This week in history: July 29-August 4

29 July 2019

25 years ago: Democratic governor orders triple execution in Arkansas

On August 3, 1994, the state of Arkansas put three men to death in less than three hours, the first triple execution in the United States in 32 years. Under Democratic Governor Jim Guy Tucker, the injections began at 7 p.m. in a small room at the Cummins Unit of the state prison system and were repeated at one-hour intervals. The order was changed when a federal court temporarily stayed the execution of the man scheduled to die second in line.

Hoyt Frank Clines, 37; James William Holmes, 37; and Darryl V. Richley, 43, were sentenced to death for murdering a prominent businessman in 1981. None of the men had any last words, but in their final joint appeal they argued that the mass execution reduced human beings to "hogs at the slaughter."

Officials at the Arkansas Correction Department justified the triple execution on the grounds that it was more efficient and provided less strain on prison employees than individual deaths. Alan Ables, a department spokesman, claimed, "Nobody wants to get up in the morning and go kill somebody."

The director of the Capital Punishment Project for the American Civil Liberties Union, Diann Rust-Tierney, said, "To take mass execution as a model of efficiency only underscores how out of step we are with the rest of the world."

"It's nice to be criticized for being efficient," Ables responded. "The people that are involved in this are very concerned that what they do is proper, done professionally and with decorum. They want this to go well."

The increased recourse to the death penalty represented a further sign of the shift to the right in American politics. The growing wave of state murders at that time was part of the law-and-order campaign promoted by the capitalist class and its political representatives.

The Arkansas event was a grisly expression of a general social malaise. The *International Workers Bulletin* wrote, "Neither the federal government, the government of Arkansas nor any other section of the ruling class has a solution to these problems. They can't put the jobless to work or guarantee decent living conditions, rebuild the cities or stamp out pestilence. But they can fatally inject, electrocute, gas, hang and shoot people in increasing numbers."

Jim Guy Tucker had moved up from lieutenant governor after Governor Bill Clinton won the presidential election in 1992. He won election in his own right in 1994, but was forced to resign from office in 1996 after a conviction on charges of conspiracy and mail fraud brought by Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr. In contrast to the barbarism he meted out to prisoners from the working class, this upper-class felon was given four years probation and house arrest.

50 years ago: Nazi war criminal executed for murdering thousands

Nazi SS officer Josef Blösche was executed in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) on July 29, 1969, after being convicted of participating in deporting over 300,000 Jews from Germany to the Warsaw Ghetto and personally killing over 2,000.

Blösche joined the Nazi party in 1938 and shortly after volunteered to join the *Schutzstaffel* (SS). After the invasion of Poland, he was assigned to patrol Warsaw. Later, he joined the Einsatzgruppen death squads and carried out murders in the Soviet Union.

By 1942, Blösche was sent back to Warsaw to keep order over the tens of thousands of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. The imprisoned Jews nicknamed him "Frankenstein" for his brutal treatment. Survivors of the Ghetto later recounted that Blösche would ride his bicycle through the streets and randomly kill and terrorize Jews. Others testified that he raped many women before killing them.

For his actions in retaliating against the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, Blösche was awarded the German War Merit Cross. Reports indicate that he killed over 1,000 Jews during the suppression of the uprising. In the famous photo that depicts a young Jewish boy raising his hands at the orders of Nazi guards, Blösche is seen holding a machine gun aimed at the boy.

When the Red Army liberated Poland in 1945 Blösche surrendered and was held as a prisoner of war. He was able to keep his identity a secret while he was held by the Soviets in part due to an accident that left his face scarred. In 1947 he was released and returned to his parents' home, escaping responsibility for his crimes.

Eventually in 1961, after the trial of another SS officer, Blösche was implicated as the perpetrator of hideous atrocities. After an East German police investigation eventually tracked Blösche down, he was arrested in 1967. His trial was held in April 1969 and he was found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death. Blösche was executed by a shot through the neck, the same manner most of his victims were killed.

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75 years ago: Polish resistance launches Warsaw Uprising

On August 1, 1944, the Polish underground resistance, politically dominated by the Home Army, launched an uprising against Nazi troops within the German-occupied city. The revolt was part of a national campaign, dubbed Operation Tempest, aimed at expelling the forces of the Third Reich from Polish territory. It was timed to coincide with the Soviet Red Army's Lublin-Brest Offensive, initiated in July, which was a frontal assault on German positions spanning from eastern Poland to Belarus.

On July 27, amid fighting between Nazi troops and Red Army detachments on the outskirts of the city, the Warsaw district governor Ludwig Fischer issued a call for 100,000 Polish citizens to report for work to construct fortifications to defend the German occupation regime. The order was largely ignored by ordinary people. At the same time, the Soviet Union and Polish nationalist forces, broadcast appeals for a rebellion against the Nazis.

On July 25, the Union of Polish Patriots had taken to radio airwaves, calling "on the thousands of brothers thirsting to fight, to smash the foe before he can recover from his defeat ... Every Polish homestead must become a stronghold in the struggle against the invaders ... Not a moment is to be lost."

An "Appeal to Warsaw," broadcast from Moscow on July 29 stated: "No doubt Warsaw already hears the guns of the battle which is soon to bring her liberation." It declared that Polish forces trained by the Soviet Union, and the Polish population, would "all together, with the Allied Army pursue the enemy westwards, wipe out the Hitlerite vermin from Polish land and strike a mortal blow at the beast of Prussian Imperialism."

On July 31, commanders of the Polish Home Army ordered a full mobilization against the Germans for the following day. Because of the difficulty in concealing a mass uprising, fighting broke out that evening. Over the following days, the Polish resistance captured a series of strategic positions, including a German arsenal, a power station and a major post office. They rapidly secured the upper hand in the Old Town and City Centre districts.

Nazi forces, however, were able to maintain a number of strongholds. This set the stage for a counter-action in the city boroughs of Wola and Ochota. Beginning on August 5, SS officers carried out a series of indiscriminate massacres, shooting all Polish citizens they encountered, including women, children and the elderly. As many as 50,000 were killed. In August and September, the remaining German troops would be forced to retreat, largely as a result of the actions of Red Army forces.

The Polish resistance was composed of diverse political tendencies, including left-wing and socialist partisans. The Home Army command, however, was dominated by nationalists who were in favor of establishing a capitalist republic in the wake of the war. This set the stage for clashes between the Home Army and the Soviet regime following the expulsion of the Germans from Poland.

100 years ago: Romanian troops enter Budapest

On August 3, 1919, Romanian troops entered the Hungarian capital of Budapest. The Romanians had crossed the Tisza River during the last days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on the night of July 28-29. After a battle with the Hungarian Red Army at the town of Fegyvernek, the Romanians pressed on directly to the capital.

The Hungarian Red Army, which had been formed by the Hungarian Soviet Republic after it came to power on March 21, had been demoralized by conflict between Communists and nationalist officers from the former Hapsburg army. In the north of Hungary, the nationalists had begun to desert the army after the setting up of a Slovak Soviet Republic. The Romanians had not upheld a promise by the French to halt their drive from the south. The Red Army collapsed and the Communist government of Bela Kun evacuated Budapest on August 1.

The Romanian army was largely an instrument of French imperialism, which had given an ultimatum (the "Vix Note") to the Hungarian government of Mihály Karolyi in March setting the boundaries between Romania and Hungary. Romania had initially sided with the Entente Powers in 1916, signed a treaty with Germany in May 1918 with the Central Powers after Germany occupied it, and then reentered the war on the Allied side in November, the day before the Germans surrendered.

During the Romanian occupation of Budapest, the White Guards of the future ruler of Hungary, Admiral Horthy—armed by the Romanians—began to spread terror among Jews and socialist-minded workers. The Romanians occupied most of the country.

The Allies were dissatisfied, however, with Romanian conduct during the intervention and persuaded the Romanians to operate under the command of an Allied committee for a short period. The Romanians departed Hungary in early 1920 after looting the country, taking with them 800 locomotives, 19,000 railway cars and over a third of Hungary's cattle.

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