Sheriff’s deputy runs down Sacramento protester and flees scene

Alec Andersen
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A woman taking part in demonstrations against the police murder of Stephon Clark Saturday evening had to be transported to the hospital after a Sacramento County sheriff’s deputy struck her with his SUV and fled the scene.

The 61-year-old woman, identified as Wanda Cleveland, sustained minor injuries and was taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital. The deputies involved in the assault have not yet been identified.

Stephon Clark, a 22-year-old African-American father of two, was shot at least six times from behind in his grandparents’ backyard by two Sacramento, California police officers responding to a report of someone breaking car windows in the neighborhood on March 18. After pointing their guns at Clark for another six minutes as he lay dying on the ground, the officers, identified as Terrence Mercadel and Jared Robinet, handcuffed his lifeless corpse and made a token effort to resuscitate Clark before pronouncing him dead at the scene. Clark was unarmed and was holding a cell phone in one hand.

The Sacramento Police Department’s release of body camera and helicopter video, including the officers’ subsequent attempt to fabricate a pretext for the murder while their microphones were switched off, have prompted almost daily protests demanding an end to police violence and poverty in the California’s capital city.

The Saturday incident occurred when the woman, who was carrying a sign that read “Stephon Clark Rest in Power,” walked in front of a deputy’s vehicle and motioned for him to stop. After initially slowing down, the deputy suddenly accelerated into the woman, violently knocking her to the ground.

Rather than stopping to determine her condition and apply first aid, the deputy immediately sped away from the scene. In the United States, fleeing the scene of an auto collision constitutes a felony punishable by prison and fines reaching into the tens of thousands of dollars.

In a press release, Sacramento County Sheriff’s Department spokesman Sgt. Shaun Hampton acknowledged that a deputy hit the woman with his car, while simultaneously seeking to minimize and justify the deputy’s actions.

“The collision occurred while the patrol vehicle was traveling at slow speeds,” Hampton said, claiming that protesters were “yelling while pounding and kicking the vehicles’ exterior.”

Hampton continued: “During the incident, the Sheriff’s Department vehicle sustained scratches, dents, and a shattered rear window. The damage to the vehicle was not a result of the collision involving the pedestrian but was caused by vandals in the crowd.”

However, witnesses and cell phone camera footage of the incident tell a far different story from the one being peddled by the Sacramento Sheriff’s Department.

In video published by the National Lawyers Guild Legal Observers, protesters can be seen surrounding two Sacramento Sheriff’s Department SUVs with lights and sirens on, though demonstrators did not appear to engage in any form of violent or aggressive behavior toward the vehicle. An officer can be heard warning demonstrators to back away from his vehicle four times over his public-address system. The vehicle then slows momentarily and almost comes to a complete stop before accelerating at high speed into the stunned crowd of protesters, striking a woman, and speeding off.

“The vehicle accelerated and struck her, accelerated very fast and struck her violently and she fell to the ground. It was a very fast acceleration, not the way you would move with people around,” Guy Danilowitz, the

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legal observer who recorded the video on his cell phone, told CNN.

The California Highway Patrol announced that it is investigating the incident but refused to say whether the attack was being investigated as a “hit and run” or a lesser charge.

The incident further highlights the contempt with which the police view elementary constitutional and democratic rights such as the freedom of speech and the right to peacefully protest.

Throughout the nation, workers and young people are increasingly taking to the streets to decry the epidemic of mass violence and police repression. On March 24, students in hundreds of cities throughout the United States and internationally marched to demand an end to mass shootings, which occur on an almost daily basis in the US.

Last week, the Baton Rouge, Louisiana police department was forced to fire one of the officers involved in the 2016 murder of Alton Sterling following mass demonstrations against a recent decision to not pursue charges against either of the two officers involved in the killing.

The increasingly vocal opposition of broad layers of the population to mass violence represents one expression of the growth of class struggle internationally over recent months. In order for these movements to succeed, workers and youth must break free from the political straitjacket of the Democratic Party and its various organs, such as Black Lives Matter, to coordinate their actions with their class brothers and sisters internationally in a unified struggle for socialism.

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