

Events in Detroit and Los Angeles mark 43rd anniversary of racist murder of Chinese American draftsman Vincent Chin

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Several public events marked the 43rd anniversary of the death of Chinese-American draftsman Vincent Chin, who was beaten to death by a Chrysler plant superintendent, Ronald Ebens and his unemployed stepson, Michael Nitz, outside a bar in Detroit. The anniversary takes place amid concerted moves by the Trump administration to impose a police state in the United States to enforce his program of mass deportations of immigrants, who are being blamed for all the social ills created by capitalism.

Chinese nationals in the US, including students and scientists, are being targeted for alleged spying on behalf of Beijing. The climate of bigotry is not just being fanned by the fascist Republicans, but is also being stoked by the Democratic Party and the labor bureaucracy in the United Auto Workers and other unions.

The brutal killing of Chin took place amid an earlier wave of anti-Japanese hysteria whipped up by the UAW and Democratic Party officials, who scapegoated Japanese workers for supposedly “stealing” American jobs. The UAW has never acknowledged, let alone apologized for its role in fueling anti-Asian hate.

On June 19, 1982, Ebens and Nitz instigated a fight with Chin, who was celebrating his upcoming wedding with friends at a bar. The two men thought Chin was Japanese. After they were thrown out of the bar, Ebens and Nitz hunted down Chin and assaulted him with a baseball bat. Ebens reportedly told Chin, “Because of you (expletive) we’re out of work.”

The pair never served jail time for the murder. They were convicted only of manslaughter and sentenced to three years probation and a token \$3,000 fine. A subsequent conviction of Ebens on federal civil rights charges was later overturned on appeal.

The official ceremony in Detroit marked the unveiling

of a secondary street sign honoring Chin approved by the Detroit City Council. The event was addressed by representatives of Asian American civil rights groups as well as local Democrats, including Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan and Reverend Horace Sheffield III, whose daughter Mary is seeking to replace Duggan when he steps down at the end of the year.

The official speeches lacked both content and context and were more remarkable for what was not said than what was said. There was only one brief reference to the role of the Trump administration in promoting bigotry, by Democratic Detroit City Councilwoman Gabriela Santiago-Romero. But she did not mention that the vicious scapegoating of immigrant workers is being aided and abetted by the Democrats, who support the crackdown on “illegals.”

For his part Duggan offered only empty platitudes declaiming, “The hate that is going on continues, and we have to speak out against it. We have to step up and stop it. And most of all, we’ve got to remember, and that’s what you’ve done today.”

Duggan’s only mention of Trump was an abstract reference to political violence, in which he conflated the past assassination attempt on the president with recent attacks on Democratic officials, including the murder of a Minnesota state senator. He did not mention that Trump and fascist Republicans have brazenly stoked violence against Democratic officials as well as protesters.

Other speakers noted that the placement of the street sign marked the center of the former Chinatown district in Detroit, an area that local Chinese-American business owners are now seeking to revitalize.

One would hardly learn from the official speeches what is taking place all across America: the virtual declaration of martial law in Los Angeles, the mass round-up of

immigrants and “foreign-looking” people by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Gestapo, and their detention in inhuman conditions without due process. Among those immigrants being rounded up are also US citizens and legal residents.

In line with the whipping up of anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner sentiment is the promotion of the false claim that the COVID-19 pandemic was caused by a “lab leak” at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. This lie effectively blames China for the deaths of more than 20 million people worldwide and is being promoted with the deliberate intention of demonizing China and providing a pretext for war.

As a result of this campaign, anti-Asian hate crimes have been on the rise since the start of the global pandemic. Among the speakers at an event commemorating the murder of Vincent Chin held Monday at the Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles was Aki Maehara, professor of Asian American history at East Los Angeles College. In late April this year, Maehara said he was intentionally struck while on his bicycle by the driver of a vehicle who yelled, “f--king c--k” as he was hit. “As soon as I hit that row of bricks, I heard the guy say ‘go back to f--- ch--k land’ and then drove away,” Maehara said.

Notably absent once again at the commemoration in Detroit were any representatives from the UAW, the largest industrial union in Michigan. The murder took place amid a campaign of unbridled scapegoating of Japanese autoworkers for the mass layoffs in the 1980s, including UAW-sponsored events featuring the smashing of Japanese cars with sledgehammers in union parking lots.

The targeting of foreign workers went hand and hand with the imposition of concessions and the embrace of union-management collaboration, justified in the name of boosting the “competitiveness” of US auto companies against their overseas rivals. Stoking animosity against foreign workers has been the stock-in-trade of the UAW bureaucracy ever since, as it has sought to divert anger for its own betrayals and real source of the attacks on workers, the capitalist system, including the same financial oligarchs that richly fund the UAW apparatus.

In recent decades, the UAW has continued its anti-foreigner agitation, with the focus now on Mexico and China. Most UAW union halls to this day ban “foreign” cars in their parking lots, an absurdity under conditions of globally integrated auto production.

Nothing in this regard changed with the installation of

the supposed “reform” administration of UAW President Shawn Fain. The UAW has remained virtually silent on the mass arrest and detention of immigrant workers by ICE, including raids on schools and workplaces. Fain said nothing about the sending of US Marines to Los Angeles and the attempt to illegalize protests.

The UAW made no appearance at the mass protests against Trump’s moves toward dictatorship on June 14, and did nothing to mobilize members against the fascist president. Instead, Fain issued a statement re-emphasizing the UAW’s support for Trump’s tariffs. The statement scapegoated Mexican workers in particular, the primary target of Trump’s mass deportations.

While pretending sympathy for hyper-exploited Mexican workers, Fain at the same time advanced the position that to have jobs, American workers must put Mexican workers on the street. This dovetails with the racist lie asserted by Trump and the Democratic Party, including pseudo-left figures like Bernie Sanders, that immigrants or foreign workers are taking “American” jobs.

Trump’s tariffs are not aimed at defending jobs for American workers but at reorganizing supply chains in preparation for war, including against Iran and China and other rivals of US capitalism. The UAW is eager to prove its usefulness to the US ruling class in securing the “home front” in war, with Fain touting the UAW’s role in the World War II “arsenal of democracy.”

It is in this context that the anniversary of Vincent Chin’s murder should be considered. The fight against all forms of nationalist poison is the duty of all class conscious workers. It is central to building a mass working class movement against war and dictatorship.



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