

This week in history: June 15-21

15 June 2015

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25 years ago: ANC leader Mandela reassures capitalists during world tour

On June 20, 1990, after more than 27 years of imprisonment at the hands of the racist regime in South Africa, African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela was greeted as a conquering hero in the center of world imperialism. The 12-day, eight-city tour of the US, organized with the direct participation of the State Department, began with a ticker-tape parade up Broadway with Mandela and his wife Winnie riding in a bulletproof glass “greenhouse” under a rain of confetti.

On the eve of the visit, the revelation surfaced that Mandela’s arrest in 1962 was directed and organized by the US Central Intelligence Agency, which had infiltrated the top leadership of the ANC. A retired CIA officer told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that the CIA “turned Mandela over to the South African security branch” and then hailed the arrest as “one of our greatest coups.” The vast majority of the capitalist media blacked out this story, so as not to mar the celebrations.

Mandela was to be welcomed to the White House and “congratulated” on his release from prison by President George Bush, the former head of the same CIA that had him arrested in the first place. Asked whether he would apologize to Mandela about the US having him arrested, Bush declared cynically, “No, I will take my leadership on that question from Mandela, who put it very well when he said, let bygones be bygones.”

More important than all the public relations hype and hoopla over the Mandela trip would be the private meetings to be held on Wall Street with the top US bankers and corporate chiefs, and in Washington, with Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. In these sessions, he gave his assurances that the ANC would respect and protect imperialist interests in South Africa. This followed similar meetings with Thatcher in Britain, Mulroney in Canada and Mitterrand in France. Mandela gave assurances in these meetings that the ANC had no intention of overthrowing capitalism or expropriating imperialist interests in South Africa.

Mandela gave his audience the message they wanted to hear, assuring them that the ANC was not even committed to large-

scale nationalizations, much less “socialism.” Instead, he said, it advocated “a mixed economy, though we have no blueprint as to the makeup of that mix.”

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50 years ago: Ben Bella deposed in Algeria coup

On June 19, 1965, Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella was deposed in a bloodless coup led by his former ally, the military strongman Houari Boumédiène, head of the Revolutionary Council. Boumédiène ruled Algeria until his death in 1979, marginalizing the National Liberation Front (FLN) and ruling through decree and “revolutionary legitimacy.” Ben Bella spent the rest of his life under house arrest and then in exile in France and Switzerland until his death in 2012.

A communique released after the coup accused Ben Bella of being a “diabolical dictator” with a “morbid love of power.” Perhaps more to the point, it accused him of attempting to marginalize the 60,000-strong Soviet-equipped National Liberation Army (ALN.) The immediate cause of the coup was likely Ben Bella’s move to sack the foreign minister (and current president) Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a close ally of Boumédiène.

Bella was regarded as the ideological leader of the nationalist wing of the Algerian anti-colonial struggle against France, which resulted in independence in 1962 after overcoming a brutal eight-year anti-colonial war waged by the de Gaulle government that resulted in more than one million deaths.

Ben Bella considered himself an “Arab socialist” in the mold of his hero, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. But wherever this tendency consolidated power—Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen, and later Libya—not even the most basic democratic tasks were resolved. Mineral wealth was nationalized through joint-stock firms, but never socialized under the democratic control of the working class. The borders arbitrarily imposed by Great Britain and France on North Africa and the Middle East were maintained. In each case anti-socialist authoritarian regimes were established that pitted rival sectarian and tribal groupings against each other, basing themselves in the end on control of the military, and, in the realm of foreign policy, balancing between Western imperialism and the Soviet Union.

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75 years ago: France surrenders to Nazi Germany

On June 17, 1940 Marshal Petain, the new premier of France, formed a cabinet and asked Germany for armistice terms as the French armies conceded defeat by Hitler's forces.

One week earlier, on June 8, the French armies were defeated at the Somme River. On June 11, the army fell into a general retreat and many sections virtually disintegrated, blending in with refugees that clogged the roads of France. On June 14, German forces entered Paris. The French government evacuated the city and it was surrendered without a fight. One of the terms stipulated by the Germans was that the municipal police remain in the city to prevent any resistance by the working class.

For one week a crisis raged between the civilian government, led by Paul Reynaud, who wanted to evacuate to North Africa and continue the war against Hitler, and military leaders, such as Petain and General Weygand, who wanted to capitulate immediately. Ultimately, Reynaud's cabinet itself split on the issue, Reynaud resigned, and Petain assumed the premiership.

Besides the military defeat and political decay of the government, another issue that led the generals to demand an armistice was the need to conserve France's army for use against a possible revolutionary uprising by the working class. One week after the appeal by Petain to Germany, an armistice took effect. France was cut in half, with the northern provinces placed under direct German rule, while the south, with its capital at Vichy, was ruled by a stooge government led by Petain.

One provision of the armistice required that the government turn over all German and Austrian refugees in France to Hitler, an action which condemned thousands to their deaths. This began the notorious collaboration between Hitler and the French bourgeoisie, in which the Third Republic was transformed into a fascistic state.

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Howard Taft. The 100 or so representatives of the US ruling elite included a spokesman for the newly founded US Chamber of Commerce, Edward Filene, Harvard University President A. Lawrence Lowell and former cabinet member Oscar S. Strauss, among others.

The League was formally founded some six weeks after the sinking of the British ship the Lusitania by German torpedoes, resulting in a number of American deaths. That event had prompted a wave of calls in the capitalist press for American intervention against Germany. The League had an explicitly pro-British and anti-German character, with its vague calls for world peace and order presuming the defeat and dismemberment of Germany and the preservation of the British Empire.

Reflecting the opposing tendency in the US ruling class, William Bryan Jennings resigned June 8 as secretary of state in the Wilson administration over concerns that the US government was moving towards direct involvement in the war against Germany. As an isolationist, Jennings naturally opposed the League to Enforce Peace, which vociferously advocated American "preparedness" for military intervention in the world war, and printed the word "enforce" in red ink in its publications.

The League advocated the development of a world body to regulate international relations among the major powers. Its emergence reflected the desire by sections of the American ruling class to match US economic ascendancy with a more dominant role in global politics. The preamble of the statement said, "We believe it to be desirable for the United States to join a league of nations..." It outlined a series of goals for such a body, including that, "The signatory powers shall jointly use forthwith both their economic and military force against any one of their number that goes to war, or commits acts of hostility..."

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100 years ago: Pro-war "League to Enforce Peace" founded in US

In what was a precursor of the drive to found the League of Nations after World War I, a number of prominent US political and business figures met on June 17, 1915, to establish the League to Enforce Peace. The convention in Philadelphia's Independence Hall was chaired by former president William