

This week in history: June 3-9

3 June 2019

25 years ago: OECD calls for deeper attack on the working class

On June 7-8, 1994, finance, trade and labor ministers met in Paris at the annual conference of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to discuss and agree upon a draft report of the organization. After two years of study, the organization concluded that recovery in the business cycle was not enough to significantly reduce unemployment rates, which had climbed to 35 million among the member countries.

The “flexibility” of the labor force had already been discussed and come under attack earlier in the year, with US President Bill Clinton declaring weeks earlier that workers would have to adjust to working “seven or eight” jobs in the course of their careers. In other words, workers no longer held the right to a long-term and decent-paying job. The restructuring of the workforce in order to accommodate big business and increase profitability included expanding the use of part-time and contract labor, forced early retirement for higher-paid workers, lowering the minimum wage, and reducing fringe benefits in order to make it easier to fire workers.

The OECD study attacked “quasi-permanent income support in many countries” and added that minimum wages “often end up damaging opportunities for unskilled labor.” While the “success” of the American economy was touted as a model of job creation, Labor Secretary Robert Reich also noted that the “long-term trend is toward a widening gap between the top and the bottom of the income ladder.” Other reports noted a steady decline in wages for less educated and low-skill workers.

Emboldened by the official labor movements, who had fully integrated themselves into the corporations and management, the bankers and capitalists used the OECD conference as an opportunity to blatantly spell out what would be required in order to maintain profits and satisfy Wall Street.

Set up in 1948 as part of the reconstruction of capitalism in Western Europe under the Marshall Plan, the OECD expanded beyond Western Europe from the 1960s to include

25 countries. Its membership consisted of the US, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and 19 European countries, until the entry of Mexico in 1994. Former Stalinist countries in Eastern Europe were admitted entry later in the decade, following the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union.

50 years ago: Nixon announces token Vietnam troop withdrawal

Amidst great fanfare, President Richard Nixon announced June 8, 1969 that 25,000 US soldiers would be withdrawn from South Vietnam by the end of August, out of a total force of 540,000. The statement followed a meeting between Nixon and South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu on Midway Island in the Pacific. Both presidents stressed that the US troops would be replaced in the field by South Vietnamese troops. More soldiers, Nixon said, would be withdrawn by the end of the year.

Following a five-hour conference Nixon and his Saigon puppet issued a vaguely worded joint statement on the conduct of the war and the Paris negotiations. Differences had developed over the possibility of a coalition government with the National Liberation Front. Privately, Thieu accused the US of preparing to abandon his government for the sake of a face-saving deal with Hanoi.

Differences had also arisen over Thieu’s domestic policy. During April and May the Nixon administration had withheld \$40 million in economic aid to the South while it continued discussions with the Thieu regime over policies to curb rampant inflation, much of it fueled by rampant corruption. Saigon reluctantly agreed to curb the import of luxury items and to increase imports of fertilizer and machinery.

At the meeting Nixon and Thieu also discussed strategy for keeping Thieu’s faction in power in the 1970 South Vietnamese elections. The major concern was whether the NLF would be allowed to freely run candidates. Thieu expressed worry that the outcome was not certain and that in South Vietnam, “many politicians were holding themselves

available for a coalition government with the NLF.”

The token troop withdrawal provided window dressing for what was in fact an escalation of US military operations in Vietnam. While it had halted the bombing of the North, the US had increased bombing in the South. This included carpet-bombing raids carried out by B-52s. Nixon had meanwhile initiated a secret bombing campaign against NLF bases in Cambodia.

There continued to be heavy fighting on the ground. US casualties averaged between 300-400 per week. During one week in May the US suffered 453 killed. The toll included losses inflicted on US Marines attacking NLF defenders on Aphibia Mountain (Hamburger Hill).

75 years ago: Allied powers launch D-Day landings in Normandy

On June 6, 1944, Allied forces, led by Britain and the United States, landed at several locations in Normandy, France, in the opening shot of their successful invasion of Nazi-occupied western Europe. The landings, dubbed as D-Day, took place amid a deepening crisis of Hitler’s Third Reich, amid major military defeats on the eastern front and a growing internal crisis of the fascist regimes.

Before the landing began, the Allies conducted a major naval and aerial bombardment of fortifications built by the Germans along the Normandy coast in anticipation of an invasion. After the area had been cleared, some 24,000 British, US and Canadian troops were parachuted into the region, a little after midnight on June 6. Their aim was to help secure a beachhead for the upcoming mass amphibious landing.

Early that morning, armored and infantry forces began disembarking from military ships. Tanks and other military vehicles, along with large reserves of munitions, were also brought ashore. The operation involved 160,000 troops, almost 5,000 assault and landing craft, 277 minesweepers and 289 escort vehicles. It was the largest seaborne invasion in history.

On the first day of the landing, Allied troops came under heavy fire from fortified German positions on cliffs and hills overlooking the beaches. German troops had erected a variety of obstacles, including mines and barbed wire, in a bid to hamper the invasion.

On the first day, the Allied troops failed to secure their objectives of linking the five beachheads, and capturing a number of strategically critical neighboring towns and villages. Over 4,000 Allied troops were killed, with up to

6,000 more wounded. German casualties were over 4,000. As many as 3,000 civilians were killed or injured.

The beachheads were ultimately connected and a successful push outwards from the coast began. By the end of June, 875,000 Allied troops had landed. Over the following weeks, Allied forces made a series of advances, fortifying their position and creating the conditions for a broader offensive against German troops.

100 years ago: British troops shoot protesters on Malta

On June 7, 1919, British troops fired into a crowd of protesters in front of a newspaper office in Valletta, the capital of the Mediterranean island of Malta, a British protectorate since 1800, injuring about 50 people and killing three.

British troops had been called in to control thousands of nationalist protesters in front of and in the vicinity of the second meeting of the Maltese National Assembly, which was dominated by contending nationalist factions that wanted independence from the British, and, in some cases, unification with Italy.

The period after World War I had seen inflation and unemployment rise and widespread suspicion by the Maltese population of food profiteering. On May 16, nationalist university students held an anti-British demonstration.

On June 7, the crowd broke into government offices and tore down British flags and Maltese flags because they displayed British symbols. As the wounded were brought into the meeting of the National Assembly, British troops were persuaded to withdraw, but rioting continued throughout the day.

The next day, the colonial authorities imposed press censorship, and, after an attack on the house of an owner of a flour mill, British Marines were deployed and cleared the streets. One marine bayoneted a protestor who died the next week from his wounds. Malta was granted governance over local affairs in 1921 but did not become an independent state until 1964. The massacre of “Sette Giugno” (June 7) became an occasion for fascist agitation for Italian imperialist ambitions in the 1930s and is today a national holiday in Malta.



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