

This week in history: June 13-19

13 June 2016

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25 years ago: Kuwait emirate sentences 29 people to death after Iraqi withdrawal

This week in 1991, the martial law court set up by the Kuwaiti monarchy sentenced 29 people to death after brief trials which made a mockery of democratic procedures. Prisoners were sentenced to public hanging for such “crimes” as running a secondary school or writing newspaper articles during the seven-month occupation of the emirate by Iraqi military forces.

After three death sentences in the first month of show trials, the right-wing dictatorship stepped up the pace of its savagery, handing down death sentences in batches every day.

On Saturday, June 15, six journalists were sentenced to death for working on an Iraqi-sponsored newspaper. On Sunday, June 16, three men were sentenced to death on charges of stealing property and cooperating with the Iraqis. The three, Hassan Daoud, Mossam Hadi and Youssef Moustafa, fled Kuwait after US forces invaded in February.

On June 17, a Palestinian headmistress was sentenced to death for operating the Tulilla School, where she taught Arabic, during the Iraqi occupation. The woman, 55-year-old Hamdi Assad, told the five-member panel of judges that she had lived in Kuwait for more than 30 years.

Her two sons were being detained and tortured by Kuwaiti police. Her two daughters, who attended the trial, broke down afterwards, screaming at the judges and police who used bayonets to disperse the crowd of onlookers.

On June 18, eight people were sentenced to death, six of them in absentia, because they had been drafted into the Iraqi military after the occupation. The regime of Saddam Hussein declared Kuwait to be Iraq's 19th province and extended Iraqi law, including the draft, to the territory.

Finally, on June 19, eight more prisoners were sentenced to death, including six Jordanians, a stateless Arab and the first Iraqi given the death sentence.

More than 250 prisoners were dragged through the kangaroo courts set up by the emir's police and military officers. They were denied the right to present a defense, cross-examine

witnesses or testify, and in many cases, even to know the evidence against them. A total of 440 prisoners were to be tried by the time martial law would expire at the end of July, Kuwaiti authorities said. Youth as young as 12-years-old were subjected to court martial.

Human rights groups and Palestinian groups said that 2,000 people were now imprisoned in Kuwait, the vast majority of them Palestinian or other stateless Arabs. Thousands of other Palestinians were deported without trial.

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50 years ago: Supreme Court issues *Miranda* ruling

On June 13, 1966, by a 5-4 margin, the US Supreme Court voted to set limits on the power of police to question suspects. The ruling in the case of Arizona prisoner Ernesto *Miranda* and three other prisoners required police to inform detainees of their right to remain silent and their right to legal counsel before beginning any questioning.

The majority, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, further stipulated that if an arrested person requested a lawyer but could not afford to pay, the state was obliged to appoint an attorney to represent him during questioning. The decision provoked a storm of outrage from the conservative minority on the Supreme Court led by Justice John C. Harlan, who denounced it as “dangerous experimentation” at a time of a “high crime rate.”

The ruling upheld the appeals of four men charged with unrelated crimes, who were convicted following the extraction of confessions by the police. All four men made incriminating statements to the police after hours of intensive questioning.

In his majority opinion, Warren expressed a desire to curb some of the most blatant excesses of the police. While praising the defenders of capitalist law and order, he warned that by a too open display of injustice, provoking the indignation of the masses, they “become as great a menace to society as any criminal we have.”

The court decision expanded on the ruling in the 1964 *Escobedo* case. There, the Supreme Court upheld the right of a defendant to legal counsel during police questioning. Prior to *Miranda* and *Escobedo* the constitutional guarantees against

self-incrimination had been interpreted to apply only in the courtroom and did not prohibit the use of force or psychological pressure by the state to secure incriminating information from arrested persons.

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75 years ago: Stalin ignores invasion threat from Nazi Germany

On June 13, 1941 the Soviet news agency Tass declared over Moscow Radio that “both Germany and the Soviet Union are fulfilling to the letter the terms of the Soviet-German nonaggression pact, so that in the opinion of Soviet circles the rumors of the intention of Germany to break the pact and to launch an attack against the Soviet Union are completely without foundation, while the present movements of German troops ... to the eastern and northern parts of Germany, must be explained by other motives ...”

For nearly a year, Soviet military and covert intelligence had provided a steady and voluminous stream of ever more detailed information on the deployment of German units, their strength, tactics and, ultimately, the exact date of the invasion. Stalin ordered, however, that “all documents claiming that war is imminent must be regarded as forgeries emanating from British or even German sources.”

In addition, Stalin had been warned of the attack by both Churchill and Roosevelt. The German press, after several years of silence on the question, was again serializing excerpts of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* that dealt with German expansion to the east, that is, into Ukraine and Russia. A German printer had appeared at the Soviet consulate in Berlin with a German-Russian phrase book being printed in large quantities for the military. It instructed Germans on how to interrogate Russians.

German aircraft violations of Soviet airspace increased dramatically throughout April and May. During the same period, Stalin boosted deliveries to Hitler of grain, oil, cotton, rubber and various metals to record levels, while Germany’s reciprocal shipments had virtually ground to a halt, and military exports to the USSR had been cancelled.

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100 years ago: Striking miners in Minnesota draw up list of demands

On June 15, 1916, 1,500 miners met at the Finnish Socialist Hall in Virginia, Minnesota to elect a central strike committee and draw up a list of demands for better working conditions and

pay in mass strike action that had begun at the beginning of the month. The dispute became one of the largest labor conflicts in Minnesota history.

United States Steel was the first billion-dollar corporation in the United States. The company’s subsidiary, Oliver Mining Company, controlled about 75 percent of the ore resources in the Mesabi Iron Range in northern Minnesota. The iron ore was mined both underground and from open pit mines.

The miners who worked underground were paid on a contract system that rewarded them for the amount of ore they extracted rather than the hours worked. Mine foremen estimated the quality of ore that could be produced and the difficulty of extracting it from a particular location and set the contract rate accordingly. This system was known to be subject to abuse with mine foremen demanding bribes from the workers in return for allocating better working locations.

The underground miners were charged by the company for the equipment they used to extract the ore, and their pay consisted of the amount the contract had earned with costs deducted. Their net pay was often below \$3 per day and sometimes below \$2 per day. Open pit miners who were not on the contract system were paid on average between \$2.25 and \$2.60 per day.

The demands raised by the striking miners included the end of the contract system, daily pay rates of \$3.50 per day for underground work in wet areas, \$3.00 per day for underground work in dry areas and \$2.75 per day for work in the open pit mines.

To combat the strike, the mining companies hired over 1,000 armed guards and sought to starve the strikers out. By the time the strike ended on September 16, 1916, three people were dead, many were injured, hundreds of strikers had been arrested, and the miners had failed to win a single concession from the mining companies.

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