of Yassine Tayeb, a senior Interior Ministry official, “present in Kasserine at the time of the repression in January 2011, and promoted director general after the revolution.”



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