

Mubarak’s state machine blamed for football massacre

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Seventy-four football fans were killed and hundreds injured after the final whistle blew at the al-Masry versus al-Ahly match in Port Said on 1 February. Many had head wounds, some had been stabbed, some thrown from the stands and others crushed in the panic as they tried to escape the erupting violence. Why did this horror take place?

The head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf), Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, described the bloodshed as “something that can happen anywhere in the world.” But it is clear that this was anything but ‘normal’ football violence. Demonstrations across Egypt in the days since have blamed Scaf.

The hardcore fans of al-Ahly, a big Cairo club, are known as Ultras Ahlawy. The last time this match took place, in April 2011, they were blamed for fighting and destruction in Port Said, home of al-Masry. The Ultras blamed lack of security for the violence.

A video of vandalism on that occasion was apparently circulating on the internet prior to this match, stoking up tension.

A fixture with this history would normally have a strong police presence to separate home and away fans and prevent trouble developing. So why did the security forces stationed between their stands depart during the match?

“Hundreds would storm the pitch after every goal, so we could sense what was going to happen,” reported an eyewitness. “There was a huge lapse in security. The police non-intervention was very strange – there was practically no security outside the stadium and inside it they didn’t do anything when events escalated.” (Guardian 3/2/12)

People reported seeing knives and swords outside the stadium yet people were not searched on their way in. It also appears that exits were locked.

Port Said residents condemned the attacks on al-Ahly fans and maintain that the attackers were not local. “We were surprised by buses coming from out of town carrying supporters wearing the shirts of al-Masry Ultras,” said one. (Guardian 3/2/12)

Following the horrific events sev-

en protest marches, with over 20,000 taking part, were held on Friday 3 February in this city of 600,000. The size of these demonstrations far exceeded those of January and February 2011, which had been on a smaller scale than in many other cities. Many protest marches took place in other cities around the country, holding Scaf responsible for the events.

Fans against regime

Why should Scaf want to see Ultras Ahlawy attacked? The mostly young and working class fans played a crucial role during the Tahrir Square uprising, not least during the ‘Battle of the Camel’ on 2 February 2011 when they heroically fought off a brutal attempt to crush the developing revolution.

In September 2011 al-Ahly fans had been attacked by security forces after chanting slogans against Mubarak and his Interior minister, al-Adly, whose trial for killing protesters had begun, and against the police.

A few days later a united march of fans from the three big Cairo clubs took place, putting aside their normal rivalry, protesting against

security forces’ violence.

Despite the normally heavy policing of the Ultras, on that occasion a breakaway march to the Israeli embassy went unchallenged, and there were virtually no security forces around as the embassy was attacked. This conveniently allowed Scaf to divert attention away from the crimes of the security forces to the crimes of the Israeli government.

Ultras Ahlawy also played a prominent part in the battles against security forces’ repression at the Interior Ministry last November. They were in the front line again in December, outside the Cabinet Office, protesting against Scaf’s appointment of Kamal el-Ganzouri as prime minister, who had held the same post from 1996-99 under Mubarak. Ultras Ahlawy have been punished for their record of opposition to the regime.

It seems that Scaf also deliberately allowed violence to take place at the al-Masry stadium to fuel insecurity and chaos, strengthening those who say that only the armed forces can save Egypt from descending into lawlessness.

On the eve of the anniversary of the 25 January 2011 uprising, Tantawi announced the lifting of Mu-

barak’s long-standing emergency laws except in cases of “thuggery”. How strange that this terrible example of ‘thuggery’ should occur a week later!

Thug forces

At the same time as this football stadium massacre, 800 protestors, both Muslim and Coptic, camped in front of Nagaa Hammadi police station protesting at the killing of a Coptic trader and his son for refusing to pay protection money to thugs associated with police officers.

There have been many other occasions when police and security forces have viciously attacked those opposing them. After a Coptic church had been burnt last October, a protest at the Maspero TV centre was lethally attacked by security forces, killing 28.

And in the days after the Port Said violence there were further pitched battles in Cairo and elsewhere. Tear gas, birdshot and live ammunition were used, leading to five deaths in Cairo and seven in Suez, with 1,500 injured. Mubarak’s security forces are still intact, even if their old boss is held in jail during his trial.

Students at Cairo University and the German University in Cairo have announced a strike on 11 February, the anniversary of Mubarak’s ousting. They are demanding that Scaf hand over power to a civilian government and the prosecution of those responsible for the Port Said massacre.

Students should call on the trade unions to join them, to demand the newly elected parliament immediately take power from Scaf.

But workers and youth can have no confidence that this parliament will take measures in their interests. Leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafist and pro-business liberal parties that make parliament’s big majority will put the interests of big business first.

Workers, the poor masses and the youth need their own party. With a programme of socialist change, including genuine democratic control over all security and policing, it could win mass support and lead the way to a society without the state-sponsored brutality seen this past week.

The Committee for a Workers’ International

The Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

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Document agreed by the International Executive Committee of the CWI which met in January 2012.

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