

This week in history: June 30-July 6

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

29 June 2025

25 years ago: Ruling PRI suffers a huge defeat in Mexico's presidential election

On July 2, 2000, the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, suffered an historic defeat at the polls. After 71 years of PRI control, the party's presidential candidate, Francisco Labastida, a bourgeois economist and former governor of Sinaloa, lost the election. The PRI endured defeats in elections to Congress, for mayor of Mexico City, and two state governorships.

Once defeat appeared inevitable, PRI President Ernesto Zedillo went on national television and pledged the transfer of power to his successor on December 1, as provided by Mexico's constitution. Labastida followed with the first-ever concession speech by a PRI presidential candidate.

Vicente Fox, the right-wing candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), proclaimed victory with 44 percent of the vote. The PRI received 34 percent and Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, the candidate representing the populist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), took home 16 percent. Out of 32 Mexican states, Fox won 22 and the PRI only 9. Cardenas won his home state of Michoacan.

In the capital Mexico City, however, Fox's party lost to the PRD candidate, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who garnered 39 percent of the vote. Santiago Creel, the PAN candidate, took only 34 percent and the PRI suffered another defeat, with 22 percent of the vote.

The PRI's humiliating defeat marked an end to 71 years of uninterrupted rule of the party which had been founded by the victorious generals who brought an end to the Mexican Revolution.

While the PRI had for many, many decades abandoned its bourgeois nationalist program of land redistribution and nationalizations, economic independence from imperialism and limited concessions to the working class, its defeat was not due to a rebellion of the Mexican working class against PRI rule.

On the contrary, popular anger over corruption, mismanagement and endemic poverty was channeled behind the right-wing big business party of PAN that sought to intensify, rather than reverse, the attacks on working people carried out by the PRI. Fox, a former executive for Coca Cola, pledged better relations with Wall Street and the American bourgeoisie, along with further privatization and deregulation of the Mexican economy.

The US ruling class hailed Fox's presidency as a milestone in Mexican democracy. Washington was more concerned about the

possibility of PRI vote rigging leading to the destabilization of Mexico's political system in its "own backyard." For Wall Street and the banks, Fox was a trustworthy representative. His role was to increase profits for his corporate backers and toe the line set by Yankee imperialism.

50 years ago: Soviet composers Dmitri Shostakovich completes his final work

On July 5, 1975 Dmitri Shostakovich completed his final composition, the Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147. The great Soviet composer would pass away barely one month later, on August 9, 1975.

The Sonata premiered first privately on September 25, 1975, on what would have been Shostakovich's 69th birthday. It was performed by violist Fyodor Druzhinin and pianist Mikhail Muntyan. Shostakovich had dedicated the work to Druzhinin, who was one of his closest friends and musical colleagues. The composition made its public debut shortly afterward, on October 1, 1975, at the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory.

The Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147, is widely regarded as a deeply introspective work reflecting on the composer's declining health and contemplation of his own mortality. It includes a notable reference to Ludwig van Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata in its final movement, which Shostakovich intended as a sign of respect to one of his greatest inspirations.

Shostakovich's lifetime achievements are immense, encompassing 15 symphonies, 15 string quartets, operas, concertos, and film scores. He achieved early international recognition with his First Symphony, composed while still a student. His Symphony No. 5 and the monumental Symphony No. 7, "Leningrad," remain among his most famous and frequently performed works.

The "Leningrad" Symphony, composed in 1941, holds immense historical significance. Written by Shostakovich while living through the brutal siege of Leningrad by Nazi forces, it made its public debut in the besieged city on August 9, 1942. In order for the performance to proceed it was timed to coincide with an offensive by the Red Army to silence German artillery. The concert was broadcast to the front lines and it reported to have made a profound impact on the morale of

Soviet soldiers.

Shostakovich's career was marked by a deeply complex and often fraught relationship with the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy. His opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was famously denounced as "Muddle Instead of Music" in a 1936 *Pravda* editorial, widely believed to have been instigated by Stalin himself. Following the incident Shostakovich is said to have slept in his hallway, fearing that he could be taken away at any time by Stalinist agents.

Throughout his career, Shostakovich often conceded in face of the intimidation of the Stalinist bureaucracy. However, artistically he never gave in. In "The legacy of Dmitri Shostakovich," written 25 years following the composer's death, the WSWS commented:

The 50 years of composition between Shostakovich's First Symphony and his final works, including the Fifteenth String Quartet (1974) and Viola Sonata (1975) are, in terms of the quantity and quality of this work, without any parallel in the twentieth century. Shostakovich the man cowered in the face of Stalinism. Given his lack of political perspective, that is not surprising. But he did not capitulate to socialist realism, nor did he succumb to despair and turn away from his audience. He expressed the enormous contradictions of his time, and he wrote music that will live forever.

75 years ago: US forces defeated at Osan during first deployment in Korean War

On July 5, 1950, United States Army forces were defeated by a vastly greater number of North Korean troops during the Battle of Osan, the first engagement between the two militaries during the Korean War. The North Korean military, the Korean People's Army (KPA), had captured the South Korean capital of Seoul on June 28, during Operation Pokpung. They continued their advance south for about a week virtually unchallenged, due to the widespread collapse of the South Korean army, which in the space of a few days had been reduced from almost 100,000 to roughly 20,000, a result of mass desertion or defection to the KPA.

US President Harry S. Truman sent in military forces to aid the deeply unpopular Syngman Rhee dictatorship of South Korea, beginning with the 24th Infantry Division, which had been occupying the Japanese island of Kyushu since the end of World War II. Task Force Smith was assembled from its ranks, consisting of 540 infantry and artillery troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Bradford Smith. They arrived on July 1 at Osan, a city about 20 miles south of Seoul, to delay the KPA forces while the rest of the division was moved to South Korea as reinforcements.

On the morning of July 5, the first shots between US and North Korean forces were fired, when KPA tanks advanced on the American lines at Osan. The poorly equipped Task Force Smith had almost no weapons that could defeat the Soviet T-34 tanks that the North Koreans used. A total of 36 tanks arrived in waves and breached the American column. This allowed some 5,000 KPA infantry troops to flank and overwhelm Task Force Smith.

As the T-34 tanks advanced, they were used to cut communication signal wires that allowed US infantry and artillery forces to

communicate with each other. By the afternoon, Task Force Smith was in disarray from communications breakdown, and was also running low on ammunition. As a consequence, Lt. Colonel Smith ordered the withdrawal of the troops.

The first engagement for the US during the Korean war was a decisive loss. Task Force Smith managed to slow down the North Korean advance by a few hours at most, but 60 of its troops were killed in the process. The rest of the 24th Infantry Division arrived in South Korea, but over the next month were repeatedly pushed further South by advancing North Korean troops.

100 years ago: Fascists clash with anti-fascists in New York City

On July 4, 1925, gangs of fascists attacked anti-fascist marchers at a commemoration of the Italian revolutionary and general Giuseppe Garibaldi in Rosebank, in the borough of Staten Island. The clashes took place near the Garibaldi Pantheon, a house where he lived in exile from 1851-1853 (now the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum).

About 350 fascists sought to break up a rally of about 1,000, which included members of the Sons of Italy as well as leftists led by the anarchist Carlo Tresca. A pitched battle with rocks and bottles ensued, and fascists beat men, women and children until police arrived and kept the two sides apart. Police arrested five fascists. After the rally, confrontation between fascists and their opponents, many of whom wore red shirts, the uniform of Garibaldi's soldiers, continued elsewhere on Staten Island on trains and on ferries back to Manhattan.

Fascist attacks continued in Manhattan, when a veteran of Garibaldi's wars, 82-year old Giuseppe Genovese, returning from the rally in Staten Island, was attacked on 14th Street because he was wearing a red shirt decorated with medals he had received for fighting in Garibaldi's army, including one awarded to him by Garibaldi's son and another for helping to combat a cholera epidemic. The fascists chased Genovese into a florist shop and began hurling potted plants at him until the police intervened and arrested seven of them.

The commemoration of the unification of Italy by Garibaldi and of Garibaldi himself was a major event for Italian Americans in New York City. Garibaldi was born on July 4, 1807 and that day was celebrated with rallies and speeches in conjunction with Independence Day as an affirmation of democratic principles. Garibaldi was a supporter of the Union during the American Civil War and an ardent opponent of slavery. Abraham Lincoln sought at one point to make him the commander of the Union army.



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