

This week in history: June 22-28

22 June 2020

25 years ago: Germany sends troops into the Balkans

On June 26, 1995, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced the decision to deploy German troops into the Balkans for the first time since Hitler's Wehrmacht invaded the region in 1941. The intervention was directed not at resolving the Bosnian crisis, but at asserting Berlin's own power and independence from Washington.

The Kohl administration had sought for months to carry out the deployment of troops. First it advocated German military support for the United Nations peacekeeping force. Then it insisted that German participation was indispensable for what appeared to be an imminent UN withdrawal from Bosnia. Finally it began providing "logistical support" for the Rapid Reaction force set up by France and Britain.

The terms of the deployment were notable: no limits were placed on the length of the operation, the numbers of troops, or the type of weapons involved. Bonn insisted that the force be subordinated neither to the UN nor to NATO, but would remain under the command of the German Defense Ministry.

The previous July, Germany's highest court ruled that troops could participate in military operations abroad, but that deployments were required to win approval in Parliament first. Kohl had a 10-seat majority in Parliament, and two-thirds voted in favor.

The former Yugoslavia still bore scars from the German military intervention in World War II, some 54 years previously. In the Balkans, the Nazi Wehrmacht carried out a savage war of extermination, liquidating the entire Jewish population of Serbia and shooting and hanging countless Serbian civilians. German imperialism backed the creation of a separatist Croatian state run by the fascist Ustase movement. The genocidal campaign of this regime wiped out over three-quarters of a million people.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of east and west Germany, Bonn was anxious to assert its newfound strength on the world stage, taking the lead among the imperialists in the break-up of Yugoslavia.

50 years ago: Alexander Dubček expelled from the Communist Party

Alexander Dubček, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, was expelled from membership on June 26, 1970. He was removed by a vote of 7 to 4 vote in the Communist Party Central Committee. Dubček had most recently been assigned to serve as Czechoslovakia's ambassador to Turkey, a post from which he had been removed two days before his expulsion.

The expulsion of Dubček marked the end of a struggle within the Czechoslovak Communist Party between the hardline Stalinists and reformers like Dubček. This crisis had reached its height two years prior when Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 to reverse the reforms that Dubček had implemented. The Warsaw Pact invasion put an end to the mass protests of the Prague Spring.

Initially Dubček was allowed to keep his post as First Secretary, after having assured Moscow that he would not interfere with putting down the mass protest movement that emerged in the working class. However, in 1969 Dubček could not stop the "hockey riots," which saw large clashes between the working class and the occupying Soviet military, after an ice hockey match between Czechoslovakia and the USSR.

After the riots were put down, Dubček was forced to resign as First Secretary, then sent to Turkey as ambassador. Dubček was replaced as First Secretary by Gustáv Husák, whose so-called "normalization" policy reversed any reforms and purged any allies of Dubček from the Communist Party, including the four members of the Central Committee who had voted against Dubček's expulsion.

Like other Stalinists, Dubček's politics were rooted in nationalism. He hoped not for political revolution against the bureaucracy but for more national independence from Moscow and the ability to enforce Czechoslovakia's own brand of Stalinism. This included minor political concessions to the working class, while at the same time taking steps to forge closer ties with the imperialist countries and setting the stage for a restoration of capitalism.

While he was targeted by the most hardline Stalinists, Dubček offered no genuine political strategy to the workers. Dubček hid his pro-capitalist agenda behind the slogan "socialism with a human face" which appealed to the working class' desire for genuine socialism and opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy. However, without a genuine revolutionary leadership putting forward an internationalist program for political revolution, the Prague Spring movement

had no direction and eventually dissolved in the face of overwhelming military occupation.

After his expulsion Dubček would remain politically suppressed, finding work in the Slovakian Forestry Service. He would return to political life in 1989 and played a leading role in the so-called Velvet Revolution that disbanded the Communist Party, divided the country into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and oversaw their return to capitalism.

75 years ago: Victory parade in Moscow celebrates defeat of Nazi Germany

On June 24, 1945, more than 40,000 Red Army soldiers marched through Moscow in one of the largest military parades held to that point in the Soviet Union. The event marked the defeat of the German Third Reich the previous month, resulting, above all, from sweeping advances by Soviet troops throughout Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe and into Germany.

The Red Army had played the decisive role in capturing Berlin in the course of heavy street fighting in early May, prompting Hitler's suicide and the surrender of the remaining Nazi forces in early May. The Soviet forces had combined with troops from the United States and Britain, involved in the successful allied landings in France and advances into German territory from the west.

While journalists noted the inclement weather, thousands of Moscow citizens turned out to hail the efforts of the Red Army and celebrate the defeat of the fascist forces. Soviet dictator Josef Stalin did not personally attend the Moscow rally, for reasons that have yet to be fully explained. His regime had murdered the army leadership on the eve of the war, as part of its political genocide of all those who were connected to the October Revolution of 1917. The Stalinists were fearful that the anti-fascist upsurge internationally would result in renewed struggles against the privileged bureaucracy that ruled the Soviet Union.

Coinciding with the celebrations, the Stalinist regime was collaborating with Britain and the US to restabilize capitalism throughout the areas captured from the fascists, including through the brutal suppression of the working class. It was putting into effect a series of Allied pacts made prior to the conclusion of the conflict, which provided for the carving-up of Europe by the victorious parties, based on the prevention of socialist revolutions throughout the continent and internationally.

In the course of the six years of war, as many as 27 million Soviet citizens died. They included more than 10 million military fatalities, and more than 15 million civilians, who perished as a result of Nazi attacks, famine and other horrors stemming from the war.

100 years: British gunboats kill 1,000 in Turkish city of Izmit

On June 26, 1920, the British Royal Navy bombarded the city of Izmit on the shore of the Sea of Marmara, killing over 1,000 Turkish nationalist troops.

The city had been surrounded by the nationalist forces of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, fighting the Turkish War of Independence against British, French, Italian and Greek occupying forces.

Greek troops were marching northward toward Izmit from their base in Smyrna. Izmit was occupied by the British on July 6, 1920. By October, they had turned the city over to Greek troops. Izmit was finally re-taken by the Turks in June 1921.

In the aftermath of the surrender of the Ottoman Empire, a belligerent on the side of Germany during the First World War, British and French troops had occupied the Turkish capital of Constantinople in 1918. Greek, Italian and French troops occupied other parts of Turkey as well. The British and French also seized the provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East in the following months.

The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920, would divide the Ottoman Empire between the imperialist powers, and carve up the Anatolian Turkish homeland into spheres of influence, controlled by the imperialist powers or their proxies. In addition to the French, Italian and Greek areas of control, a supposedly international area, Zone of the Straits, would include the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara, including Izmit.

The imperialist powers, however, had to contend with nationalist resistance from the forces of Kemal Atatürk, which were able to push the occupying forces out of Turkey and establish a secular republic by 1923.



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