

This week in history: April 22-28

22 April 2019

25 years ago: Raboteau massacre ignites renewed threats of US military action in Haiti

On April 22, 1994, soldiers and paramilitary forces raided the Raboteau neighborhood of Gonaïves, Haiti, executing residents thought to be in support of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted in a 1991 military coup. Soldiers went door-to-door rounding up, arresting and beating residents, including children and the elderly. Anyone who fled was shot on the spot.

While human rights groups acknowledged that eight to 15 people were killed, and journalists placed the death count closer to 30, the official number never reached higher than six. The military did not allow families to collect bodies in order to prevent an exact death toll from being reported.

US special envoy Lawrence Pezzullo announced his resignation later the same week, writing to Secretary of State Warren Christopher to voice his “grave concern that we are heading down a path toward unilateral military intervention in Haiti.”

Washington previously pushed economic sanctions against Haiti through the United Nations Security Council, which included a ban on flights, asset freezing, and tightening an existing embargo on goods entering the country. In addition, an unnamed senior official in the Clinton administration confirmed to the press that the US president was considering military action against junta leader Lt. Gen. Raoul Cedras if the Haitian government failed to respond to these sanctions.

Open divisions between different factions of the ruling class emerged. Pentagon and State Department officials warned against military intervention, drawing comparisons with the “humanitarian mission” debacle in Somalia; others, like influential Democratic Congressman David Obey, called for a Panama-style invasion of Haiti, with Washington justifying military operations on the pretext of removing the military dictatorship. Obey explicitly called for new elections in Haiti as opposed to restoring Aristide to the presidency.

US capital accounted for 95 percent of all foreign investment in Haiti. All the disputing parties in Washington agreed on the necessity of a regime capable of suppressing the working class in order to protect its economic interests, regardless of whether or not Aristide was in charge.

50 years ago: De Gaulle resigns after losing French referendum vote

On April 28, 1969, the 78-year-old former general Charles de Gaulle ended his ten-year rule as president of France. The resignation came after the French population rejected de Gaulle’s proposals for changes to the constitution in a referendum vote, with about 12 million voting against the referendum and 10.5 million voting in favor.

The referendum essentially served as a vote of confidence in de Gaulle’s government, especially after he pledged to resign if the country did not vote yes. After the crisis in May and June of 1968, when France was on the verge of revolution, French workers and students felt massive resentment for de Gaulle’s right-wing government.

Gaullist parties had won the great majority of seats in parliament following the 1968 crisis, but this was largely because of the right-wing role of the Communist Party of France (PCF), which blocked any revolutionary outcome for the crisis. After the Stalinists called off the May-June general strike, de Gaulle pressed forward with widespread repression of political opposition to ensure the survival of French capitalism, including banning the French Trotskyist movement.

The constitutional referendum itself had two main features. First was to decentralize the French government and give more powers to the local regions. The second was to make changes limiting the powers of the French Senate (the upper house) and giving full ability to make laws and declare war to the National Assembly.

Included in the Senate changes was the allocation of 146 seats to represent “economic, social and cultural activities.” These seats were not elected, but appointed by the state-approved representatives of certain sections of the population. For example, 42 seats in the senate were to be reserved for representatives of the working class, with the senators nominated by the trade union bureaucracies like the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), which had worked to suppress the general strike in 1968 and worked to keep French capitalism afloat.

After the country rejected these proposals and de Gaulle stepped down, Alain Poher, the president of the Senate, became the acting president of France until new elections could be held in June 1969, which were won by the right-wing Gaullist

candidate Georges Pompidou.

75 years ago: Churchill crushes uprising in Greek Middle East Army

On April 23, 1944, an uprising of the Greek Middle East Army and Navy in Egypt against the return of the Greek king to power ended in violence. Monarchist troops, under cover of darkness and backed up by British naval guns, seized key ships under control of Greek sailors. Within hours the rebellious Greek Army surrendered as well.

The uprising came as the Soviet Red Army advanced into Romania and the Greek masses, led by the partisan guerrilla movement, escalated their struggle against Hitler's occupation of Greece. The British government of Winston Churchill was determined to eliminate the Greek partisans, block socialist revolution and restore the monarchy in order to obtain Greece as a semi-colony.

The rebellion began on March 31 when petitions signed by thousands of Greek Middle East soldiers, sailors and anti-monarchist officers were presented to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos, former head of the Bank of Greece and a British puppet.

British motorized units responded by attacking the Greek Fourth Regiment and an artillery regiment. When 280 militant leaders were arrested there were protest demonstrations. Egyptian police joined British troops to arrest 50 union leaders and dock workers.

Greek soldiers responded by abducting monarchist officers, while sailors mutinied and threw their officers overboard. The rebel troops declared, "We are keeping our arms: they are destined to liberate our country." The British ambassador in Cairo told his government, "What is happening here among the Greeks is nothing less than a revolution."

British troops surrounded Greek units and starved them out despite attempts by Egyptian workers to break through barricades and supply the Greeks with food and water. The rebel troops were disarmed and imprisoned by the British in Libyan desert concentration camps for a year and a half.

100 years ago: Paris conference supports League of Nations

On April 28, 1919, a plenary session of the Paris Peace Conference, the conference staged by the victorious imperialist powers after the First World War to restabilize the world capitalist order, unanimously approved a Covenant as the basis of a League of Nations, to be formally established the following

year. With only minor amendments, the covenant had been written by the administration of American President Woodrow Wilson. Forty-five nations signed the Covenant.

Membership was open to any nation or colony that agreed to the covenant and was approved by a two-thirds majority of existing members of the league. The governing council of the league was to consist of five permanent members: the United States, Britain, France, Italy and Japan, and four members elected by an assembly of all of the League's member states.

The central goal of the League outlined in the Covenant was to suppress the type of military conflicts that had exploded into World War I. The Covenant had provisions for arms reduction and control. Any member that committed an act of war would have its economic and trade relations with other members immediately cut off and a process for common military action was outlined. The pact forbade secret treaties between member states, but did not, however, dictate the size of national armies.

The Covenant was an expressly imperialist agreement, stating that peoples "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world," should "be entrusted to advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience, or their geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility." The Monroe Doctrine, which gave American imperialism control over the Western Hemisphere, was singled out for approval and the control of Britain and France over the former overseas territories of the German and Ottoman empires was implicitly supported.

The Japanese had proposed a clause supporting racial equality in the Covenant, but this had been opposed by the British and Australian delegations to the Paris Peace Conference and was not included in the final draft.

The *New York Times* celebrated the news of the signing of the Covenant "under conditions of the greatest harmony" on its front page. The newspaper expressed relief that a world government "super-state" had not been created and that American interests were guaranteed.

Shortly before the ratification of the Covenant, Leon Trotsky remarked on the real significance of the League of Nations:

"The victor governments are heatedly discussing how to get hold of their booty, how to divide and how to safeguard this booty from the social revolution—not only their new booty but also their old booty, namely, their capital and profits. For this purpose Wilson put forward the idea of a 'League of Nations', that is, an alliance of capitalist governments to protect exploitation."



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