

This week in history: June 14-20

13 June 2021

25 years ago: New Democratic Party selects business ally Howard Hampton as leader

On June 21-23, 1996, the Ontario wing of Canada's New Democratic Party met in Hamilton to select a successor to former Premier Bob Rae, who headed a first-ever NDP government in Ontario that was so right-wing and anti-working class that it was overwhelmingly defeated in the 1995 provincial elections. The union-based party nonetheless moved further to the right, selecting pro-business candidate Howard Hampton as its new party leader.

The race to succeed Bob Rae, who earned the enmity of Ontario workers by becoming the errand boy for the province's Wall Street and Bay Street creditors, was significant for two reasons. First, it underscored the class gulf which separated the social democratic NDP and the trade union bureaucracy from the working class. Second, it served as the occasion for the middle-class "left" to mount a campaign to politically rehabilitate the social democrats, attempting to refurbish the NDP's credentials as a party of the working class.

The Rae NDP became the spearhead of Canadian big business's offensive against the working class through its five years in office. It slashed billions in social spending, imposed tax hikes and implemented a "social contract," which suspended the collective bargaining rights and slashed the pay of one million Ontario workers.

Up until 48 hours before the leadership ballot, three of the four contestants—Frances Larkin, Tony Slippo and Hampton—stood squarely in defense of the record of the Rae NDP government. Then, on the first day of the convention, Hampton tried to portray himself as an anti-establishment candidate.

Although as a member of Rae's cabinet, Hampton himself had voted for the "social contract," he denounced Larkin, the perceived frontrunner and Rae's hand-picked successor, for her role in its implementation. This demagoguery impressed the NDP's middle-class professionals and union bureaucrats who comprised the convention delegates, and Hampton was able to parlay it into a third ballot victory over Larkin.

Hampton's victory was a matter of appearances and not substance—an attempt to distance the NDP from Rae without altering party policy. He was considered the most right-wing of the four candidates due to his outspoken support of profit sharing, "worker co-management" and other corporatist arrangements between business and the labor bureaucracy.

50 years ago: Nixon declares "war on drugs"

On June 17, 1971, US President Richard Nixon held a nationwide address where he announced his administration would begin to carry out a "war on drugs." In his speech Nixon spent most of the time addressing opium addiction among US soldiers in Vietnam. However, the War on Drugs would be used primarily as a pretext for an international campaign to target left-wing groups and grew into a system of mass incarceration for working-class and poor Americans.

Nixon claimed that drug addiction had "assumed the dimensions of a national emergency" and asked Congress to provide \$155 million for programs to assist in enforcing narcotics legislation and some funding for rehabilitation programs. The president also stated that all US troops returning from Vietnam would have to pass a drug test or be held and forcibly sent to treatment centers.

The president presented drug use in the most ominous terms. It was a problem not just for soldiers, he claimed, but was "a tide which has swept the country in the past decade, and which afflicts both the body and soul of America." Nixon promised to "tighten the noose around the necks of drug peddlers."

The phrase "War on Drugs" was not hyperbole. The Nixon administration would begin a policy of militarized drug raids leading to thousands of arrests. The tempo of the drug war would pick up significantly in 1973 when Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to replace the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

Antiwar and black nationalist activists were heavily targeted by the drug raids. In a 1994 interview for *Harper's Magazine*, John Ehrlichman, a domestic affairs advisor to Nixon, confessed the true target of the War on Drugs, saying:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.

In later years, the war on drugs would be used as the justification to provide billions of dollars in cash and weapons to South American dictatorships, who primarily used the resources to carry out terror sweeps against left-wing guerrilla movements.

In 2011, the Global Commission on Drug Policy issued a report

condemning the war on drugs saying: “The global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world. ... Fifty years after the initiation of the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, and 40 years after President Nixon launched the US government’s war on drugs, fundamental reforms in national and global drug control policies are urgently needed.”

75 years ago: US ploy to maintain nuclear monopoly fails at UN

On June 14, 1946, the US government presented a plan to the first meeting of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC) that it claimed would result in international cooperation to prevent nuclear weapons development, thereby preventing an atomic conflict.

The US proposal was presented by financier Bernard Baruch, who told the gathering, “We are here to make a choice between the quick and the dead.” Baruch was speaking on behalf of the US administration of President Harry Truman, which had dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki less than a year before, in the first and only use of such weapons against human beings.

Under the Baruch Plan, United Nations member-states would be required to agree not to develop nuclear weapons. They would be compelled to submit to UNAEC inspection and compliance, and no country on the UN Security Council would be empowered to veto its decisions. This was presented as a step towards peace and the collaborative use of atomic development for energy supplies and other industries not related to war.

The Soviet Union called the US bluff days later, presenting a counterproposal that would have delayed the enforcement powers of UNAEC until existing nuclear weapons stocks, which only existed in America, were destroyed. Demonstrating the truth of the Soviet contention that the Baruch Plan was a cynical attempt to ensure a US nuclear monopoly, this was rejected by the Truman administration, and no agreement was ever reached.

The meeting took place amid feverish US testing of its nuclear weapons arsenal in the central Pacific Ocean. In a small area around the Bikini Atoll, whose inhabitants were removed from their homes, American imperialism detonated 27 nuclear devices between 1946 and 1958, rendering the area uninhabitable and causing immense environmental damage. This was part of an arms race that escalated with the failure to reach any agreement at the UNAEC. The Soviet Union’s atomic development projects, which had been extremely limited during World War II, were rapidly accelerated in its aftermath.

100 years ago: South China nationalist government seeks American aid

On June 16, 1921, Sun Yat-sen, the newly elected president of the Guangzhou (Canton) Republic in the south of China, appealed to American President Warren Harding for recognition of his government, even though his title as “president of China” was little acknowledged outside of his southern territorial base.

Sun had founded the Chinese nationalist movement, the Kuomintang, in 1912. By the 1920s, though, his party had been unable to unite China and form a viable national state. China was controlled by rival cliques of warlords, including those who dominated the internationally recognized Beiyang government based in Beijing, itself the object of conflict between warlord factions, as well as the growing influence of Japanese imperialism.

Sun’s government in Guangzhou controlled Guangdong province under its military governor, Chen Jiongming, who had put Sun in power, but barely held on to Guangxi province to the south, amid shifting alliances and conflicts among various local warlords.

The United States ignored Sun’s plea and refused to reply or to seat his government at a naval conference in November, despite an editorial in the *New York Times* urging that both the Beijing and Guangzhou governments be represented.

The US State Department forbade American investors to deal with the Guangzhou government, an expression of the generalized hostility in Washington to anything that smacked of revolutionary nationalism, even of the legalistic and nonthreatening variety espoused by Sun Yat-sen.

Sun would die of gall bladder cancer in 1925 without having succeeded in his goal of national unification and without ever being acknowledged by the imperialist powers as the leader of China. That would be reserved to his successor, Chiang Kai-shek, who proved himself to the imperialists by drowning in blood the 1927 Chinese Revolution.



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