

This week in history: June 23-29

23 June 2014

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

25 years ago: New Chinese Communist Party head appointed amid wave of state terror

On June 24, 1989, Jiang Zemin was appointed general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. His appointment was to replace previous General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, who remained under house arrest since the state crackdown began on the Tiananmen Square protesters in late May.

The previous week, the Stalinist regime acknowledged the executions of 27 workers since the massacre at Tiananmen Square. Since the military clampdown, the repressive campaign of the regime has had the central objective of strong-arming the Chinese workers into submission. Workers were frog-marched before television cameras in what is known as the “airplane” position; their heads forced down in a bowing position with their arms twisted behind them by a soldier on either side. Their faces were bruised and bloodied and their clothes in disarray from obvious beatings and torture.

In an article entitled “Terror against Workers in China,” the French newspaper *Liberation* described the scene at a “trial” in Changchun, the capital of Jilin province: “The 26 condemned men, with their heads shaved and a sign around their neck, giving their name, their workplace and the crime of which they are accused (participation in the demonstration or spreading ‘rumors’), were exhibited on the stage of a cinema in front of hundreds of spectators....”

The public reprisal executions were carried out to terrorize the population and “normalize” the situation in the factories to ensure reliability to global capitalist markets. The number of arrests, tortures and state murders is not known, but accounts have been taped and smuggled out of China indicating that the numbers are much higher than publicly acknowledged.

A Western diplomat in Shanghai told the *New York Times*: “My guess is we’re going to enter into a stage of heavy intimidation to make sure people go back to work and stay at work. They’ve already killed a couple thousand people so what’s a couple thousand more? You’ve got to look at it from their perspective.”

Despite some public protests by bourgeois politicians against the repression in China, the real attitude of American imperialism was summed up in a June 20 *New York Times* interview with the head of the China desk at the US Commerce Department, where the government worked to coordinate the activities of some 300

multinationals with operations in China. “Basically we’re telling them to sit tight ... and see how things shake out,” Commerce Department official told the *Times*. The department was closely monitoring the return to “normalcy” at Chinese ports, factories and post offices, though it revealed that the port of Shanghai was still shut down. The main concern of this imperialist listening post—and of the corporations which it served—was whether the Deng Xiaoping bureaucracy would prove successful in crushing the movement of the working class.

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50 years ago: NAACP seeks Mississippi takeover

On June 26, 1964, after the disappearance of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, leaders of the middle class National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called for the US government to take over the administration of the state of Mississippi “to restore law and order and protect the life of all citizens.”

The call followed the discovery of a burned out-car belonging to the three civil rights workers, which was found in a swamp 15 miles north of Philadelphia. Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney were last seen June 21 after being released from jail by the Neshoba County Sheriff’s Department.

The three were participating in a civil rights task force organized by the Congress of Racial Equality in cooperation with other civil rights organizations. Leaders of the Mississippi civil rights campaign said that they had learned that the car’s license plate number had been circulated by the racist Citizens’ Council. Sheriff L.A. Rainey showed little concern for the disappearance, telling reporters, “If they are missing, they just hid somewhere, trying to get a lot of publicity out of it, I figure.”

The Socialist Workers Party, which had broken with the Fourth International a year earlier, supported the NAACP’s reliance on the federal government against the state government, a policy telling workers to put their faith in one section of the capitalist state to fight the crimes of another section. The SWP refused to put forward any demand for the independent mobilization of the working class, including workers’ defense guards organized by the trade unions to protect civil rights and defend civil rights organizations in Mississippi.

On the same day the NAACP issued its call for federal intervention, police stood by while a racist mob in St. Augustine, Florida, attacked a civil rights march, seriously injuring 30 blacks,

including women and children.

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75 years ago: Nazi Freikorps organize in Free City of Danzig

During this week in 1939, the crisis over the Free City of Danzig was exacerbated by naked fascist terror. On June 27, 1939, the London *Times* reported that the German Nazi Freikorps were being organized by military specialists from the German region of East Prussia. The virulently anticommunist paramilitary had already assembled a force of 2,000 and 3,000, according to estimates. The Treaty of Versailles, which concluded World War I, granted Danzig its “Free City” status, which stipulated that it remain nonmilitarized but in a customs union with Poland.

Military advisers and tactical specialists from the German Nazi regime were responsible for the organization of local men and youths, some of whom were said to be in Prussia receiving training in military combat and policing tactics while others were set to work on fortifications within the boundaries of the Free City. The trenches, ramparts and tank traps created by the fascist workforce were described in the British press as “preliminaries of a fortification program drawn up by the military experts of the Reich.”

Meanwhile on June 29, the culmination of “Sea Week” demonstrations took place throughout Poland under the slogan “We will not be forced from the sea”. In a speech broadcast to the nation from Warsaw, Polish President Ignacy Moscicki said that three quarters of the country’s trade passed through the ports of Gdynia and Danzig: “Their value is beyond all price, they are the air and the sunlight of our existence as a state.” *Gazeta Polska* noted with satisfaction the British assurance of military assistance to Poland should its border be infringed by aggressive military moves by Germany. “[A]ll England now knows if war be started by Germany at Danzig, it is not a war for or about Danzig, but war for domination of Europe wherein Danzig is merely the artificial pretext chosen at this point for the first assault,” the newspaper asserted.

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100 years ago: Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated

On June 28, 1914, Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was shot dead by Gavrilo Princip, a young Serbian nationalist, in the streets of Sarajevo. The assassination, occurring amid deepening geopolitical tensions throughout Europe and internationally, precipitated the outbreak of the First World War in the following months.

Ferdinand was touring Bosnia-Herzegovina, the southeastern point of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to inspect imperial troops

there. Shortly after Ferdinand and his wife arrived in Sarajevo, the convoy they were traveling in was attacked, with one of the Serbian nationalists involved in the assassination plot hurling a bomb at Ferdinand’s passing car. The bomb struck the car, but bounced off, exploding under another vehicle in the convoy.

Ferdinand attended a reception at the town hall later that day, and reportedly interrupted the mayor’s official welcome, exclaiming, “Mr. Mayor, I came here on a visit and I get bombs thrown at me. It is outrageous!” The driver of the official cavalcade, unaware that the party had decided to visit those wounded by the earlier bombing at the hospital, drove along a pre-planned route to the National Museum. While the convoy was reversing to correct its route, Princip shot Ferdinand and his wife at close range, killing both. Princip was immediately arrested and would later face trial.

On the evening of the assassination, and the following day, violent anti-Serbian demonstrations took place in Zagreb, in neighboring Croatia, and in Sarajevo. Encouraged by Austro-Hungarian officials and political leaders, the riots took on the form of a pogrom, with mobs destroying Serbian shops and homes. Scores of ethnic Serbians were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the assassination.

The assassination followed the upheavals of the Balkan wars of 1912-13, during which a series of Balkan states, including Serbia, ousted Ottoman forces from the Balkans, and later fought one another for control of the spoils. Serbia had emerged from those wars emboldened as the most powerful of the Balkan states. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina from the ailing Ottoman Empire prior to the Balkan wars, and continued to dominate it at their conclusion.

The coordinated character of the assassination prompted widespread speculation that the attack on Ferdinand had been organized with the support of Serbian intelligence forces. In the weeks following the assassination, tensions between Austro-Hungary and Serbia rapidly escalated, culminating in military mobilization in late July.

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