

This week in history: June 16-22

15 June 2025

25 years ago: 58 Chinese migrants found dead in the United Kingdom

On June 18, 2000, customs officials at the port of Dover, United Kingdom found the bodies of 58 Chinese migrants in a 60-foot, airtight truck container carrying crates of tomatoes and produce. The air vents accidentally shut during the 18-hour journey suffocating those inside. Only two people survived, clinging to the truck's trailer door and gasping for breath in temperatures rising to 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32.2 Celsius).

The gruesome discovery, according to officials, was like a “nightmare” and the stench of rotting flesh unbearable. British officials arrested the driver, Perry Wacker of Rotterdam, Netherlands. A Dutch shipping company, Van Der Spek Transporten, had registered the vehicle only five days before the uncovering of the bodies, and had embarked from the port of Zeebrugge, Belgium.

Trying to escape grinding poverty and oppression, the 60 immigrants paid upwards of \$30,000 in the form of cash and indentured servitude to travel from the southern Chinese province of Fujian to Britain, where the largest Chinese population in Europe lived. To pay off their debt, Chinese immigrants worked in British sweatshops and low-paying restaurant jobs or as prostitutes upon arrival. Any extra money would be sent back home to family members.

The death of these immigrant workers was a political indictment of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the resulting brutal social conditions. For many years, the CCP encouraged private enterprises and dismantled state-owned industries and social spending. Emigration from China increased. Roughly 1,000 Chinese sought asylum every year in Western countries, mostly in Britain. Only 5 percent were successful in their asylum claims.

The Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair exploited the tragic death of 58 people to crack down on immigrants looking for an escape from poverty and destitution. The UK government, an accomplice in the crime, enacted tougher penalties and fines on unwitting truck drivers carrying immigrants and installed more checkpoints to search for stowaways.

The UK and the other capitalist “democracies” pushed through several measures to prohibit asylum seekers from entering their countries. Blair’s government had jailed around 1,000 asylum seekers for supposedly traveling with false papers. Without any recourse to legally migrate, criminal gangs and traffickers stood in as middle-men in the human trafficking trade. A UK Immigration and Nationality Directorate memorandum stated that gangs were

charging almost 16,000 pounds per migrant smuggled from the China to the UK.

50 years ago: Organized crime boss and key witness to CIA crimes assassinated

On June 19, 1975, Sam Giancana, the head of the organized crime syndicate known as the “Chicago Outfit,” was murdered in his home in Oak Park, Illinois. An assailant shot him once in the back of the head and six more times in the face and neck with a pistol. The killing occurred just days before Giancana was scheduled to testify before the Church Committee, a Senate investigation into criminal activity and other conspiracies against the public committed by the CIA.

The assassination of Giancana was a desperate attempt to cover up the alliance between US intelligence agencies and organized crime. During the Kennedy administration, the CIA actively recruited members of the Mafia for various plots, including to assassinate Cuban president Fidel Castro. Declassified documents confirm that in September 1960, the CIA, through ex-FBI agent and contractor Robert Maheu, enlisted mobsters Johnny Roselli, Santo Trafficante Jr., and Sam Giancana for this purpose.

The CIA offered \$150,000 for Castro’s assassination. Giancana proposed using poison pills, which the CIA supplied, to be placed in Castro’s food by a Cuban official with access to him. This collaboration was known at the highest levels of government. Another investigation into CIA activities, the Rockefeller Commission, reported that Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy had informed the FBI of the CIA’s plan to approach Giancana.

As repayment for carrying out their dirty work, the CIA performed favors for its mob associates, including wiretapping Giancana’s personal enemies. When law enforcement uncovered the wiretap, Robert Kennedy personally intervened at the CIA’s request to halt the prosecution of the individuals involved. Giancana is reported to have described the CIA and organized crime as “different sides of the same coin.”

The 1975 Church Committee was the most public investigation of US intelligence agencies ever conducted, uncovering widespread abuses including assassination plots against foreign leaders. While already damning, the testimony of Giancana had the potential to reveal far more about the government’s relationship with criminal organizations than the ruling class was willing to permit. Johnny Roselli, another member of Giancana’s gang, was murdered in August 1976 not long after testifying to the

Committee.

Giancana's murder remains unsolved. Most “official” reports issued by police investigations suggest that Giancana was killed by members of his own organization as retribution for testifying. However, this is contradicted by the fact that a grand jury was preparing to indict Giancana for his lack of cooperation with the investigation. No one was ever prosecuted for the murder.

75 years ago: David Greenglass, key witness in Rosenberg frame-up, arrested by FBI

On June 22, 1950, David Greenglass was arrested by the FBI and charged with spying for the Soviet Union.

Greenglass had been a machinist and technician for the US Army at Los Alamos, New Mexico, the base of operations for the Manhattan Project, which was responsible for building the atomic bomb during World War II. Shortly before joining the army, Greenglass had become a member of the Young Communist League, the youth section of the Stalinist Communist Party USA. During his time at Los Alamos, Greenglass passed on information about the nuclear weapon to the Soviet Union, a wartime ally of the United States, via a courier, Harry Gold.

By the time Greenglass was arrested in June, Gold had already been implicated as the courier of British physicist Klaus Fuchs, convicted a few months prior by the British government of “communicating information to a potential enemy” for passing on information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union.

The US government at this time was engaged in an intense anti-communist witch-hunt, which resulted in the arrest of anyone suspected of spying for, or even being sympathetic to, the Soviet Union. Fuchs had been arrested in February 1950, and under interrogation identified Gold as his courier. Gold’s confession, after being seized by the FBI three months later, led in turn to the arrest of Greenglass.

Greenglass’s testimony played a significant role in the frame-up of his sister, Ethel Rosenberg, whom he accused during his trial of typing up the notes he passed on to the Soviets. In exchange for an agreement that saw his prison sentence reduced to 15 years, Greenglass implicated Ethel, as well as her husband Julius, as primarily responsible for recruiting him to the spy network in the first place.

The Rosenbergs were executed in 1953 after being convicted of espionage. Greenglass on the other hand served less than 10 years of his prison sentence, and after his release lived in New York City under a new identity. He died in 2014 at the age of 92.

After his death, the transcript of his grand jury testimony from August 7, 1950, was released to the public. The transcript revealed that Greenglass had initially told the grand jury that his sister Ethel had “never spoken” to him about his espionage activities. It is further evidence, confirming an admission from Greenglass himself in a 2003 book by journalist Sam Roberts, that he lied at his 1951 trial, falsely implicating his sister to protect his wife, Ruth, whom he later identified as the one who actually typed up

the notes.

100 years: First Vietnamese Communist organization founded

On June 21, 1925, The Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Viết Nam Thanh niên Cách mạng青年團, abbreviated as Thanh niên) was founded by Vietnamese communists in Guangzhou, China, led by Nguyen Ai Quoc, better known subsequently by his pseudonym Ho Chi Minh. The organization elected a central committee and began working out of a three-story house in Guangzhou.

Vietnam at the time was a part of Indo-China, a colonial possession of French imperialism that also included modern Laos and Cambodia.

Earlier in the year, a secret organization of nine Vietnamese communists, the Communist Youth Corps, had been organized by Nguyen as the nucleus of Thanh niên. The organization worked closely with the Chinese Communist Party and the Communist International.

Nguyen had become a socialist in France in 1919, when he joined the social democratic SFIO and supported the entrance of the party into the Third (Communist) International. He traveled to Moscow in 1923, worked for the Communist International and was a delegate to its Fifth Congress in 1924, where he was assigned to form a Communist group among Vietnamese exiles. He traveled to China as the interpreter for Communist International representative Michael Borodin.

In June 1925, Guangzhou and other Chinese cities were in the throes of mass demonstrations against the influence of the imperialist powers. Only a few days after Thanh niên was founded, British and French troops massacred 43 protesters, including 20 cadets from the Whampoa Military Academy, which was associated with the Communist Party and the Kuomintang, the bourgeois nationalist movement headed by Chiang Kai-shek.

Thanh niên organized training courses for Vietnamese communists that included political theory as well as history and was able to print communist material in Vietnamese and smuggle it into Vietnam, as well as organize underground work there.



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