

Egypt hangs nine prisoners

## State murder backed by imperialism

22 February 2019

In an action that demonstrates the barbarism of the military dictatorship in Cairo, the Egyptian authorities hanged nine young men February 20, after a sham trial using confessions extracted from the prisoners by torture.

Wednesday's slaughter brought the number of political prisoners executed at the orders of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi this month to 15: three were put to death February 7, allegedly for killing a judge's son; three more were executed February 13, supposedly for killing a policeman in 2013; and then the nine hanged on Wednesday, part of a group of 28 men charged with the assassination of chief state prosecutor Hisham Barakat in 2015.

None of the 15 prisoners was linked to the supposed crimes by any evidence, except confessions obtained through brutal torture. The el-Sisi regime operates a "justice" system that makes a mockery of the word, with mass trials involving hundreds of defendants, charges that are entirely unsupported by evidence, and judges who issue rulings demanded by the dictator, regardless of the law or the facts.

According to a report on Middle East Eye, several of the men executed February 20 had publicly disavowed their confessions in court hearings. The news service posted a link to a video of the defendants recanting their confessions and describing how they were tortured.

Mahmoud el-Ahmadi, aged 23, executed on Wednesday, told the court: "Here, in this court, there is a police officer who was in the prison with us and was torturing us. If you want me to point him out, I will do it. Give me a taser, and I can make anyone here in this court admit to a crime they didn't commit. We were pumped with electricity. We were electrocuted enough to supply Egypt for 20 years."

Abulqasim Youssef, another defendant executed Wednesday and a student at al-Azhar University, told the court he had been blindfolded, hung on the door upside down for seven consecutive hours, and electrocuted "in sensitive areas of my body."

Amnesty International denounced the latest executions as a demonstration of the regime's complete indifference to the right to life. The group issued a statement declaring, "Egyptian authorities must urgently halt this bloody execution spree which has seen them repeatedly putting people to death after grossly unfair trials in recent weeks. The international community must not stay silent over this surge in executions. Egypt's allies must take a clear stand by publicly condemning the authorities' use of the death penalty, the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment."

The "international community" to which this appeal is directed, however, consists of the governments of the major imperialist powers who are unanimous in their support for the Egyptian military regime, including its worst and bloodiest crimes.

Sisi's bloody crackdown represents the Egyptian ruling class's response to the Egyptian revolution of 2011, a mass revolutionary movement that overthrew the US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak. In the absence of genuine socialist leadership, the Egyptian ruling elite has carried out a bloody purge of leading figures in the revolution, as well as opposition parties more broadly.

Since seizing power in a military coup in July 2013 that overthrew Mohamed Morsi, the elected president and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the military has slaughtered thousands on the streets of Cairo and other cities, jailed and tortured tens of thousands, and is now beginning to accelerate the machinery of execution for hundreds of prisoners it has sentenced to death after proceedings that were nothing more than kangaroo courts. Some 737 people now are under sentence of death, while 51 have exhausted all appeals.

These crimes have not stopped the embrace of el-Sisi by the United States and the European imperialist powers. On the contrary, the more his regime is steeped in blood, the more he is embraced and welcomed in Washington, Berlin, London and Paris.

In June 2015, the butcher of Cairo was hailed in Berlin by Chancellor Angela Merkel and the leaders of all the main bourgeois parties: the Social Democratic Party, the Greens, the Left Party, in addition to Merkel's right-wing CDU/CSU.

In April 2017, el-Sisi was feted by Donald Trump at the White House, where he confirmed the continuation of massive US military aid, more than \$1.3 billion a year. Last month, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Cairo to deliver a fanatical anti-Iranian speech, while hailing the Egyptian dictatorship "as an example for all leaders and all peoples of the Middle East."

Only 25 days ago, French President Emmanuel Macron went to Cairo, in the midst of the "yellow vest" protests at home, to hold discussions with a president who has shown how to drown a popular movement in blood. He promised to sell more weapons to the regime, including Rafale fighter jets and armored vehicles.

As the WSWS explained at the time, Macron's visit to el-Sisi amounted to a thinly veiled threat to the mounting opposition to his government by French workers and youth. It was a declaration that the French ruling elite "is preparing a drastic intensification of repression of social protest amid a universal turn of the capitalist class around the world towards authoritarian forms of rule."

Next weekend the first-ever joint summit of the European Union and the Arab League will be held in Sharm el-Sheikh, with President el-Sisi hosting more than 20 heads of state, including British Prime Minister Theresa May, European Council president Donald Tusk, and European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker.

The fact that the Egyptian regime could proceed with nine executions only a few days before this summit testifies to el-Sisi's confidence that he has the full backing of all those coming to Sharm el-Sheikh, both his fellow Arab despots and the "democratic" heads of state from the EU, for the savage repression of the Egyptian working class.

General el-Sisi orchestrated his own reelection in 2018 in a contest where most of his would-be opponents were either arrested or otherwise browbeaten to drop out of the contest. One army officer who dared to run against him, Sami Anan, was just sentenced to ten years in prison. But there has been no outcry about the "legitimacy" of his government, in contrast to the hue and cry over Venezuela's President Nicholas Maduro, whose 2018 reelection appears a model of democratic procedure by comparison.

Two weeks ago, the Egyptian parliament, consisting of el-Sisi's political stooges, began consideration of a constitutional amendment that will extend the presidential term from four years to six years and waive the two-term limit for el-Sisi. In effect, the military dictator will be allowed to stay in office for another 12 years past the end of his current (and supposedly final) term, which ends in 2022. This would enable el-Sisi to remain president until 2034, when he reaches the age of 80—two years short of the age at which his predecessor as military ruler, Hosni Mubarak, was overthrown in 2011.

Whatever the arrangements on paper, it is highly doubtful that el-Sisi will succeed in his goal of emulating Mubarak's lengthy reign. More than 40 percent of the Egyptian population lives in dire poverty, forced to subsist on less than \$2 a day. Economic growth is negligible, and the austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as the price of further loans will only intensify the attacks on jobs and living standards.

Working-class opposition to the regime is mounting. Even savage repression has failed to stop the outbreak of strikes in working class areas like the textile mill-towns of the Nile Delta. There are mass struggles of the working class throughout North Africa, most recently a general strike in Tunisia, and mass strikes by teachers and other workers in Morocco.

Under these conditions, the most vital issue is the building of a new revolutionary leadership in the Egyptian working class, and throughout North Africa and the Middle East, based on a careful study of the lessons of the betrayal of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, and the assimilation of the history of the struggle to build the international revolutionary party of the working class, carried forward today by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Patrick Martin

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