

## This week in history: June 19–25

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.

### 18 June 2023

#### 25 years ago: Clinton visits China

On June 25, 1998, US President Bill Clinton embarked on a nine-day visit to China, the first American president to visit that country since the Tiananmen Square massacre of anti-government protesters in 1989. While claiming “human rights” was a major focus, Clinton was accompanied by a retinue of more than 1,000 government officials and businessmen, who would participate in the backroom deal-making that was a far more important purpose of the visit. On the eve of the trip, two US telecommunications firms, Lucent Technologies and Motorola, signed deals in China collectively worth more than \$400 million.

While there were ample grounds for criticizing the anti-democratic record of the Beijing dictatorship, the position of the US government was thoroughly hypocritical. On the eve of Clinton’s arrival, the Stalinist regime rounded up many prominent dissidents. These were added to the hundreds who remained jailed from the Tiananmen Square upheaval and the hundreds of thousands imprisoned in forced labor camps.

Clinton left Washington in the midst of the uproar over his relations with Monica Lewinsky. Leading congressional Republicans, seeking to develop a new line of attack on a White House already virtually paralyzed by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and the investigation into Clinton’s sex life, had urged cancellation of the visit.

The media coverage of Clinton’s trip to China focused on such largely superficial events as his press conference with President Jiang Zemin and his speech to students at Beijing University, but the most critical discussions between the US and Chinese governments were being held outside public view and did not even involve the summit participants.

US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin was also in Beijing for talks with his Chinese counterparts: Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, Finance Minister Xiang Huaicheng and central bank chief Dai Xianglong. Rubin emerged from the talks saying he was well-pleased with the Chinese commitment to cooperate with the United States in efforts to contain the mounting financial crisis in Asia. Of particular significance, he said, was China’s pledge to maintain the stability of its currency, the yuan, or renminbi, in the face of mounting pressure for a devaluation.

The Clinton administration ended up dropping the “human rights” issue in favor of a cold-blooded and thoroughly cynical pursuit of the strategic and economic interests of American capitalism. As one Clinton adviser, former deputy Beijing chief of mission Charles W. Freeman, who was Clinton’s first assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, told the *Washington Post*, “The administration accepted that it was going to have to deal seriously with China, that China was more than a theme park for the human rights advocates and the Dalai Lama’s followers.

#### 50 years ago: 13 killed in Argentina as Juan Perón returns after 18 years of exile

On June 20, 1973, Juan Perón returned to Argentina after 18 years of exile. Upon his arrival, supporters organized a mass rally that saw millions of Argentines come out to see the former president.

Argentina was fiercely divided politically. Perón’s Justicialist Party, which had been banned by the military dictatorship until May 1973, was split into deeply hostile left and right factions. On the right were fascistic anti-communists, while the left included socialist-minded youth and the Montoneros guerrilla fighters.

In this atmosphere the right-wing Peronists launched a terrorist attack against the rally which was comprised of many left-wing elements. Snipers shot into the massive crowd killing 13 people and wounding at least 300 more.

Perón did not appear at the rally, saying later that when news of the massacre reached him he canceled his plans to speak as to “avoid further disorders.” It would later become clear that Perón was in full political support of the right-wing terror attack.

The post-World War II period in Argentina was one of immense revolutionary potential but also deep political confusion. Perón was elected president of Argentina in 1946 but was ousted by a US-backed military coup in 1955.

As president, Perón brought forward a brand of intensely nationalist politics combined with anti-imperialist and populist rhetoric. Amidst an economic boom, Perón’s government made alliances with the trade unions and allowed modest improvements to wages and living standards for workers in order to block the revolutionary strivings of the working class.

At the same time, Perón harbored fascistic views and gave asylum to many Nazi war criminals who managed to escape Germany after the war. After the military coup that ousted him from power, he spent his 18-year exile as a guest of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain.

Only one month after Perón’s return, the sitting president resigned. President Hector Campora was a close ally of Perón and was the first Peronist allowed to run in an election since the 1955 coup. He was essentially a stand-in for Perón who was still in exile at the time of the March 1973 election.

A new election was organized with no restrictions against Perón’s participation. In October 1973 at the age of 79, he would return to the presidency. His campaign consisted of building a cult of personality which included the selection of his wife, Isabel Perón, as vice president.

During his return to the presidency Perón had dropped all pretenses of entertaining any progressive social policies. He moved quickly to purge

the Montoneros and the left-wing of his party and promoted the most fascistic elements into high office.

Peron's final year in power would see the creation of the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance, a paramilitary death squad, which carried out the total destruction of the Montoneros and set out to exterminate any left-wing and socialist organizations. Peron would die in office in July 1974.

### **75 years ago: US introduces peacetime military draft amid Cold War**

On June 24, 1948, US President Harry S. Truman signed into law a bill requiring that all men between the ages of 18 and 26 register for potential military service. The legislation was implemented amid American imperialism's increasingly aggressive drive to establish its post-World War II global hegemony, including through a deepening conflict with the Soviet Union.

Commenting on the passage of the bill through the Senate the week before, which allowed it to be enacted, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party noted: "For the second time in American history the U.S. Senate has voted to establish a conscription system in peacetime. This happened first in 1940, when Washington was making active preparations to enter World War II. The 1948 conscription system is a similar proposition: a step toward war and the further militarization of the country."

Under the measure, 18-year-olds could be compelled to serve in the military for a year, while those in other age groups up to 26 could be forced to work for two years. The year before the legislation, the administration had outlined the "Truman Doctrine," under which the US government, including the military, would intervene anywhere in the world in a purported defense of "democracy" against "totalitarianism."

There were fears within the ruling elite that, in the wake of World War II, American capitalism would find difficulty in recruiting in sufficient numbers for this bellicose Cold War policy. Vast numbers of World War II veterans had returned to be confronted with the consequences of substantial inflation and the attempts of the corporations to effectively prolong a wartime pay freeze. They had been involved in major class battles against the auto companies, the packinghouses and other capitalist giants, in one of the largest upsurges of the American working class.

The SWP pointed out that while the "Republican and Democratic servants of Wall Street" were "ready to use the youth as cannon-fodder ... they take an entirely different attitude to the employers."

It pointed to the juxtaposition between the draft law, which was overwhelmingly supported in Congress, and the attempt to pass a bill that would have provided a sop to defending workers wages, writing that in the Senate

When William Langer (R.-N.D.) proposed the payment of "fair and just compensation, but not to exceed 10% on invested capital" for articles, materials, plants and other facilities received or used by the armed forces, he was overwhelmingly defeated on a voice vote. [A] second amendment, offered by W. Lee O'Daniel (D-Tex.), proposed the suspension of the draft until Congress passed a law putting a 100% tax on "abnormal" profits from contracts between employers and the armed services. This was beaten down by a vote of 81 to 8. Big profits never seem abnormal to Big Business and its political hired help.

### **100 years ago: Antisemitic tirade from Marcus Garvey after conviction and prison sentence for mail fraud**

On June 21, 1923, Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican black nationalist demagogue and leader of United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), was sentenced by a federal judge, Julian Mack, to five years in prison and a \$1,000 fine for selling shares to a ship from his Black Star Line that the line did not own yet.

He had been arrested in January 1922 on charges of mail fraud. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was intent on convicting him since he regarded Garvey as a dangerous agitator among blacks. He had been released on bail and the trial was postponed until May.

Garvey blamed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for his arrest. He traveled the country in 1922 and met with Edward Young Clarke, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, at the KKK's offices in Atlanta. As Lawrence Porter noted in his recent WWSW essay on Garvey:

The encounter between Garvey and Clarke revealed the basis of their mutual pact. It was Garvey's support for racial separation and his rejection of the struggle for equality that ingratiated him with the KKK. Klan members even began to attend UNIA meetings. Garvey called the Klan and other white supremacist groups "better friends" of his race, citing their "honesty and fair play." He concluded, "You may call me a Klansman if you will..."

At the mail fraud trial his attorney urged him to plead guilty and accept the minimum sentence, but Garvey dismissed him and insisted on defending himself, although he had no legal training. The jury convicted him on June 18 but found his three co-defendants not guilty.

When he heard his verdict, Garvey burst out in a rage condemning the Judge and the District Attorney as "damn dirty Jews." As he was brought to jail, he told a crowd of supporters that he had never intended the remarks as an insult, but he continued to rail against Jews, writing, "The peculiar and outstanding feature of the whole case is that I am being punished for the crime of the Jew, Silverstone ... who has caused the ruin of the [Black Star] company ... I was prosecuted in this by Maxwell Mattuck, another Jew, and I am to be sentenced by Judge Julian Mack, the eminent Jewish Jurist."



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