

“At the Stade de France, I saw the same police incompetence as at Hillsborough”

# French government defends police rampage against Liverpool fans at Champions League Final

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On May 28, the Stade de France in the northern suburbs of Paris hosted the UEFA Champions League final between Liverpool and Real Madrid. Fans endured what a Liverpool supporters' magazine called “five hours of hell,” as they were assaulted by police before the match.

Before the game, Liverpool fans, including children, pensioners, and disabled individuals were tear gassed and beaten by police outside the stadium. One video viewed over 9 million times shows a French cop pepper-spraying fans standing peacefully behind a fence.

Another video showing fans desperately climbing fences and jumping over barriers to avoid suffocation has received over 4.5 million views.

The kick-off of the final, watched on television by an estimated 400 million people internationally, was delayed by 35 minutes. Even with the delay, thousands of Liverpool fans with tickets did not enter the stadium until half-time. Fans were also assaulted after the game, as they left the Stade de France.

The police rampage against football fans has exposed before a world audience the brutality and thuggery of the French police and of President Emmanuel Macron's government. The government has responded by smearing Liverpool fans and defending the police violence.

The extent of the cover-up became clear on June 9, when Erwan Le Prévost, director of the French Football Federation, told BFM-TV that the CCTV footage of security cameras around the Stade de France had been deleted and was likely irretrievable. He said tapes were destroyed automatically after seven days as they had not been requested for review by police or any other

authorities. However, Théo Leclerc, a civil liberties lawyer, told *L'Express*, “The police did not need the public prosecutor to requisition the images.”

Police manifestly did not request the security camera footage because it would have shown what other camera footage showed: a blatant police assault on peaceful fans. It also exposes all the lies Macron government officials have used to excuse and justify the police rampage.

On Monday, May 30, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin denounced a “massive, industrial and organized fraud of counterfeit tickets,” claiming that “30,000 to 40,000 fans ended up at the Stade de France either without a ticket or with falsified tickets,” before going on to imply this was only an issue with English fans.

Darmanin went on to thank “all the police forces who, through their calm, avoided a tragedy.” On June 1, Darmanin told the French Senate that responsibility for the violence rested with the city of Liverpool: “It is clear—all the security services notes say so—that the people of Liverpool pose public order problems.”

Darmanin's comments recalled those by British officials in the aftermath of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, blaming “tanked-up mobs” for the death of 97 Liverpool fans. In fact, they were crushed to death due to egregious police error in handling the movement of the crowd at Sheffield's Hillsborough Stadium.

In the days after the May 28 final, there were reports of errors with the stadium's digitized ticketing system, and the estimated number of fake tickets was dropped to 2,589. However, on June 10, the French Sports Minister admitted that 2,700 real tickets were never activated.

Beyond Darmanin's claim, there is no evidence suggesting there was any effort by Liverpool fans to gain access to the final with fraudulent tickets.

Liverpool left-back Andrew Robertson expressed disbelief at the claim of ticket fraud by Liverpool supporters, telling Sky Sports: "Obviously my tickets were [supplied] through the club, and somehow somebody told one of our mates he's got a fake ticket, which I can assure you it definitely wasn't." Robertson added that a number of Liverpool players' relatives were caught up in the violence: "Pretty much all of our families were affected."

There is no clear evidence that Liverpool fans were even acting in a disorderly, let alone criminal, manner as they approached the stadium. Ex-Ireland manager, Brian Kerr, who attended the final, told extra.ie: "The Liverpool fans were bang-on in their behavior," whereas French police "looked like they were up for a fight."

French police appear to have overwhelmingly targeted Liverpool fans, including players' families and friends. Moreover, though Liverpool and Madrid fans had ticket problems in roughly equal numbers, Liverpool supporters disproportionately suffered from them. According to Darmanin, only 50 percent of Liverpool fans were seated at the Stade de France by 9 p.m., the scheduled kick-off time, compared to 97 percent of Madrid fans. It raises the question of whether French authorities tried to deliberately interfere with the atmosphere and outcome of the match.

Whatever exactly occurred, the crackdown at the Stade de France is another reminder of the class violence meted out by Macron's police.

Ex-Liverpool player and pundit Jamie Carragher summed up the feelings of many Liverpool fans, tweeting: "Liars @GDarmanin @AOC1978 [the account of French Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra] @UEFA video evidence proves how corrupt you all are. Margaret Thatcher & Norman Bettison all over again."

A Liverpool fan named Peter, who attended the final, told sofoot.com: "As a Liverpool fan, Hillsborough is always on my mind. We were afraid it would happen again. I lived through this tragedy when I was in my twenties. ... This Saturday at the Stade de France, I saw the same police incompetence as at Hillsborough. Miraculously, it didn't have the same consequences."

Peter added, "You know, I have been to France many times. But now I don't want to go back. I don't feel safe there anymore, and especially not in Paris."

In previous decades, heads could have rolled inside the

police forces as part of the French capitalist government's reaction to such an internationally embarrassing event. This did not reflect democratic sentiments, but the cold self-interest of the capitalist class. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 9.7 percent of France's GDP came from tourism. In the next two years, moreover, France is to host both the 2023 Rugby World Cup and the 2024 Olympic games.

Today, however, Macron depends almost entirely on inciting fascistic forces in the police to suppress working class opposition. In his second term, Macron, the "president of the rich," is preparing new, deep cuts to pensions and unemployment insurance, university tuition hikes, and the impoverishment of the working class by global inflation. For this reason, French officials have chosen to double down in support of police repression at the Stade de France.

On June 10, Paris police chief Didier Lallement told a commission investigating the event that the management of the final was "a failure because the image of the country was undermined." He claimed to be "sorry" for the use of tear gas. Nonetheless, Lallement, who is infamous in France for telling a protesting "yellow vest" worker she was "on the other side," then brazenly defended the assault at the Stade de France, claiming there was "no other means" of moving people back than firing barrages of tear gas at them.

The savage police repression at the Stade de France is a warning to workers, in France and internationally: Macron and the entire financial aristocracy, knowing themselves isolated and hated, will stop at nothing to defend their class rule.



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