

This week in history: June 10-16

10 June 2013

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

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25 years ago: Soviet government rehabilitates 33 victims of the Moscow Trials

On June 13, 1988, the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union announced the rehabilitation of many of the “Old Bolshevik” leaders who were sentenced to death and executed during the Moscow trials of 1936-37. Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Yuri Pyatakov were among the 33 defendants, murdered on the orders of Josef Stalin, whose convictions were reversed.

For the first time since they were shot after the first of the three Moscow trials in August 1936, the political contributions of Zinoviev and Kamenev were commented upon favorably in the Soviet press. The two were among Lenin’s closest associates in the decade leading up to the 1917 October Revolution and major figures in the early history of the Soviet state.

The state newspaper *Izvestia* stated, “Now it is clear that they are not enemies, that they are not guilty before the law, the state, or the people. The state which they helped to create 70 years ago gives them back their honor and their name.”

In posthumously overturning the convictions and acknowledging that the defendants were innocent of all charges, the Supreme Court implicitly conceded that the man who was the principal target of the Moscow trial frame-ups—Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the October Revolution and founder of the Fourth International—was the victim of the most terrible campaign of slander and falsification in history.

The fact that the Supreme Court ruling failed to even mention Trotsky and his son, Leon Sedov, let alone exonerate them from the tidal wave of Stalinist slanders, was an indication of the fear that his name still evoked within the Soviet bureaucracy.

The court ruling came three days after *Izvestia* announced the decision to cancel all final history exams for 53 million Soviet schoolchildren in order to end the passing of lies from “one generation to another.” The newspaper added, “Today, we are reaping the bitter fruits of our own moral laxity. We are paying

for succumbing to conformity and thus to giving silent approval of everything that now brings the blush of shame to our faces and about which we do not know how to answer our children honestly.”

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50 years ago: Medgar Evers assassinated

On June 12, 1963, civil rights leader Medgar Evers was shot from behind in the driveway of his home in Jackson, Mississippi. A veteran of World War II, Evers was the Mississippi field officer for the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). He was born in Decatur, Mississippi, the son of James Evers, a sawmill worker, and Jessie Wright, a domestic. Evers left behind his wife Myrlie and three young children. He was 37.

The assassin was Byron De La Beckwith, a fertilizer salesman and member of the racist White Citizens’ Council. Beckwith, who later joined the Ku Klux Klan, was not convicted of the crime in two separate cases with all-white juries. He was ultimately convicted in 1994 in a case launched based on evidence gathered subsequently—largely that he himself had boasted of the murder to acquaintances for years.

Two major events in the civil rights movement had occurred a day earlier, on June 11, 1963. In the morning Alabama Governor George C. Wallace carried out his promise to defy a federal court order and personally block two African American students from attending the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. With news cameras rolling, Wallace dismissed an appeal by Assistant US Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach. He eventually left the building under threat of arrest by Alabama National Guard General Henry Graham, whose forces had been placed under the control of US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara.

In response to the events in Alabama, later in the day US President John Kennedy gave a speech that, for the first time since the administration of Abraham Lincoln a century earlier, indicated active presidential support for equal rights. Kennedy warned of rising social tensions creating “a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety,” and expressed concerns that racial oppression was undercutting US

pretensions as the guardian of democracy abroad.

“We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or cast system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes?” Kennedy asked.

“Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law,” Kennedy concluded.

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75 years ago: Nazis round up “anti-social elements”

Mass arrests of Jews and others deemed by German fascism to be “anti-social elements”— socialists, communists, and ethnic Roma and Sinti— took place over the period of June 12-18, 1938. Thousands of people were taken into custody, and many were moved directly into concentration camps.

The mass arrests were made by the Reich Criminal Bureau under secret powers granted at the end of the previous year that enabled authorities to make “preventative arrests” without the usual formalities of due process.

In the German capital, Berlin, the mass arrests consisted almost entirely of apprehending Jews and political opponents of the fascist regime. On June 13 a special train containing some 700 Austrian Jews and political prisoners left Vienna bound for the Dachau concentration camp.

But in rural areas, the German provincial authorities, in the absence of any substantial numbers of Jews, filled the arrest quotas assigned to them by locking up members of the Roma and Sinti minorities. Along with Jews, European “gypsies” were declared by the Nazi Nuremberg laws to be non-Aryan.

On June 14 the German secretary of state demanded legislation to prevent Jews acquiring German nationality by birth, naturalization, or marriage. Jews remaining in Germany were allowed to retain their nationality, but children born to them after the enactment of the new law would be denied citizenship and would be effectively stateless.

Between February 1, 1933 and March 31, 1936, according to the Nazi Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question, some 100,000 German Jews emigrated from Germany; according to a media estimate about one third had migrated to Palestine. “

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100 years ago: Battle of Bagsag in the Philippines

This week in June 1913, US troops, Philippine police, and scouts launched a brutal attack on the island of Jolo, in Sulu province in the Southern Philippines, targeting some 500 Moro fighters who had refused to surrender.

The battle, which began on June 11 and ended on June 15, took place in the context of a rebellion of Moros, Muslims who largely live in the Southern Philippines, against American colonization following the US invasion of the Philippines in 1898. Moro resistance was fueled by a policy of transforming “unoccupied land” into public land, which effectively amounted to land confiscation.

Prior to the battle, US authorities had ordered the disarming of Moro people. Early in 1913, thousands of Moros fortified themselves on Mount Bagsag. While negotiations resulted in most of them leaving the mountain, around 500 remained defiant. American forces launched their attack on June 11.

While American troops were heavily armed, the Moro fighters fought with spears, other traditional weapons, and a handful of guns. American troops, under the command of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, and Filipino forces indiscriminately massacred Moro civilians. Reports stated that around 2,000 Moros, including women and children, were killed, and US troops gave no quarter to injured Moro fighters. Around 15 US troops also reportedly died and another 25 were injured. The defeat of the Moro fighters crushed resistance to colonial rule.

While an official inquiry into the battle was announced in Washington, government representatives hastily asserted that Pershing and the American forces were not suspected of any wrongdoing, and the *New York Times* denounced the Moro population as a “fanatical lot.” Pershing was nominated for a Medal of Honor, and would go on to lead American forces against the Mexican Revolution, and command Allied Expedition Forces in World War I.

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