“It's good this case has taken a political turn … It shouldn’t have come to this”

Victims’ testimony exposes official account of Paris police killing

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9 June 2022

At around 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 4, Paris police shot nine rounds into a car with four passengers in central Paris after an attempted traffic stop. The front seat passenger, a 21-year-old woman named Rayana, was shot in the head and died in hospital on Sunday. The 38-year-old driver was hit in the chest but has since been released from hospital.

This is the second such police shooting in central Paris in recent months. On April 24, the night of the second round of the French presidential election, police shot at a car that did not stop for a vehicle control on Pont Neuf in central Paris. Both the driver and front-seat passenger were killed.

This Saturday, police fired after the driver refused to comply with a traffic stop. Authorities have charged the driver with attempted murder, alleging that officers had been forced to resort to gunfire to protect the lives of pedestrians in the immediate area. However, testimony from surviving passengers corroborated by other eyewitness accounts has exposed the authorities’ narrative and the police’s attempt to cover up its responsibility by prosecuting the driver for crimes he did not commit.

In the police account of last Saturday’s shooting, the officers fired only *after* the driver started to drive off. According to the Paris prosecutor, the driver “started up again despite a new order to stop the vehicle,” and police then shot at the vehicle to protect pedestrians in the area. The three officers who fired into the vehicle were released from custody on Tuesday and are now being investigated. On the same day, the driver was taken into custody after being indicted for “attempted homicide of a person in authority” and “refusal to obey aggravated by endangering others.”

On Wednesday, June 8, the passenger in the back seat of the vehicle, a friend of the deceased, spoke on the shooting to FranceInfo. She said, “At Clignancourt, three policemen on bicycles knocked on the driver's window because he [the driver] was not wearing a seat belt. He did not want to lower his window. He accelerated and stopped 30, 40 meters further on because of the traffic. There was a bus in front of us.”

“We told him to stop, but he replied that he didn't have a license. He was a bit panicked, a bit stressed. Then, I saw two policemen standing at the front windows. Everything went very quickly. I didn't even hear ‘Get out of the car’ or ‘Hands up.’ …The scene was very violent. The driver didn't even have time to take his hands off the wheel.”

Contradicting the police account, she continued, “It wasn’t the case that the car left first and then they shot, it was at the same time. They must have fired about ten shots; it lasted a long time.” FranceInfo itself reportedthat other witness statements, including by bystanders,“contradict the account of the police forces, and stress that the driver did not ‘start in a hurry.’”

After seeing their friends shot, the ordeal at the hands of the police was not over for Ines and the other passenger. She said, “The police came up behind us. They pointed their guns at us and said, ‘Hands up, hands on your head’…They left us on a corner of the street, for more than three hours in the sun, in front of a crowd. They didn't let us see a doctor.”

Speaking to RTL, the other passenger, a friend of the

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driver, corroborated this account, saying that one of the cops "pointed [a gun] directly at them," and added: "The driver acted as if he wasn't looking ... I shouted 'get down,' then we heard the gunshots and the windows smash. Afterwards, my friend put the car in first gear and started to drive again after the shots were fired."

After the shots were fired, the vehicle collided with a white van a few meters further up the road at low speed.

Multiple eyewitness accounts show that the vehicle was trapped in traffic and at a standstill when multiple police officers began shooting indiscriminately at its four occupants. Contrary to the police account, there is not a shred of evidence that the vehicle was a threat to the public or the police officers involved. In appointing themselves judge, jury and executioner, these officers transformed a routine traffic offense into another deadly act of police violence.

In her interview with FranceInfo, Ines pledged to pursue the policemen responsible and pointed to the significance of the case: "It's good that this case has taken a political turn. This story needs to be talked about. The most important thing is that there are people on our side who understand that it shouldn't have to come to this."

While immediate legal responsibility for the killing lies with police officers, broader political responsibility lies with the Macron government and its political allies. They have cultivated a fascistic culture of violence and impunity in the police, whom they used as a last line of defense against explosive social anger and mass protests and strikes in the working class.

Since the 2015 declaration of a state of emergency, the police have had *carte blanche* to violently suppress any opposition to the widely detested policies of the French state. From the "Yellow Vests" to high-school students, protesters found themselves surrounded by cops assaulting them with batons, tear gas canisters and rubber bullets.

The Macron government has given medals to police units guilty of particularly heinous crimes against the population—like the killing in Marseille of 80-year-old Zineb Redouane, whose head was destroyed by a tear gas canister police shot into her apartment during a "Yellow Vest" protest. The purpose of this was manifestly to make clear to the police that they would be rewarded for egregious acts of violence insofar as they served to terrorize the public.

Emboldened by this treatment, police officers, broad layers of which sympathize with the far right, have taken to meting out deadly violence against working people.

The movement against police violence must be developed as a movement of the working class, in opposition to militarism and social austerity, and to the capitalist governments which the police forces serve to defend.

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