

This week in history: June 28-July 4

28 June 2010

This Week in History provides brief synopses of important historical events whose anniversaries fall during a given week.

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25 years ago: Meeting of European states fails to advance integration

A meeting of European Common Market heads of state ended in acrimony this week in 1985 over bitter British opposition to plans to move toward a federal structure for the trade bloc, favored by France and West Germany.

Britain, backed by Greece and Denmark, denounced the very idea of the gathering, held in Milan and presided over by Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi. French President Francois Mitterrand and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl recognized there was little chance that the meeting would agree to their idea of revising or replacing the Treaty of Rome of 1957, the groundwork of the EC. They nonetheless used the conference to push forward with plans for integration, largely isolating British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The EC was set to absorb Spain and Portugal in the coming months. Meanwhile the unilateralism of US imperialism under Reagan and the appeasement of Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev were threatening traditional European foreign policy. Thus Paris and Bonn sought a new framework for Western Europe's interests.

This underlying crisis expressed itself in Spain the same week, where the Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez sacked a number of ministers, including Foreign Minister Fernando Moran, who had been primarily responsible for negotiating Spanish entry into the EC.

Gonzalez sought to bring Spain into NATO, but most of the population saw membership in the military alliance as a reminder of Spain's relationship to the US during the long Franco dictatorship. Moran had adapted himself to this popular hostility, and even after dropping his nominal opposition, had failed to campaign vigorously for NATO membership.

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50 years ago: Cuba nationalizes US, British oil refineries

On July 1, 1960, the left nationalist government of Fidel Castro ordered the nationalization of oil refineries operated by US-owned Esso and British Shell, after doing the same to Texaco's refineries days earlier.

The move came in response to American efforts to strangle the Cuban revolution. Washington had imposed an embargo of US-produced oil, on which Cuba was entirely dependent. In response Cuba turned to the Soviet Union to supply the vital resource. However, the US and British-owned refineries, under orders from the Eisenhower administration, refused to process the Soviet oil.

With the economy grinding to a halt, Castro—who had

sought an accommodation with Washington since supplanting the regime of US stooge Fulgencio Battista in 1959—had little choice but to order the nationalization of the refineries and turn to the Soviet Union.

US machinations against Cuba were far from finished. On July 3, the US cut off its trade with Cuba in sugar, in a stroke removing the island nation's single largest export market. In response, Castro made preparations for the nationalization of all American-owned property in Cuba.

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75 years ago: Nazi regime deepens its persecution of homosexuals

On June 28, 1935, the Nazis' Ministry of Justice revised Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code to provide a legal cover for the further persecution of homosexuals in the country.

The revisions to Paragraph 175 made homosexual acts a felony while leaving the definition of such an act so loose as to include behavior such as kissing, not previously a crime. The statute provided for lengthy prison terms for those convicted, including a sentence of up to 10 years in prison for engaging in homosexual acts with men under the age of 21.

In 1935, a total of 2,106 adults were convicted under Paragraph 175, while 257 under the age of 18 were convicted.

The Nazi regime had begun its persecution of homosexuals as early as 1933, sending many of those believed to be gay to concentration camps. In 1934, under the orders of the Gestapo, law enforcement officials throughout the country began keeping lists of suspected homosexuals, which were then used to round up men during raids (and also to further intimidate potential political opponents). The changes made to Paragraph 175 in 1935 lay the groundwork for increasing arrests and oppression; the following year, 5,320 adults and 428 under the age of 18 would be convicted under the law.

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100 years ago: African American boxer Jack Johnson KOs Jim Jeffries

World heavyweight champion Jack Johnson defeated former champion Jim Jeffries in a title fight in Reno, Nevada on July 4, 1910, which became a major political event in the US.

Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion, fought at the height of the Jim Crow era, when hundreds of blacks were lynched each year in the US and where racial segregation had reached its zenith. Racial thinking, moreover, was a veritable obsession of ruling circles, with a copious literature pondering "race suicide" and the "passing of the great race." Johnson was not only a great fighter but a showman, who understood and capitalized on such racial fears.

Jeffries, who as heavyweight champion had refused to fight Johnson, came out of retirement, he declared, "for the white race." In the event, Johnson sent the former champion, who had never before been defeated or knocked down, to the mat twice before Jeffries' corner threw in the towel in the 15th round.

Upon hearing of Johnson's victory—for which he earned the staggering sum of \$100,000—African American workers and youth took to the streets across the US. At least 20 were killed by police and white mobs who attempted to shut down the celebrations. A number of cities and towns—with the support of former President Theodore Roosevelt—sought to suppress film footage of the bout.

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