

Protests against Egyptian junta spread after football massacre

Johannes Stern
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On Friday protests against the Egyptian military junta spread all over the country. The protests are a response to the pro-regime football riots in Port Said on Wednesday, when 74 supporters of Egypt's most famous football club El-Ahly were killed and several hundred injured.

In downtown Cairo thousands of workers and youth tore down the wall erected by the army in Mohamed Mahmoud Street during the last clashes in November and surrounded the Ministry of Interior. They called for the downfall of the regime and the execution of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the leader of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta.

Fierce clashes between heavily armed Central Security Forces (CSF) and protesters continued during all of Thursday night and continued on Friday. The CSF attacked protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets to prevent them from storming the ministry. Reportedly one protester was killed by a pellet and over 1,400 were injured.

In the port city of Suez, security forces fired live rounds into crowds of protesters attacking a police station. Reportedly at least two were killed and many others injured. Protesters also attacked shops and destroyed the façade of the Suez Canal Bank. Police forces cordoned off the Suez state security headquarters and a compound of the justice ministry with razor wire.

In Alexandria, the funeral of 23-year-old Mahmoud El-Ghandour, the founder of the El-Ahly Ultras fan club in that city, turned into a demonstration against the junta. Protesters marched towards the military's North District Command and chanted against the SCAF.

In Port Said, where the deadly massacre took place, thousands of protesters gathered in front of the governor's headquarters chanting, "Port Said is

innocent, this is the truth." This slogan means that it was not the regular fans of Al-Masry who were responsible for the violence, but infiltrators working for the security forces.

A protester told the *Egyptian Independent*: "The Ahly supporters were predominantly from Port Said. My brother was one of them. Port Said is sad today, all residents of the city are sad and feel as if their own relatives have died."

There is strong evidence that the deadly riot was an orchestrated act of violence. Eye witnesses who were in the stadium when the El-Masry team beat El-Ahly 3-1 recounted that a police officer told "supporters" of El-Masry—who had been shouting slogans in support of Tantawi and the junta during the game—to come onto the pitch after the game was finished. Some pointed out that the gate between the stands and the pitch was left open while at the same time the gates of the Ahly fan blocks have been closed. As the thugs attacked the Ahly supporters with knives, bottles, clubs and firecrackers, the security forces stood idly by.

Prosecutors arriving at the stadium on Friday found that a janitor had already washed the floor and walls of the visiting team's locker room and removed any potential traces of blood. According to Ahly players, several wounded Ahly supporters died in the dressing room from their injuries. Inside the stadium itself, a forensic team found empty bullet casings in the seats in which Ahly fans sat.

The massacre is reminiscent of the events that happened exactly one year ago, when hired pro-government thugs attacked protesters with horses and camels on Tahrir Square in an attempt to crush the revolution. The infamous attack was supported by the military, who allowed the thugs to pass through their lines into the square. However, protesting workers and

youth defeated the thugs and only nine days later longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down after a wave of mass strikes. Ahly Ultras together with the Zamalek White Knights, hardcore supporters of the other big football club in Cairo, played a significant role in the revolution from the start. They participated in street fighting against the Mubarak regime and his successors in the SCAF.

Many observers believe that the junta deliberately organized the massacre at the football game Wednesday to take revenge and stir up the counterrevolution. Saad Hagra, a journalist of *Al Masry Al Youm*, accused the SCAF and remnants of the old regime, saying that the incident “was the result of a plot made in advance”.

The director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, Gamal Eid, told *Al Masry Al Youm* that the SCAF aims to sow division in Egypt and that the junta would be the main beneficiary of the events.

On January 25, the anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution, millions marched all over Egypt and demanded the downfall of the military junta and the whole regime. The masses made clear that they oppose the US-sponsored “democratic transition,” which is supported by the entire Egyptian political establishment. Frightened by a renewed explosion of the masses, the junta obviously aims to instigate thuggery and violence as a pretext to justify further security crackdowns.

This plan is supported by the whole Egyptian ruling elite. The right-wing Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement calling “for firmness in applying the law to everyone” in order to end “the state of security chaos and disorder in all parts of the country”.

A coalition of youth groups, liberal and petty bourgeois “left” parties—including the April 6 Movement, Revolution Youth Union, the Socialist Alliance Party and the Revolutionary Socialists—participated in the protests on Friday. Their aim is to control the protests against the junta and prevent a further escalation.

When angry protesters climbed the tax office building in order to attack security forces with stones and Molotov cocktails, the petty bourgeois left forces intervened to stop them. Amr Hamed, the spokesman of the Revolution Youth Union, stated that his group managed to convince the demonstrators not to occupy

the building. “The building was not stormed. No damage has taken place inside the building. We persuaded the protesters to climb down to avoid blemishing their image. We don’t want anyone to accuse our peaceful demonstrations of damaging public property.”

The position of Hamed and his liberal and pseudo-left allies could not show more clearly the class gulf between the revolutionary workers and youth and the petty bourgeois defenders of order. While the first understand that the junta and the system it defends must be brought down through continued revolutionary struggle, the second desperately seek to promote illusions in a “peaceful democratic transition.”

In a statement issued on Thursday, the petty bourgeois alliance calls on the new parliament—which is dominated by right-wing Islamists and was elected on a low turnout under military rule—to assume political responsibility and undertake measures to counter “the recent deliberate and systematic acts of killing and instigating chaos for the aim of sabotaging and aborting the revolution,” demanding that the military council should hand over power to a civilian authority immediately.

This amounts to nothing more than changing the parliamentary façade behind which the junta rules, even though the masses themselves have made clear they demand the overthrow of the US-backed junta itself.



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