

This week in history: April 17-23

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago.

16 April 2023

25 years ago: Students protest against Suharto

On April 23, 1998, students in Indonesia from seven universities marched through the streets of Jakarta despite threats of severe repression from President Suharto, who demanded that students return to their studies.

Unemployment had reached 18.7 million. Prices were soaring and continuing to increase during the implementation of IMF demands for the ending of price subsidies on basic commodities. An estimated 7.5 million Indonesians faced acute food shortages because of a devastating drought and rising food prices.

Students became bolder than in previous demonstrations. They took to the streets in a bid to involve workers and others hit by rising levels of inflation and unemployment. Riot police and army troops were deployed to confine the demonstrations to campus grounds.

The previous weekend, violent clashes had erupted between police and students in the Indonesian cities of Jambi and Mataram, as demonstrators attempted to leave the universities and march to local parliament buildings. In the North Sumatran city of Medan, police broke into campus grounds and shot at students following three days of protests.

In the latest protests, students chanted "Lower prices!" and "Out with Suharto!" They called on drivers and bus passengers to join the demonstration. Outside Indonesian Christian University about 500 demonstrators sat down in the road, confronting hundreds of riot police with automatic rifles, batons and shields lined up nearby. Eventually they retreated back onto the campus grounds.

On the same day, students in at least seven other cities, including Bandung, Yogyakarta and Bandarlampung, took part in rallies and demonstrations demanding an end to Suharto's rule.

On the island of Bali, 12 demonstrators were injured outside the gates of Udayana University in Denpasar when police attacked a protest of about 3,000 students with batons and tear gas.

In the east Javan city of Surabaya, thousands of students held a rally on April 20 at the Adhi Tama Institute of Technology and then marched to nearby Putara Bangas University, shouting, "Reform or war!" Other protests took place in Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung and Banjarmasin, the capital of South Kalimantan province.

The Suharto dictatorship adopted a carrot-and-stick approach to the demonstrations, attempting to woo some student leaders into formal discussions while rounding up and detaining political activists and maintaining a heavy police and military presence on the streets. On April 18, a much publicized forum took place at the Jakarta fairgrounds between government ministers and a select group of students. No student representatives were present from three of Indonesia's largest and best-

known institutions: the University of Indonesia, the Bandung Institute of Technology, and Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta.

The student leaders were heavily outnumbered by senior military officers, government officials, university rectors and political and economic commentators. Those present included social affairs minister Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, chief economic minister Ginanjar Kartasasmita and armed forces head General Wiranto.

50 years ago: Kissinger announces end of the Marshall Plan

On April 23, 1973, Henry Kissinger, national security advisor to President Richard Nixon, announced that the White House would be making a shift in its foreign policy with regard to Europe, officially ending the Marshall Plan, which had been in place since 1948, three years after the end of the Second World War. The new "Kissinger Plan" would be more openly and directly focused on ensuring that the United States maintained its economic dominance over Europe.

"There have been complaints in America that Europe ignores its wider responsibilities in pursuing economic self-interest too one-sidedly and that Europe is not carrying its fair share of the burden of the common defense," Kissinger said in his speech. Announcing that Nixon would be traveling to Europe to enforce the new policy, he added that the US "proposes to its Atlantic partners that by the time the president travels to Europe toward the end of the year, we will have worked out a new Atlantic charter setting the goals for the future."

One goal of the Marshall Plan was to stimulate the economic recovery of Europe in order to provide markets for US corporations. Another was to stave off revolution. The devastation and impoverishment of millions, many of whom remained sympathetic to socialism and the ideals of the Russian Revolution, had created an atmosphere of rebellion both in Europe and America. The American ruling class decided that by allowing reforms at home and providing billions for the European recovery, the working class could be pacified.

On this basis, world trade expanded rapidly. But by 1973, the brief period of capitalist stabilization had come to an end. Over the course of the 1960s, the rebuilt industries of West Germany and Japan began to cut into American market domination, and masses of workers in Europe, the US and the world over were moving into struggle.

A statement in the *Bulletin*, the US forerunner of the *World Socialist Web Site*, explained that the Kissinger Plan for Europe meant "total submission to the economic interests of the United States," raising "the specter of barbarism that American imperialism is preparing to unleash

internationally.”

The statement continued:

The replacement of the Marshall Plan by the Kissinger Plan means that from a period dominated by the tendency toward compromise, the United States now turns toward the actual preparation of world war for the re-conquest of the workers’ states and, at the same time, civil war against the industrial working class of the advanced capitalist countries.

The statement explained that while the Marshall Plan had been required to turn Europe into a bulwark against the Soviet Union, in the new period emerging in the 1970s, American capitalism would ultimately demand “the destruction of every vestige of European capitalism’s political and economic independence.”

75 years ago: Zionists secure control of Haifa, Palestine

On April 21 and 22, 1948, the Haganah, the main Zionist paramilitary organization, carried out an ethnic cleansing operation, forcing thousands of Palestinian residents to leave their homes in the city of Haifa.

The violent attack took place in the context of the Palestinian civil war, leading up to the all-out Arab-Israeli war later in the year. As Britain moved out of its former colonial possession of Palestine, amid the crisis of its empire, Zionist organizations, backed by the United States and the United Nations, sought to establish an ethno-religious state aligned with the major imperialist powers.

Haifa, located on the Mediterranean coast, was strategically crucial. It was both a major trading port and a key military staging post. Prior to the conflict, its population was mixed, with around half of the inhabitants being Arab.

The attack on Haifa took place amid a series of increasingly violent clashes. Far-right Zionist paramilitaries were involved in massacres of Palestinian villagers and other crimes aimed at clearing out the Arab population. These included openly terrorist actions such as bombings. Palestinian resistance organizations carried out counterattacks.

Notably, the raid on Haifa was not led by the Irgun, one of the far-right Zionist paramilitaries that had recently committed war crimes. Instead, it was led by the Haganah, which was purportedly more moderate and had the backing of the main Zionist political organizations.

Five of its armed companies hit the city and Arab fighters within it in a coordinated strike on April 21. On the outskirts of the city, Zionist propaganda trucks called on residents to give up the “foreign fighters” and surrender.

A Palestinian municipal official in the city later described the scene:

Thousands of women, children and men hurried to the port district in a state of chaos and terror without precedent in the history of the Arab nation. They fled their houses to the coast, barefoot and naked, to wait for their turn to travel to Lebanon. They left their homeland, their houses, their possessions, their money, their welfare, and their trades, to surrender their dignity and their souls.

100 years ago: First issue of Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* published

On April 20, 1923, the first issue of the virulently antisemitic, pro-Nazi German newspaper *Der Stürmer* (in English, *The Stormer* or *The Attacker*), was published by Julius Streicher. It would appear weekly with only brief interruptions until the collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945.

Der Stürmer is infamous for spreading the vilest antisemitic and racist ideas through modern mass media, increasing from an initial circulation of 2,500 to nearly 500,000 by 1937. While not an official publication of the Nazi party, it played a crucial role in Nazi propaganda. It developed the racist cartoon caricature of the Jew, published semi-pornographic stories of seduction of German women by Jewish men, and promoted claims of ritual murder of Christian children by Jews. At the bottom of each issue’s front page appeared the slogan, “Die Juden sind unser Unglück!” (“The Jews are our misfortune!”)

Streicher had been an infantryman in the German army in the First World War. In the social dislocation that followed the defeat of Germany, he became a far-right activist, blaming the Jews for all of Germany’s difficulties. In 1922 he became a follower of Adolf Hitler after hearing him speak in Munich. He marched with Hitler in his abortive putsch of November 1923, became a regional official in the Nazi party after 1925, and was elected a Nazi deputy to the Reichstag in 1932.

Der Stürmer played a crucial role in legitimizing the Nazi regime after 1933 and propagandizing the German people for aggressive war and the mass extermination of the Jews, a position it called for as early as 1933 and held to ever after.

While some leading Nazis attempted to ban the paper because of its vulgarity, Hitler read it avidly and protected it.

The judgement against Streicher at the Nuremberg war crimes trials stated:

For his 25 years of speaking, writing, and preaching hatred of the Jews, Streicher was widely known as “Jew-Baiter Number One.” In his speeches and articles, week after week, month after month, he infected the German mind with the virus of anti-Semitism, and incited the German people to active persecution...

Streicher’s incitement to murder and extermination at the time when Jews in the East were being killed under the most horrible conditions clearly constitutes persecution on political and racial grounds in connection with war crimes... and constitutes a crime against humanity.

Streicher was hanged for these crimes in October 1946.



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