

This week in history, June 25-July 1

25 June 2018

25 years ago: Bill Clinton orders cruise missile strikes on Baghdad

June 27, 1993: The US military unleashed 23 Tomahawk cruise missiles on Baghdad, the capital city of Iraq, in what President Bill Clinton intended as a show of “toughness” against the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. At least eight civilians were killed when three of the cruise missiles slammed into a residential neighborhood in the early hours of the morning.

Among the dead were Layla al-Attar, a museum curator and well-known Iraqi painter, and most of her family. The missile struck her sister’s house, where al-Attar was living while her own home, badly damaged by US bombs in the Persian Gulf war of 1990-91, was being repaired.

The missiles were fired by two US destroyers, the USS Peterson, operating in the Red Sea, and the USS Chancellorsville, operating in the Persian Gulf. Most of the missiles struck a building identified as the headquarters of the Iraqi Intelligence Service.

The pretext for the raid was a claim by CIA officials that the Iraqi intelligence Service was responsible for an alleged assassination plot against former president George H. W. Bush during his visit to Kuwait in April 1993, which was broken up ahead of time by Kuwaiti security forces. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh subsequently reported that the explosive devices “found” by the Kuwaitis were of commonplace design and probably not even manufactured in Iraq. *Newsweek* magazine devoted its cover story to the decision-making process inside the White House which led to the murderous assault, glorifying the role of Clinton, his chief military adviser Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Vice President Gore. The magazine was given unprecedented behind-the-scenes access to chronicle the seven days that led up to the attack.

Clinton gave a television address on the raid, then slept for eight hours, pronouncing it “the best sleep I’ve had in months.” The *International Workers Bulletin* commented, “For Clinton, the former antiwar protester, killing Iraqis is all in a day’s work, barely interrupting his late-night snacks. Murdering civilians in their sleep only makes his own sleep more sound.” The IWB noted that Clinton carried out the raid largely for domestic political reasons, after weeks in which he had been ridiculed for “weakness” and “indecision” in the media.

50 years ago: The CIA begins Phoenix Program assassinations in Vietnam

Following the political debacle suffered the United States in the Vietnamese Tet Offensive (January-February 1968), Washington turned to increasingly savage and desperate measures to turn the war to their favor. A joint CIA-US Army assassination campaign called the Phoenix Program, officially launched on July 1, 1968, would lead to the death of at least 26,000 people with some estimates exceeding 40,000.

The mission of the Phoenix Program, according to the CIA, was “a set of programs that sought to attack and destroy the political infrastructure of the Viet Cong.” But in reality, it was a systematic policy of terrorism carried out against the civilian population of South Vietnam.

South Vietnamese soldiers did most of the dirty work, but CIA and Army officials oversaw and participated in various forms of torture and assassinations. The main purpose of the program was to collect intelligence on suspected members of the Viet Cong then “neutralize” them, which could mean imprisonment and torture, or assassination, or both.

The methods used by the Phoenix operatives were as unsophisticated as they were brutal. Supposedly, before “neutralizing” a suspected communist, the US-South Vietnamese forces were required to obtain three separate sources of evidence. But the real practice involved grabbing random civilians and forcing them to point out the house of known Viet Cong members.

Victims of the random selection would often be too afraid to openly finger their neighbors. The solution the Phoenix Program came up with was to put a bag cut with eye holes over the head of a villager and pull him or her around the village with a leash around their neck. Then he or she would be instructed to scratch their head when walking by the house of a communist.

According to the account of Lieutenant Vincent Okamoto, after a house was selected, “that night Phoenix would come back, knock on the door, and say, ‘April Fool, motherfucker.’ Whoever answered the door would get wasted. As far as they were concerned whoever answered was a Communist, including family members. Sometimes they’d come back to camp with ears to prove that they killed people.”

Those dragged off to torture suffered beatings, rape, electrocution, dog attacks, and in some cases were thrown alive out of helicopters. The methods of the US government under the Phoenix Program rivaled the methods of the Nazi Gestapo and Stalin’s KGB.

75 years ago: Uprising of Jewish workers in Poland drowned in blood by the Nazis

On June 25, 1943, Jewish workers and youth launched a heroic uprising against their Nazi jailers in the Cz?stochowa Ghetto in German-occupied Poland. The rebellion, like similar struggles against Third Reich troops earlier in the year, was viciously suppressed. However, it served to inspire workers throughout Europe engaged in a life-and-death battle against the fascist powers.

The Cz?stochowa Ghetto had been established in April 1941, in the aftermath of the German invasion and occupation of Poland. Located in an area with a large Jewish population, it served as a slave labor camp for the Nazi regime's munitions and other war goods manufacture.

Resistance had been mounted to the fascist troops in January, 1943, in the larger of the two centers in the ghetto. Young Jewish workers had taken on Nazi forces seeking to deport 500 of the ghetto's inhabitants to their deaths in the gas chambers. Fifty of them were executed in reprisal killings.

On June 25, a full-scale uprising was launched by the Organization of Jewish Fighters, a political group that had prepared for resistance to the planned liquidation of the ghetto's inhabitants. The Jewish fighters were outmanned and outgunned. Some 1,500 of them were killed in the first stages of the fighting. Another 500 were burned to death or buried alive, as Nazi troops razed much of the ghetto. In the aftermath of the defeat of the uprising on June 30, some 3,900 people were taken into custody and dispatched to other camps, many of them to their deaths.

The fighters in Cz?stochowa had been inspired by the insurgents who had carried out the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April-May 1943. That struggle concluded with the destruction of the ghetto in Poland's capital, and the brutal murder of over 56,000 Jews by Hitler's SS.

Jewish workers and youth were locked in a desperate struggle against the Nazi regime's Final Solution. Their fight against the Third Reich's attempts to annihilate European Jewry received no support from Britain, France, the US, and the other Allied powers, who, while claiming to be waging a war for democracy, did nothing to stop the transfer of Jews to their deaths in fascist concentration camps, and blocked their own borders to refugees fleeing the slaughter.

100 years ago: Soviet government nationalizes basic industries

A decree of June 28, 1918, by the Soviet Council of People's Commissars nationalized all mining, engineering, textile, electrical, wood, tobacco, glass, ceramics, leather, rubber, cement and transport industries worth over half a million rubles. This and the state control of agricultural supply to the cities mark the beginning of the phase of Soviet rule known as War Communism. The decree of June 28, however, was also the first in a series of nationalizations in 1918 that laid the initial foundations for a socialist economy.

The immediate goal of the decree was to stop the collapse of industry and sabotage by its capitalist owners as the

counterrevolution advanced. May and June had already seen the revolt of the Czech Legion of the former Tsarist army, the setting up of a counterrevolutionary government in Samara (Komuch), the invasion of the Russian territory by imperialist forces and the spread of famine and cholera throughout the regions of Russia controlled by the Soviets.

Industrial output was a fraction of what it had been in 1913 and workers were living in miserable conditions. By April 1918, 46 percent of industrial workers were unemployed. Every basic necessity from food to fuel to clothing was in short supply.

The industries nationalized were to be managed by the Supreme Council of National Economy (Vesenkha), which, at the time, was headed by the Old Bolshevik Alexi Rykov. According to Victor Serge (*Year One of the Russian Revolution*), many of these industries had to be leased back to their owners and the government ordered that "technical staff and directors remain in office, appointed by the state and responsible to it. Any case of desertion of duty was to be punished by revolutionary tribunals."

The use of specialists and technical staff from the old regime—which Lenin and Trotsky believed was necessary—would begin one of the significant controversies inside the Communist Party over the next months and years about the leadership of the industrial management of the Soviet state and of the officer corps in the Red Army.

The nationalization of industry, begun in a moment of direst need in the hardest days of the Revolution, was not merely an expedient but the manifestation of the long-worked-out political strategy of the permanent revolution developed by Trotsky after the 1905 revolution and embraced in practice by Lenin after his return to Russia in April 1917. As Trotsky wrote in his *Results and Prospects* (1906): "Collectivism will become not only the inevitable way forward from the position in which the party in power will find itself but will also be a means of preserving this position with the support of the proletariat."



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