

# This week in history: June 7-13

6 June 2021

**25 years ago: Northern Ireland peace talks open in Belfast**

On June 10, 1996, all-party talks on a political settlement in Northern Ireland opened in Belfast, with Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, initially excluded and with Protestant delegates objecting to the proposed chairman of the session, former US senator and close advisor to the Clinton administration, George Mitchell.

British Prime Minister John Major and Irish Prime Minister John Bruton refused to allow Sinn Fein representatives to attend the talks, demanding assurances from the IRA that it would observe an indefinite ceasefire. The IRA broke an earlier 17-month ceasefire agreement with a series of bomb explosions in London in February earlier that year. Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein, was being urged to have the ceasefire renewed in order to continue the talks. Adams told the press he was in favor of the appointment of Mitchell.

The talks convened with delegations apportioned according to balloting June 2 which strengthened both hardline Protestant and Catholic groups. Sinn Fein won 15 percent of the vote, then its biggest ever total, while the Democratic Unionist Party of Ian Paisley won 19 percent, up from 13.1 percent in the 1992 parliamentary elections.

The most significant aspect of the new talks—the latest round in a diplomatic process which had extended over two years—was the British acceptance of an international, and especially an American, role. The discussions were presided over by a three-member international commission, chaired by Mitchell, with representatives John de Chastelain of Canada and Harri Holkeri of Finland as well.

Paisley denounced the appointment of Mitchell, a Roman Catholic and US official, as unacceptable “foreign interference” in the affairs of a “British province.” This position, the traditional attitude of London toward a US role in Irish affairs, was later that year abandoned by the Major government.

The American framework for peace was based not only on the acceptance, but on the perpetuation of religious divisions between Protestant and Catholic, in which the reactionary Unionists and the religious-nationalist Sinn Fein were accepted as the legitimate representatives of the people. The central task confronting Irish and British workers for more than a century, however, had been to throw off the competing nationalist factions and build a united socialist movement against British, and now American, imperialism.

**50 years ago: Mexican military massacres 120 student protesters**

On June 10, 1971, around 120 student protesters were gunned down in Mexico City by a paramilitary black operations group known as *Los Halcones*. The mass killing is known as the Corpus Christi Massacre or *El Halconazo*, “The Hawk Strike.”

The massacre happened in the context of immense social unrest and state repression in Mexico during the 1960s and 70s. During this period, known as the “Dirty War,” the Mexican government, with CIA training and funding, carried out a reign of terror targeting left-wing students and workers. Thousands were killed, arrested, tortured, or “disappeared.”

The Halconazo came three years after the Tlatelolco massacre when Mexican police and military opened fire on a similar demonstration where as many as 400 students were killed.

In May 1971, a strike wave emerged across several colleges including the University of Nuevo León, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and National Polytechnic Institute. Students and professors opposed cuts to education and threats to limit the autonomy of the universities to conduct research and education, as well as mounting social inequality and police-state measures.

The June 10 march was planned to build mass support for the university strikes. Hundreds of students and supporters marched and gathered at the Plaza del Zócalo to protest the government of President Luis Echeverría Álvarez.

As the students gathered, they immediately found the city in a state resembling a military occupation. Riot police, military, armored cars, and tanks lined the streets. Not long after the students had gathered and begun their protest, the CIA-trained *Halcones*, dressed in plainclothes, attacked the unarmed students, at first with bamboo sticks.

The students stood their ground and defended themselves against the beatings, at first repelling the initial assault. Then the *Halcones* unloaded rifles and machine guns from vans on the defenseless students, who could only attempt to run or hide.

The police and military surrounding the shooting stood by as the students were killed and blocked off those attempting to escape, taking many into custody who would never be seen again. Some who managed to leave the plaza attempted to take wounded students to the nearby hospital. However, *Halcones* members had gone to the hospitals to continue their brutal assault, killing some protestors while still in operating rooms.

No serious attempt to hold those responsible for the massacre has been made. Only over 30 years later, in the mid-2000s, were charges brought against former President Echeverría. However, it

was ruled by the Mexican courts that the statute of limitations had expired. In 2009, a federal court dropped the charges of mass killing against him.

## **75 years ago: Fourth International advances revolutionary perspective after World War II**

In June 1946, the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, published for the first time a resolution that it had adopted at its second international conference, held in Belgium two months earlier, titled “The New Imperialist Peace and the Building of the Parties of the Fourth International.”

The document rejected claims that the end of World War II the previous year had ushered in a new period of capitalist stability. “The war has aggravated the disorganization of capitalist economy and has destroyed the last possibilities of a relatively stable equilibrium in social and international relations,” the resolution stated.

The document analyzed the immense crisis of European capitalism, as a result of the crisis of the war, as well as the emergence of the US as the predominant imperialist power.

“Thanks to the circumstances of the war, American imperialism has effected a penetration throughout the world on a scale never before attained by any other imperialism, and it has actually become the principal manufacturer and banker of the capitalist world,” the resolution explained. While couching its policies in democratic phraseology, the American capitalist class was allying with reactionary and fascistic forces throughout Europe and around the world to head off socialist revolution.

The Fourth International noted the political radicalization of millions of workers around the world, reflected in a wave of strikes, protests and upheavals at the end of the world war. It anticipated a major intensification of the mass struggle against colonialism.

Making a balance sheet of experiences over the previous several years, the resolution stated: “Only the superficial and cowardly petty-bourgeois mind can see a refutation of our revolutionary perspective in these facts: that war did not, either during its course or immediately thereafter, bring about the revolution in Europe; that the German revolution has not taken place; that the traditional organizations, and foremost among them the Stalinist parties, have experienced a new and powerful rise.

“While recognizing that all of these facts represent so many defeats for the revolutionary proletariat, the Fourth International cannot for one moment forget that the mortal crisis of capitalism, the destruction of its equilibrium, the sharpening of all of its fundamental contradictions, constitute far more important facts, and upon them rest our revolutionary perspective and our vastly increased opportunities for building the revolutionary party.”

## **100 years ago: D.H Lawrence’s novel *Women in Love***

### **published**

On June 10, 1921, a commercial edition of D. H. Lawrence’s modernist classic, *Women in Love*, was finally published in England by Martin Secker. Lawrence had written the novel in 1916 but it had been rejected by publisher after publisher because of frank discussions of sex.

The novel concerns the emotional and sexual relationships of the Brangwen sisters, Ursula, a teacher, and Gudrin a painter, and their partners, Rupert Birkin, a school inspector, and Gerald Crich, the owner of a coal mine. The characters discuss politics and morality and have contrasting and sometimes violent relationships with each other.

The novel has been debated for decades as to whether it effectively and honestly displays the psychology of the two women, and women in general. Nevertheless, the novel has been seen as a breakthrough in attempting to deal with inner life. One critic has noted that Lawrence was “writing with a vivid, bristling immediacy that captures the freshness of sense impressions as they register upon the mind.”

A limited American edition was published in the United States, available by subscription only, in 1920, but it was almost impossible for Lawrence to get the work published in England for a wider readership. As late as 1920, Secker was proposing to put out a censored edition, in which the publisher asked Lawrence to make “two or three excisions or paraphrases in the text.” Lawrence refused and Secker published only 1,500 copies and sent few review copies.

The book still circulated and generated both praise and anger. One right-wing journal wrote, “[the] production is an obscene abomination. The police must act.” The book was not challenged on the basis of obscenity laws, although an acquaintance of Lawrence did take out a libel suit, alleging that one of the characters was based on him. Lawrence rewrote some passages and agreed to a monetary payment out of court.

A later novel of Lawrence’s, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), was the object of a famous obscenity trial, when the publisher of the full version, Penguin Books was prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act in Britain in 1959.



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