

US-backed military junta in Egypt sentences 529 Brotherhood members to death

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Yesterday an Egyptian court sentenced 529 members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) to death. The biggest mass death sentence in recent history marks another escalation in the ruthless efforts of the US-backed military junta in Egypt to annihilate its political opponents and drown the Egyptian revolution in blood.

Since the July 3, 2013 coup—carried out amidst mass protests against MB President Mohamed Mursi—the military junta has violently attacked sit-ins, demonstrations and strikes, killing at least 1,400 people and jailing more than 16,000. It has banned the MB, Egypt's largest Islamist organization, issued an anti-protest law and pushed through a constitution enshrining the army's dominant role in society.

Most of the defendants were arrested during anti-coup protests in the Minya governorate that erupted after the brutal dispersal of two pro-Mursi sit-ins in Cairo by security and army forces on August 14. The charges against the group on trial included murder, attempted murder, attacking a police station and damaging public and private property. Out of 545 defendants, only 150 were present at court, while all others were tried in absentia.

The whole trial was a farce and bore the character of a show trial.

"This is the quickest case and the number sentenced to death is the largest in the history of the judiciary," said lawyer Nabil Abdel Salam, who defends leading MB members including Mursi himself. Defense lawyer Khaled el-Koumi told the Associated Press: "We didn't have a chance to say a word, to look at more than 3,000 pages of investigation and to see what evidence they are talking about."

Presiding judge Said Youssef reportedly started shouting and ordered in court security when defence lawyers protested against the proceedings. Some

lawyers said they were barred from entering the courthouse entirely.

Walid, a relative of one of the sentenced, told Reuters: "When the trial starts on Saturday and it is just a procedural hearing, and the judge doesn't listen to any lawyers or witnesses and doesn't even call the defendants, you are before a group of thugs and not the judiciary."

Dramatic scenes unfolded after the verdict. Family members started screaming in despair, and angry protesters set fire to a nearby building, Egyptian state TV reported.

Today another mass trial will begin, with another 683 people facing similar charges. Amongst the defendants are the MB's Supreme Guide, Mohamed Badie, and the leader of its political arm, Saad al-Katatni.

The US government and its imperialist allies in Europe responded with empty and thoroughly hypocritical statements. Marie Harf, the deputy US State Department spokeswoman, expressed "deep concern" and "shock" over "the sentencing to death of 529 Egyptians related to the death of one policeman." At the same time she made clear that Washington's support for the junta would continue. She stressed that the White House regards its links with Cairo as an "important relationship", and there was no desire to "completely cut off" relations.

The EU's High Representative Catherine Ashton reminded the Egyptian junta that "the death penalty is cruel and inhuman" and called upon "the Egyptian interim authorities to apply "international standards". She stressed: "This is particularly important for the credibility of Egypt's transition towards democracy."

As the military junta is employing the most barbaric and undemocratic methods, Washington and Brussels continue to present it as a struggle for "democracy".

The verdict comes amidst preparations by the military junta to install coup leader and Defence Minister Field Marshall Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi as the new president. The de facto dictator has overseen the mass killings and jailings in the past months and is now preparing for a direct confrontation with the working class, the main target of state repression and of the military coup itself.

Speaking at a conference of young doctors earlier this month, Sisi threatened years of austerity and suffering: “Our economic circumstances, in all sincerity and with all understanding, are very, very difficult. I wonder, did anyone say that I will walk for a little bit to help my country? The country will not make progress by using words. It will make progress by working, and through perseverance, impartiality and altruism. Possibly one or two generations will [have to suffer] so that the remaining generations live.”

There are growing signs of social conflict and working-class struggle. Egypt’s new Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb was installed at the end of last month amidst a massive strike by tens of thousands of textile workers and public bus drivers. He called on the “patriotism” of Egyptian workers, stressing that it was time for work and not for strikes. He warned that “making demands that exceed logic will destroy the country” and declared: “Security and stability in the entire country and crushing terrorism will pave the way for investment.”

The military reign of terror and its preparation for violence against all strikes and protests at the behest of international finance capital underscore the counterrevolutionary role of the liberal and pseudo-left organizations that backed the military coup.

Chief among these was the so-called Revolutionary Socialists (RS), which has worked, since the initial eruption of mass struggles in January 2011, to subordinate the protests to one or another faction of the bourgeoisie. After first encouraging illusions in the military regime established after the ouster of US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak, the RS then promoted Mursi and the MB as the “right wing of the revolution.”

During the 2013 protests, the RS enthusiastically backed the Tamarod movement, which included the National Salvation Front of liberal leaders Mohamed ElBaradei, sections of the Egyptian ruling class and former members of the Mubarak regime. Tamarod

played the key role in channeling mass opposition behind the military.

Tamarod is now fueling the junta’s violent nationalistic and anti-working class campaign and supporting the installation of al-Sisi as president. Tamarod leader Mahmoud Badr recently declared that Tamarod “completely supports Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as president of Egypt”, and called upon “all Egyptians” to support him “as a national and popular agreed-upon candidate.”

For their part, the trade unions are the most unabashed supporters of the junta’s nationalistic campaign. Gebaly al-Maraghy, the president of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation was merely echoing the junta’s program for a massive confrontation with the working class when he declared: “Our battle is to increase production and combat terrorism. If we don’t win, the whole of Egypt will be destroyed.”



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