

This week in history: February 24-March 2

23 February 2025

25 years ago: New York City cops found not guilty in murder of immigrant worker Amadou Diallo

On February 25, 2000, in a grotesque travesty of justice, New York City police officers were exonerated in the brutal killing of 22-year-old immigrant worker Amadou Diallo.

Diallo immigrated to the US from Guinea with his family in 1996 and worked as a street peddler at the time of his death.

The killing took place on February 4, 1999. Four plainclothes officers—Sean Carroll, Edward McMellon, Kenneth Boss and Richard Murphy—fired 41 bullets at Diallo when he reached for his wallet to show identification. No gun was found. A total of 19 bullets hit the young man.

The capitalist justice system leveraged all the tricks of the trade to manufacture the desired outcome after grand jury charges were brought against the officers. The trial was moved to Albany, New York, over 150 miles away, under the pretext that cops could not receive a “fair trial” in the New York City—where workers experience daily police misconduct, attacks, and violation of democratic and civil rights. Moreover, the prosecution declined to cross-examine the last pro-police witness called by the defense, Dr. James J. Fyfe, whose testimony claiming that the killing was a tragic accident therefore went unchallenged.

Most damning were the actions of Judge Joseph Teresi, who influenced the jury as much as possible to produce an acquittal. Routinely laying down rulings that undermined the prosecution, at one point Teresi launched into a four-hour lecture in which he explained to the jury that three separate legal justifications could be used to find the officers not guilty. The most absurd of these rationales was Teresi’s claim that the jury could find the police innocent if they thought the cops were stopping a robbery—though no evidence pointed to this as a possibility. Attempting to evoke sympathetic emotions, the judge told jury members, “put yourselves in the officers’ shoes,” and that any “reasonable person” could have feared for his or her life.

The broader context of the case was the “tough on crime” crackdown on poor, working class communities that had been gathering speed since the 1970s under Democrats and Republicans alike. New York City had become a national model for “law-and-order” through the stop-and-frisk campaign of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, which operated on the principle that young, poor, black and immigrant men were

guilty until proven innocent.

50 years ago: Shah declares one-party state in Iran

On March 2, 1975, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi proclaimed Iran to be a one-party state. The few legal political parties, including the ruling Iran Novin Party and the loyal opposition People’s Party, were absorbed into the new sole legal political organization, the Party of Resurrection of the Iranian Nation, known as the Rastakhiz.

In his declaration, the Shah stated that the current multi-party system was failing to serve its intended purpose and needed to be abolished. He said that the system was allowing for individuals to make “shameful utterances, which in no way should be expected from an Iranian,” concluding that “[t]his situation is intolerable.”

The abolished parties were in no way independent but were directly organized by the Shah and his agents. The People’s Party, for example, existed as an “opposition” only to help dissipate resistance to the regime. All its policies were dictated directly by the Shah. Genuine opposition parties had long been abolished, including the once influential Stalinist-led party, Tudeh, illegal since 1949.

By 1975 a gathering crisis made even the sham opposition parties a threat to the Shah’s corrupt rule. The 1970s saw a serious increase in strike activity among oil workers, who threatened to shut down the extraction of the country’s most valuable resource. Protests also broke out among university students, met by the mobilization of the hated secret police. Additionally, tensions with neighboring Iraq threatened to break out into a full-scale war.

To carry out his pro-imperialist dictates, the Shah was under pressure to prevent the emergence of even the semblance of a challenge to his rule. Now, only members of Rastakhiz would be permitted to participate in the organs of the state administration. According to the Shah, admission to Rastakhiz required “loyalty to Monarchy, Iran’s constitution, and Sixth of Bahman Revolution.”

The Shah had come to power in 1953 when a CIA-backed coup toppled the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he attempted to nationalize Iran’s rich oil

supply, then owned by American and British capital. Mossadegh was imprisoned and virtually all power was turned over to the Shah.

Over the course of the next two decades the Shah would oversee a repressive state to enforce the dictates of imperialism on Iranian workers. The secret police, known as SAVAK, carried out warrantless arrest, torture, and extrajudicial killings of those suspected of political dissent.

The imposition of a one-party state was among the final efforts of the Shah to stabilize his regime as outbursts of rebellion became increasingly frequent. Just four years later he would be ousted from power by the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

75 years ago: Manhattan Project physicist Klaus Fuchs convicted of violating Britain's Official Secrets Act

On March 1, 1950, German-born physicist Klaus Fuchs, who passed on information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union, was convicted by the British government of "communicating information to a potential enemy."

Born in Germany, Fuchs emigrated to Britain after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. He worked on the top-secret Manhattan Project at the Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico from August 1944, where an international team of scientists collaborated on developing the atomic bomb for potential use by the US, led by Robert Oppenheimer. He specialized particularly in nuclear fission of the plutonium bomb.

Among the specific information Fuchs provided to the Soviets was a "sketch of the bomb and its components," the critical masses and rates of production of plutonium-239 and uranium-235, and prior knowledge of the planned "Trinity" test of the atomic bomb which took place in July 1945. He was arrested one month prior to his conviction and charged with espionage and violating the UK Official Secrets Act, for which he had signed a declaration form in 1942 after becoming a British subject.

The trial that followed resulted in a 14-year prison sentence for Fuchs. Since the Soviet Union was a wartime ally of the British at the time, Fuchs was not charged with treason, which carried the death penalty. He was, however, stripped of his British citizenship one year later. Fuchs served a total of nine years in prison, being released from Wakefield prison on June 23, 1959, for good behavior.

The conviction and trial of Fuchs was bound up with the intensification of the McCarthyite witch hunt against alleged Soviet and Communist spies spearheaded by the Truman administration in the United States. This was in turn bound up with the considerations of the Cold War, and the US-led drive to establish its global hegemony in the aftermath of the Second World War, particularly against the Soviet Union.

100 years ago: Hitler gives first public speech since release from prison

On February 27, 1925, Adolf Hitler, the Nazi leader, gave his first public speech since his release in December 1924 from Landsberg prison. He had served nine months for his leadership of the infamous Beer Hall Putsch, in which the Nazis had attempted to seize power by force in Munich, the capital city of the German state of Bavaria.

On January 4, 1925, Hitler met with the Prime Minister of Bavaria, Heinrich Held, and pledged that the Nazis would now seek power only by legal means. Held lifted the ban on the party, which had been implemented after the putsch, remarking, "This wild beast is checked. We can now afford to loosen the chains." The Nazis reconstituted themselves as a legal party on February 16, calling themselves the Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei (National Socialist Freedom Party).

Hitler's speech took place once again in a Munich beerhall before an audience of 4,000, with a crowd of 1,000 outside waiting to get in. One historian describes the scene:

"Hitler strode down the aisle and was greeted by cheers and wild applause. In his speech he reclaimed his role as the sole leader of the Nazi party. 'I alone led the movement and no one makes conditions for me so long as I personally assume all responsibility. And I unconditionally assume responsibility for everything that happens in the movement.'

"No one in the crowd challenged Hitler's authority; quite the contrary. When he had finished even some of those who had questioned his methods in the past surged forward to pledge their allegiance."

The Bavarian state, was however, alarmed by Hitler's speech and limited him to speaking before small audiences. Hitler did not contest this restriction and immediately began speaking at private homes and clubs throughout Bavaria, rebuilding the party.



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