Forty-year anniversary of Vincent Chin killing marked amid surge of anti-Asian violence

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June 19 marks the 40th anniversary of the death of Chinese-American draftsman Vincent Chin, who was beaten to death in Detroit by Chrysler plant superintendent Ronald Ebens and his unemployed stepson Michael Nitz. The murder took place amid a wave of anti-Japanese hysteria fanned by the United Auto Workers and Democratic Party politicians.

The two men beat Chin to death with a baseball bat following an altercation at a bar, where the two, believing Chin to be Japanese, yelled, “It’s because of you little (expletives) that we’re out of work!” Ebens and Nitz never spent a day in jail for their crime.

The anniversary takes place at a time when hate crimes against Asians are again on the rise. It is being marked by several public events in Detroit, including a re-screening of the Academy Award-nominated film Who killed Vincent Chin? The film will also be broadcast on PBS Monday evening at 10 PM.

According to one report, there was a 224 percent rise in the number of hate crimes directed against Asian Americans in 2021. This comes in the midst of a deliberate effort to whip up hysteria against China with the bogus and debunked claim that COVID-19 was spread from a Chinese laboratory, itself part of a broader campaign of war propaganda directed against China. At the same time, every effort is being made to foment divisions in the working class through various forms of anti-immigrant bigotry and racialist politics.

On the anniversary of Vincent Chin’s death, the UAW published a piece on its website, “When Labor Let Its Values Down: Remembering Vincent Chin.” This deceitful and hypocritical piece was authored by Sandra Engle, director of the UAW’s Public Relations Department.

While decrying the anti-Asian bigotry that triggered Chin’s killing, the article makes no mention of the central role played by the UAW in stoking it. Engle instead blames “UAW members” and “other members of other unions” for the racist hysteria. In other words, it places the blame on rank-and-file autoworkers rather than the UAW leadership.

The UAW has never taken responsibility for its central role in the anti-Japanese campaign that created the climate for the killing of Vincent Chin. The whipping up of hysteria over “Japanese imports,” including the smashing of Japanese-made cars in union parking lots, went hand in hand with UAW-imposed concessions which, in the name of “competitiveness,” gutted the wages and working conditions of US autoworkers.

Economic nationalism and protectionism were used, in turn, to deflect the anger of American autoworkers away from the US-based “Big Three” auto makers and channel it against their class brothers and sisters in other countries. Nationalist poison was the ideological foundation for the adoption of “corporatism,” that is, the open repudiation of class struggle and the lying claim that the interests of US autoworkers were identical to those of the American auto companies. On this basis, joint union-company structures were set up at the national, regional and local level, transforming the “union” into an arm of management and the government to police the workers and suppress strikes.

The scapegoating of foreign workers—be they Mexican, Chinese or Japanese—has been the central narrative promoted by the UAW ever since.

Since the election of Joe Biden, the UAW has continued its targeting of China, enlisting in Biden’s “American Jobs Plan” amid the nonstop spouting of nationalist demagogy.

It is important, as workers enter into mass struggles in the US and around the world, that they learn the lessons of this tragic episode, including the central role played by the UAW, so as to inoculate themselves against and combat all forms of nationalist demagogy. In today’s global economy, workers can defend their rights and conditions only on the basis of a unified international struggle.

Below is the article posted by the WSWS on the 30th anniversary of Vincent Chin’s death.

Thirty years since the murder of Vincent Chin

June 19 marked the 30th anniversary of the murder of Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Chinese-American draftsman who was beaten with a baseball bat in Highland Park, Michigan by Ronald Ebens, a Chrysler plant superintendent, and his laid-off stepson Michael Nitz. Chin died from his injuries four days later.

The murder came at the height of a campaign of vicious Japan-baiting by the United Auto Workers and Democratic Party politicians, who blamed foreign imports for the loss of American jobs.

Chin, who was engaged to be married later in the week, was the victim of a racially motivated attack. After a fight broke out at the bar where Chin was holding his bachelor party, Ebens shouted a
As the crisis of capitalism deepens, more and more attempts will be made to divert the anger of workers through the use of racial and ethnic scapegoating. This makes drawing the lessons of the Vincent Chin case more important than ever.

A fight against all forms of national chauvinism is at the heart of the struggle to mobilize the working class against the assault on its jobs and living conditions. Workers must reject all attempts to pit American workers against their class brothers and sisters overseas.

All the gains of the American working class have come through the solidarity of workers of different races and ethnicities in a common struggle. It is not workers in Japan, Korea, China or Mexico who are responsible for the mass unemployment and declining living standards but the crisis of the profit system, which is condemning ever greater sections of the world’s population to misery.

Capitalism is a global system, and in every country finance capital is seeking to shift its crisis onto the backs of the working class by driving down wages and living conditions. The revival of mass working class struggle requires intransigent opposition to all forms of nationalism and a political struggle for the international unity of the working class.

Prasanna Vengadam spoke to the World Socialist Web Site about the Vincent Chin murder at the Oakland County Commission commemoration ceremony. “This case needs to be out there,” he said. “I moved to the US from India 27 years ago. The last six years I have devoted myself to Asian-American advocacy.

“I am gladdened that there is an acknowledgement made of what was done. It is a small step in rectifying what went wrong.

“It is important to keep in mind what is happening today because of racial profiling. It is the same or worse. I don’t think the scapegoating of ‘others’—and Asian Americans are always seen as the ‘others’—has stopped. It is not just anti-Japanese, it happens to South Asians a lot. When the economy is down, they want to blame those overseas. It creates a sense of hate toward this community with respect to outsourcing—‘we have to fight the invasion of the Asians.’

“Peter Hoekstra (Republican candidate for US Senate in Michigan) is an example of that. He ran an anti-Chinese ad in the Super Bowl. It was such a negative message. It shows the animus is still there.”