

# This week in history: May 13-19

13 May 2013

*This Week in History* provides brief synopses of important historical events whose anniversaries fall this week.

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

## 25 years ago: Palestinian youth killed as intifada enters sixth month

Two Palestinian youth were killed and nine others wounded by Israeli forces on May 15, 1988, as the resistance to Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank entered its sixth month. Protests erupted at mosques at the end of Ramadan, the month-long period of fasting.

PLO leaders designated May 16 as a day of national mourning for Palestinians martyred in the five-month intifada, which began on December 8. The most recent casualties were children, including a 17-year-old, and a 15-year-old, both shot in the chest and killed, and a 10-year-old and a 13-year-old, both struck by bullets in the legs.<sup>v</sup>

Unidentified Israeli reservists returning from the occupied territories complained to the press that they were compelled to carry out humiliating tactics against Arabs, including stripping them naked while questioning and ransacking homes.

[top]

## 50 years ago: Sukarno declares himself Indonesia's "president for life"

On May 19, 1963, Indonesia's Provisional People's

Congress nominated President Sukarno for a lifetime presidency. The next day Sukarno accepted the nomination from a congress whose 623 members he had himself selected three years earlier, saying he would "continue to give life to the revolutionary struggles of the Indonesian people." On May 14, Sukarno gave his attorney general power to ban all publications that "endanger the Indonesian state." No dissent was offered from any of Indonesia's political parties, including the Communist Party (PKI), Indonesia's largest with 1.5 million members and a central pillar of Sukarno's rule.

Sukarno had been Indonesia's president since 1945. After wartime collaboration with the Japanese and a timid stance toward the former colonial rulers, the Dutch, in the independence struggle (1945-1949), Sukarno held on to power by balancing among the PKI, the military, and the Islamists in the domestic arena and by balancing between the US and the Soviet Union in foreign policy.

In the late 1950s Sukarno began to cultivate closer military and diplomatic ties with the Soviet bloc and with the People's Republic of China, provoking the ire of Washington and sections of the military. In tandem with this foreign policy shift, associated with the "Bandung Conference" of 1955 or the non-aligned movement, Sukarno came to rely more and more on the PKI to contain the aspirations of the Indonesian working class and peasantry. (See "Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup Chapter One: The historical background")

In an ominous development, simultaneously to Sukarno's power grab right-wing students—protected by the military—launched pogroms against the Chinese population of western Java, torching thousands of homes, shops, and killing several people. Sukarno verbally condemned the attacks, but the rioters faced no punishment.

[top]

## **75 years ago: Trial of mine owners begins in “Bloody Harlan” Kentucky**

A trial began on May 16, 1938 in London, Kentucky for 68 coal operators and 22 police officers charged with using murder, kidnapping and arson to keep Harlan County coal miners from organizing. The trial was seen as a test case of whether the courts would enforce the 1935 National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act, which had, for the first time in US history, protected the right of workers to form unions.

Harlan had earned the prefix “Bloody” during the Harlan County Coal War of 1931-32. The coal companies used violent repression after eighteen thousand non-union miners—already among the lowest paid miners in the US—struck in early 1931 to oppose demands for a 10 percent wage cut in the midst of the Great Depression.

Mine owners ran their own prisons, and company goons enjoyed virtual impunity to carry out murder and other crimes. *Life* magazine described the rule of the coal bosses as “a feudal reign of terror, which has long made ‘Bloody Harlan’ County a notorious American plague spot.”

After some 250 witnesses were summoned to give evidence in the tense proceedings, the court acquitted the accused of all wrongdoing.

[top]

## **100 years ago: Italian colonialists defeated at Battle of Sidi Garba in Libya**

On May 16, 1913, Italian colonial troops suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of native Arabs in Tripolitania, located in modern-day Libya. Dubbed the Battle of Sidi Garba, reports of Italian casualties in the fighting ranged from the hundreds, up to a thousand, while around 300 native fighters are thought to have died.

According to news reports, Italian troops numbering

close to 5,000 attacked an encampment of Arab fighters resisting foreign occupation. Expecting only a couple of thousand fighters, the Italians were instead met by as many as 20,000, who were armed, including with cannons. General Mambretti, commanding the Italian troops, ordered a retreat. The Arab fighters pursued for around five hours. As many as 700 Italian troops were wounded, and a hundred were reported captured.

The battle took place in the context of a brutal Italian occupation of modern-day Libya, following their victory over the Ottoman Empire in the Italo-Turkish war of 1911-1912. Signed by the Ottomans and Italy in October 1912, the Treaty of Lausanne gave the Italian government control of the former Ottoman colonial possessions, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan, comprising modern-day Libya.

Italian colonial occupation was met with broad resistance from the native population. Prior to the Battle of Sidi Garba, government troops had violently suppressed a rebellion in Tripolitania, which occurred in March. In April, Italian forces attacked tribesmen, killing around 200. Clashes between Italian colonial forces and native tribesman continued intermittently, until a ceasefire was signed in 1917.

[top]



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**