

This week in history: June 27-July 3

27 June 2016

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

50 years ago: Military coup in Argentina

25 years ago: Scores killed in Yugoslav civil war

Combat planes deployed by Yugoslav federal armed forces bombed Slovenia's main airports in Ljubljana on June 28, 1991, in the first concerted air attack in Europe since World War II. In the first week since Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Yugoslavia, more than 100 people were killed and thousands faced the threat of being slaughtered as tanks plowed their way through towns and villages.

Two ceasefire arrangements under the auspices of the European Commission had already broken down. A third, informal cease-fire in Slovenia threatened to collapse as the Slovenian government rejected demands by the federal presidency that its forces relinquish border posts.

"Yugoslavia no longer has a border with Austria and Italy," Slovenia's information Minister Jeiko Kacin declared defiantly. It was the seizure of the 27 border crossings on the boundaries with Italy, Austria and Hungary which provoked the federal army's intervention.

The bombing raids were in support of Yugoslav army troops after clashes broke out June 27 with Slovene nationalists, fighting that later became known as the "Ten-Day War." Yugoslav federal forces could not intervene effectively in Slovenia, which was cut off from the rest of the republic by the state of Croatia, also in rebellion.

The Slovenian government, installed after elections in 1990, had the backing of Austria, its neighbor to the north, as well as Germany, recently reunited with the absorption of Stalinist-ruled East Germany by West Germany.

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On June 28, 1966 President Arturo U. Illia was overthrown in a military coup and replaced with a three-man military junta, which named retired General Juan Carlos Onganía as the new chief of state. The junta dissolved the Congress, the Supreme Court and all political parties and appointed its supporters to the most important state positions.

Underlying the military coup was the deepening economic crisis in Argentina and fears by the bourgeoisie of increasing militancy by the powerful labor movement. The new junta accused Illia of "economic mismanagement" and creating a "state of anarchy." General Pascuel Angel Pistarini, commander of the Argentine army and architect of the coup, had publicly opposed recent wage settlements negotiated with the unions as "inflationary."

Pistarini further accused Illia of holding secret meetings with leaders of the Peronist movement.

The Peronists, named after the exiled former dictator Juan Peron, had won several recent legislative elections and had the backing of the trade union bureaucracy and the Stalinist Communist Party.

Military plans for the removal of the Illia government had been reported in detail by the bourgeois press in the period leading up to the coup. The discredited regime fell without a shot being fired or a single protest demonstration. Illia, leader of the Peoples Radical Party, had been elected in 1963 with just 25 percent of the vote.

While the Johnson administration publicly shed crocodile tears for the collapse of Argentine bourgeois democracy, military leaders calmly dismissed this as "window dressing" pointing to the aid lavished on the bloody military regime in Brazil by US imperialism since the coup of April 1964. The Argentine military had formed close relations with the Brazilian junta over the previous year citing the need to fight the advance of "Communist aggression."

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75 years ago: US government raids Minneapolis Trotskyists

On June 27, 1941 FBI agents and US marshals raided the headquarters of the Socialist Workers Party, then the American section of the world Trotskyist movement, in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The federal agents seized several boxes of Marxist literature, along with a picture of Leon Trotsky.

US Attorney General Francis Biddle, who ordered the raids, announced that criminal proceedings for alleged “seditious conspiracy to advocate overthrow of the government of the United States by force and violence” would be brought against the SWP. Biddle charged that “the principal Socialist Workers Party leaders against whom prosecution is being brought are also leaders of Local 544-CIO in Minneapolis.”

Two weeks before the raid, Local 544 disaffiliated from the AFL Teamsters union and joined the CIO, after IBT President Dan Tobin, a right-wing bureaucrat with close ties to the Roosevelt administration, tried to remove the leadership of the local because of the their militant class struggle policy and opposition to US imperialism’s entry into World War II.

Tobin sent 300 thugs to Minneapolis to cruise through the warehouse district beating up 544 members wearing CIO buttons and forcing them at knife and gun point to sign AFL pledge cards. Minneapolis trucking bosses withheld paychecks for those workers who refused to sign up with the AFL and fired the most militant workers.

Because this campaign of intimidation failed to bring the local into line, the Roosevelt administration directly intervened, while the capitalist press launched a hysterical witchhunt against the 544 leaders. On July 1, a grand jury was convened to hear trumped up charges and lay the basis for a frame-up of the SWP and 544 leaders in order to silence them and ultimately outlaw the SWP as a party.

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100 years ago: Mass strike in Germany over Liebknecht conviction

Responding to the secret trial and conviction of Karl Liebknecht for his revolutionary opposition to the First World War, 55,000 workers in Berlin took strike action on June 29, 1916. The strike action started in Berlin’s large companies, but soon spread. On many job sites there was a complete walkout. The strike was a significant show of strength for the anti-war movement and is sometimes referred to as “Liebknecht’s strike.”

Liebknecht was one of the most prominent leaders of the Spartacus League, an organization of the socialist opponents of the imperialist world war that had broken out in August 1914. Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and the other leaders of the Spartacus League constituted a small minority of the German Social Democracy (SPD) who opposed the war effort of their “own” government. The vast majority of SPD leaders had betrayed the program of socialist internationalism, supporting Germany’s predatory military operations.

The internationalists were subjected to intense state persecution, with the tacit support of the SPD leadership. Luxemburg was imprisoned in 1915 for opposing the war, while Liebknecht was dispatched to the Eastern front, to collect the bodies of the dead.

Amid mass anger over the imperialist slaughter, and the associated assault on the social conditions of the working class, the Spartacus League organised a mass demonstration against the war on May 1, 1916. At the rally, which was held in Potsdam Platz, Liebknecht called upon the 10,000 workers and young people present to oppose war and take up a struggle against those responsible.

Following his speech, Liebknecht was dragged from the crowd and arrested on a number of charges. His trial was held in secret on June 28. He was found guilty of attempted high treason, and sentenced to 30 months penal servitude. Following the announcement of the sentence, mass strikes broke out in Berlin and in other centres throughout Germany. The German state reacted harshly to the strike, drafting striking workers and their suspected leaders into the military in order to suppress the action.

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