This week in history: March 18-24

18 March 2019

25 years ago: Workers Inquiry into the death of Aboriginal youth Daniel Yock

On March 19, 1994, the Socialist Labor League, Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, held a Workers Inquiry into the Death of Daniel Yock in Brisbane. The hearing was the first event organized independently and carried out by the working class exposing the truth about a state killing in Australia in two centuries.

Daniel Yock was an 18-year-old unemployed aboriginal youth who was murdered by police on November 7, 1993. The Labor government, media, police, and the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) all worked to lie and cover up the truth about Yock's death. In spite of intimidation by the government and police to shut it down, the hearing proceeded, lasting over seven hours and reviewing evidence assembled during the preceding months.

The first witness at the hearing was Peter Symonds, a journalist for the *Workers News*, the SLL publication, who presented evidence from eyewitness testimonials and medical records, establishing that police chased Yock and tackled him to the ground, rendering him unconscious—from either a blow to the head, passing out, or fainting from being attacked. The police then handcuffed him face-down, restricting his airway further so he could not breathe. He died from a lack of oxygen as a result.

While Yock's friends attempted to assist him, the police refused to allow them to help and ignored their requests for immediate medical care. His body was dumped into the back of a paddy wagon and he was announced dead on arrival at the hospital a half hour later. Yock's friend Joseph Blair, who was also locked up in the back of the van, described how Yock remained unconscious with eyes rolled back in his head the entire ride to the hospital, in spite of his attempts to resuscitate his friend.

Lyndell Turbane, manager of the Oxford Street Aboriginal Hostel near where Yock was killed, testified at the inquiry that his death was part of a growing campaign by police to intimidate, harass and terrorize the Aboriginal youth. She also testified that in the days leading up to the inquiry, police photographed her house in a final attempt to prevent her from speaking publicly.

Together witnesses revealed the cover-up of the murder at the highest level, implicating the Labor-controlled state government and the CJC. Before a CJC inquiry was even announced, and within hours of Yock's death, a CJC official was already at the hospital. Dr. Holman Koops gave expert medical testimony, showing that no evidence existed to corroborate the claims by the government that Yock died as a result of a rare heart condition, known as a Stokes-Adams attack.

50 years ago: British police and troops stage "invasion" of Anguilla

On March 18, 1969, England sent just under 300 paratroopers and special police forces to the small Caribbean island of Anguilla. The British encountered no resistance and immediately brought the island under their control. After some confusion, they were welcomed by leaders who had opposed the consolidation of Anguilla with St. Kitts and Nevis in 1967 in a single independent state, dominated by St. Kitts, the most populous of the three islands.

The consolidation was proposed by the British for administrative convenience, despite the separation between St. Kitts and Nevis, to the south, and Anguilla to the north, with the Dutch-controlled island of St. Maartens and the French colony St. Barthelemy in between. The control of the various Caribbean islands by different imperial powers—Britain, France, the Netherlands and Spain—dates back to the wars of the 17th and 18th centuries, which left an economically and socially irrational patchwork of rule along the island chain.

In the nominally independent St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, with a total population at the time of less than 50,000, the central government of the new nation was based in St. Kitts, while Anguilla only held one seat in the parliament. One of the poorest Caribbean islands, Anguilla had requested resources from the St. Kitts leadership to build new schools, an electric grid, and a port for large cargo ships so critical imports could be delivered directly to the island. The proposals for schools and the electric grid were denied by St. Kitts because they would not generate profits. Funds were made available for the port, but it was built on St. Kitts and simply named "Port of Anguilla."

Just three months after the formation of the three-island nation, the local Anguillan elite declared their independence from St. Kitts and forced the 17 central government police officers to leave. They did not seek independence for their microstate, but rather readmission to British rule as a dependent colony. For the next three years St. Kitts and the provisional Anguillan government would exchange threats of war. However, neither country possessed forces large enough to carry out their threats.

A press campaign in Britain claimed that Anguilla was now being run by the American mafia and radical advocates of "black power." The force of paratroopers assembled were under the

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impression that they would be met with armed militia forces. Instead, they met only reporters and unarmed civilian onlookers. Not a shot was fired. The island was officially re-admitted as a British territory in 1971.

75 years ago: Nazi troops occupy Hungary

On March 19, 1944, eight German divisions entered Hungary to carry out Operation Margarethe, ordered by Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler earlier in the month. The occupation was aimed at preventing the authoritarian regime of Miklós Horthy from signing a separate peace with the Allied powers, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Initially not part of the German-dominated Axis, Horthy's regime had participated in a number of German-led operations throughout the Second World War, including against other Eastern European states and the Soviet Union. Horthy sought to expand Hungarian territory in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In 1941, he declared war on the Soviet Union.

In January 1943, following their victory in the Battle of Stalingrad, Soviet troops obliterated the Second Hungarian Army near the Don River. Hungary suffered at least 80,000 military casualties, heightening calls for an end to the war effort. The Horthy regime, collaborating closely with Hitler, responded by murdering thousands of Hungarian Jews. At the same time, the government began exploring contacts with the Allied powers.

In early 1944, representatives of Horthy's regime contacted the Allies, and declared their willingness to surrender unconditionally in the event of military defeat. They were fearful of a Soviet occupation of the country.

Hitler responded by summoning Horthy to a conference at the Klessheim Castle near Salzburg, Germany. The conference was a ruse, with German preparations for an invasion and occupation of Hungary already underway. Horthy returned to a Hungary under effective Nazi control. He was instructed to dismiss Prime Minister Miklós Kállay and appoint a new government. He appointed General Döme Sztójay as prime minister.

Among the first actions of the new government was to place Hungary's remaining Jews at the "disposal" of the Third Reich and to pass further anti-Jewish legislation. Over the following period, Jews were rounded up and deported to the Nazi death camps at Auschwitz and elsewhere in German-controlled territory. Up to 14,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz per day to be killed.

100 years ago: Soviet republic declared in Hungary

On March 21, 1919, the Hungarian Communist Party, which had recently united with the Social Democratic Party, declared a Soviet republic in Budapest. Communist leaders were released from prison and the unified Socialist Party proceeded to form a government of 13 and later 16 ministries, with Bela Kun as Commissar of Foreign Affairs.

The liberal government of Mihály Karolyi collapsed under the combined threat of famine and invasion from the French and Romanians. Karolyi's Hungarian People's Republic, which had been established in October 1918, was one of the successor states to the Austro-Hungarian empire, which had disintegrated in the aftermath of the Allied offensive of October and November, and the surrender of Germany on November 11. Contending nationalist incursions from the Czechoslovaks to the north and Serbs and Croats to the south also threatened to dismember the country.

On March 20, 1919, Karolyi announced that only the Social Democrats could rule because of their close ties with an insurgent workers' movement that had allied itself with returning soldiers, especially in the capital of Budapest, and begun to form itself into workers councils (soviets). What he did not know is that the Social Democrats had fused with the newly formed Hungarian Communist Party, led by Bela Kun, who had become a Bolshevik while he was interned as a prisoner of war in Russia. The Communist Party already held the allegiance of the most militant and politically educated workers in Budapest.

As Lenin noted: "The Hungarian bourgeoisie admitted to the world that it resigned voluntarily and that the only power in the world capable of guiding the nation in a moment of crisis was Soviet power."

Mass movements and revolutions had swept central Europe in the aftermath of the first World War. In Germany, revolutionary workers were suppressed by the proto-fascist Freikorps who also murdered socialist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. A Bavarian Soviet Republic would be declared in April 1919.

The Hungarian Soviet government formed a Red Army that scored some success against the Czechoslovaks in the north but was led by the old officer corps that had existed under the Austro-Hungarian empire. The government made serious mistakes in its agrarian policy, refusing to break up the large landed estates that it had nationalized and distribute the land to the peasantry. The peasantry turned against the Soviet government, which was unable to supply grain to the cities.

Most of all, the Social Democrats in the government, united in the same party with the Communists, played a disorganizing role and sought to capitulate to the enemies of the Soviet republic at every point. They finally surrendered to an imperialist ultimatum from the Paris Peace Conference to renegotiate the borders of Hungary. The Hungarian Soviet regime collapsed in July, leaving a rump Social Democratic government.

By August the Romanian Army took Budapest and a White Terror ensued, led by Admiral Horthy, that can best be described as barbaric. The Whites tortured, murdered and imprisoned thousands of workers, Communist and Social Democratic alike.

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