

Egyptian court overturns last remaining conviction against Mubarak

By Johannes Stern
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On Tuesday, Egypt's high court overturned the last remaining conviction against former dictator Hosni Mubarak, paving the way for his possible release, four years after the mass revolutionary struggles of the Egyptian working class that overthrew him.

Mubarak had been sentenced to three years in prison last May for embezzlement. His two sons, Alaa and Gamal, had received four-year sentences in the same case. They will be retried after the court accepted their appeal. Following the verdict, Mubarak's lawyer Farid El-Deeb filed a request and a complaint to the General Prosecution to take into account the three men's pre-trial detention time, claiming that Mubarak had already served the maximum detention period and must be freed.

For the time being Mubarak remained in the military hospital in Maadi—an upscale neighborhood in Cairo—where he is held allegedly due to ill health. However, there are increasing signs of an impending release.

Egyptian media reported that Mubarak had been expected to be released on January 17, even if the conviction had been upheld, because of the time he already spent in custody. According to a judiciary source, the latest verdict means that Mubarak will be released because there is no other remaining case against him.

Tuesday's decision follows a verdict in November, when an Egyptian court dropped charges against Mubarak for state murder, i.e., the killing of 846 people and the wounding of 6,000 protesters during the 18 days of revolutionary struggles in early 2011 that ended his 30-year rule.

The acquittal of Mubarak shortly before the fourth anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution is a provocation and a statement by the regime of General

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The Egyptian military, with the backing of the imperialist powers, is signaling that it will continue to carry through the counterrevolution and crush any resistance by the working class.

Since the 2013 July 3 military coup, the al-Sisi regime has been aiming to restore the old regime through massive bloodshed. The Egyptian military and security forces killed at least 3,000 people, most of them supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood who opposed the coup against Islamist president Mohamed Mursi. In the past year, Egyptian courts condemned a total of 1,397 political prisoners to death. The regime has also issued a law banning unauthorized demonstrations or strikes and passed a new constitution, basically enshrining permanent military rule.

According to official numbers, the al-Sisi regime has imprisoned nearly 10,000 people in 2014 alone. Human rights groups however estimate that over 40,000 people have been detained under al-Sisi's rule, many of them without charges and tortured by the notorious Egyptian security forces in secret prisons.

Mubarak's release and the whitewashing of his crimes highlights the reactionary role of the entire affluent middle class milieu in Egypt. Its liberal and pseudo left parties initially claimed to oppose Mubarak, but then lined up behind al-Sisi's coup as part of organizations such as the National Salvation Front and Tamarod in order to pre-empt and suppress the growing political movement of the Egyptian working class against then Islamist president Mohamed Mursi.

Now the very same parties are either indifferent to Mubarak's acquittal or are even seeking to integrate themselves more directly into the regime – despite the fact that it is prosecuting some of their members.

Khaled Dawoud, spokesman for the liberal

Constitution Party, ten of whose members are currently imprisoned for violating the anti-protest law, commented: “After the release of police officers charged with killing demonstrators and of Mubarak aides, and his acquittal over the killing of protesters, this is not shocking news.” He added cynically: “I don’t think Mubarak is the issue any more. The Egyptian people gave their verdict against him four years ago.”

At the same time, the “liberal” party founded by Mohamed El Baradei in 2012 attended a joint meeting with de facto dictator al-Sisi. The party talks held on Monday and Tuesday also included leaders of the liberal Egyptian Social Democratic Party, the Wafd Party, the Salafist Nour-Party, the Free Egyptians Party of Egyptian tycoon Naguib Sawiris, the National Movement Party of Mubarak-era prime minister Ahmed Shafiq, and the Tagammu Party, a melting pot of old Nasserites and Stalinists.

According to media reports, al-Sisi announced that he would favour a “national party list” for the upcoming parliamentary elections and promised to back it if the political forces unite. According to the chairman of Tagammu, Sayyed Abdel Aal, al-Sisi warned the assembled parties that the people could revolt again if the next parliament fails to confront the tasks it faces.

Behind the regime’s violence and calls for “unity” hides the fear of Egypt’s ruling elite of a renewed social explosion. After Mubarak’s ouster, none of the contradictions which led to the mass upheaval in 2011 have been resolved. On the contrary, poverty and unemployment have increased only further, and amidst a deepening economic crisis, living conditions for millions of people have become unbearable. At the beginning of this week, Egyptian minister for urban development Leila Iskander admitted that half of Egypt’s population lives in informal slum areas.

Huge class tensions are once again building up under the surface of military rule. According to a report by the Mahrousa Forum for Researches and Public Policy Studies, Egypt witnessed 2,274 labor protests in the past year. While the first quarter of 2014 saw 1,420, the highest number of protests, the last quarter including October, November and December came in second with 318 protests.

Throughout the year, the capital, Cairo, witnessed the most protests (429), followed by Alexandria (185) and

Sharqiya (150). Industrial workers were most active staging 558 or 25 percent of all protests. Civil servants came in second with 426 protests (19 percent), followed by the medical sector (323 protests), the educational sector (137) and the textile sector (117).

The report counted different forms of protests such as strikes, vigils, marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, blocking roads, detaining officials, gathering signatures, and even committing suicide. The main factors triggering the protests were social and economic, the report said, referring to demands such as a minimum wage, higher salaries and better working conditions, opposition to layoffs and calls for the release of detained colleagues.

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