

This week in history: June 15-21

15 June 2020

25 years ago: Chechen rebels release hostages

On June 20, 1995, Chechen rebel gunmen released the last of more than 1,000 people held hostage for five days in the Russian city of Budyonnovsk and returned to Chechnya under an agreement negotiated with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. At least 120 people died during the government's siege of the hospital, most of them killed when Russian troops tried to storm the building.

The Chechen separatists, numbering about 75, entered the city of 100,000 in south Russia, about 70 miles from the border with Chechnya, on June 14. They attacked the city hall and several police stations, killing 20 police, then seized the city's main hospital, taking prisoner all the workers and patients. Under the leadership of Shamil Basayev, the terrorists were animated by Wahhabism, the extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism promoted around the world by US ally Saudi Arabia.

The standoff was eased after Chernomyrdin ordered a ceasefire in Chechnya, including an end to air strikes, and the opening of talks with representatives of the ousted Chechnya government of Dzhokhar M. Dudayev, who was driven out of power by the Russian invasion six months earlier. Chernomyrdin also agreed to give the rebels safe passage back to Grozny, in negotiations conducted by telephone and broadcast live throughout Russia on national television.

The bloodletting in Budyonnovsk marked the transplantation onto Russian soil of the brutality and barbarism of the invasion of Chechnya by the Yeltsin regime, which had no progressive response to the forces, that, backed by sections of world imperialism, sought the dismemberment of Russia years after the restoration of capitalism throughout the Soviet Union.

The hostage crisis set the stage for new political upheavals in Moscow. Russian President Boris Yeltsin was denounced in the media for going ahead with a trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia for the G-7 summit while the lives of more than 1,000 hostages were in the balance. The Russian parliament passed a vote of no confidence in the Chernomyrdin cabinet only a day after the crisis ended. The regime responded with stepped-up repression, rounding up 2,000 Chechens living in Moscow.

50 years ago: Soviet scientist released from imprisonment

Zhores Medvedev, a leading Soviet geneticist, was freed from

his confinement in the Kaluga psychiatric hospital on June 17, 1970. He had been held in the asylum for drawing attention to serious problems in the development of scientific research in the Soviet Union. Medvedev's studies, which involved research into the aging process in plant life and agriculture, had put him into direct opposition with the Stalinist bureaucracy.

As he developed his work in genetics in the early 1960s Zhores Medvedev found that his research and findings disproved the official agriculture policy of the Soviet Union. Medvedev's work, which was based in the widely accepted body of work known as Mendelian inheritance, opposed the pseudoscientific ideas of "Lysenkoism" developed by Trofim Lysenko with the support of Joseph Stalin in the mid-1930s.

Lysenkoism was not a scientific theory but an attempt to defend the disastrous agricultural policy of Stalin. Lysenko made absurd claims that crops are "self-sacrificing" and that if they die it is to make room for more healthy crops.

Medvedev sought to expose this fraud for what it was and to set the record straight. In 1962 he wrote a history of Soviet genetics titled *The Rise and Fall of T.D. Lysenko*, in which he explained both Lysenko's scientific errors and that their origin came from the treachery of Stalinism.

The book was censored in the Soviet Union and was not allowed to be published. However, Medvedev was able to circulate his work among the Soviet scientific community. In 1969 the book was published in the United States, after which Medvedev was dismissed from his position as head of a biology laboratory.

In late May 1970, the police were sent to Medvedev's home to arrest him and commit him to a mental institution. They claimed that Medvedev was obsessed with disproving Lysenko and was mentally imbalanced.

The arrest provoked immediate opposition from scientists and academics in the Soviet Union and internationally, including physicists Andrei Sakharov, Pyotr Kapitsa and Igor Tamm and writers like Aleksandr Tvardovsky, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Vladimir Dudintsev, among others. A petition for Medvedev's release emerged in the Soviet Academy of Sciences and calls for his freedom were issued from the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC.

After his release, Medvedev continued his biological research and his criticisms of the damage done to science by the Stalinist bureaucracy. In 1972 he would accept a one-year position doing genetic research in London. Upon his departure from the Soviet Union, he was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and was forced to live the rest of his life in the United Kingdom.

Medvedev never ceased his work, publishing over 170 research papers in the course of his life. In London, he continued to warn of

the potential dangers in the anti-scientific policy of the Soviet bureaucracy. Notably, he warned that Soviet nuclear power plants should be critically investigated by scientists, foreshadowing the 1986 disaster in Chernobyl.

Zhores Medvedev was the twin brother of Soviet historian Roy Medvedev.

See also: The fate of Soviet genetics

75 years ago: Japan on the brink of defeat in World War Two

This week in June 1945, the Japanese imperial government and the country's emperor acknowledged that they were all but defeated in the Second World War. Amid military debacles throughout Southeast Asia, the collapse of their fascist allies in Italy and Germany, the imminence of the Soviet Red Army's entry into the Pacific war, and the growth of revolution throughout Asia, they floated the possibility of a surrender for the first time.

On June 18, Prime Minister Kantarō Suzuki notified the Japanese Supreme Council that Emperor Hirohito intended to seek peace with the Allies as soon as possible. Several days later, on June 22, a request from Hirohito was transmitted to the US government, declaring: "I desire that concrete plans to end the war, unhampered by existing policy, be speedily studied and that efforts made to implement them."

Over the previous three months, Japanese cities had been levelled by an unprecedented US aerial assault. The bombings of Tokyo, Nagoya and other major cities had resulted in the destruction of an estimated one-seventh of urban Japanese settlements. Hundreds of thousands of civilians had been killed, in an onslaught that involved combustible munitions designed to ignite firestorms in densely-populated areas. Industrial capacity had been obliterated, ports destroyed, and the Japanese government was compelled to acknowledge that its air force was incapable of countering further sorties.

Plans for Japanese imperial conquests throughout the region also lay in tatters. Over the previous months, US troops had secured control of much of American imperialism's former colonial possessions in the Philippines. A week earlier, US soldiers had easily ousted remaining Japanese troops from Davao, capital of the southern island of Mindanao, ensuring US domination over the southern half of the strategically-important archipelago. Japanese detachments also suffered a series of setbacks at the hands of the Australian army in the Pacific and were cut off from supplies and reinforcements by defeats further to the north.

On June 22, the US army declared victory in the Battle of Okinawa, thereby establishing a redoubt for further operations against the rest of Japan, in addition to air bases on Taiwan and in the Pacific, along with superior naval battleships and carriers.

Dominant sections of the US ruling elite were uninterested in a negotiated peace with Japan, whose prospects were clearly finished, despite desperate kamikaze attacks and attempts at resistance. The American capitalist class intended to establish its supremacy in the post-war era, and to intimidate the masses

throughout Asia and internationally, with a display of overwhelming military force. To that end, the conflict in the Pacific would conclude in August with US nuclear weapons being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a war crime of unprecedented dimensions.

100 years: Rioting between nationalists and loyalists in Northern Ireland

On June 20, 1920, five people were killed in the northern Irish city of Derry and dozens seriously wounded during riots between nationalists, who opposed British legislation to separate the six counties of northern Ireland from the 26 counties in the south, and unionists who supported it.

Neighborhoods in Derry were occupied by armed groups from both sides, and stores were looted and burnt. Rioting and exchanges of gunfire between the two groups also occurred in the city of Belfast. In both cities, heavily armed British troops moved in to quell the fighting.

The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 passed by the British parliament sought to split Ireland into two distinct parts: a north with a Protestant majority and a south with a Catholic majority. Each part was to have distinct legislatures, and both would remain parts of the United Kingdom.

However, with the development of the Irish War of Independence, a guerrilla war between nationalists and the British army in the south, the southern 26 counties formed the Irish Free State in 1922.

The formation of the Free State, which allowed the six northern counties to remain a part of the United Kingdom, sparked the Irish Civil War, fought by two factions of the nationalist movement, one in support of accepting the settlement and one against it.

The partition of Ireland and the Irish working class along sectarian lines by British imperialism, with the acquiescence of the Irish bourgeoisie in the south, was to set the stage for conflict in Northern Ireland for most of the rest of the 20th century.



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