

## This week in history: June 1-7

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.

31 May 2026

### 25 years ago: Massacre in Nepal royal family

On June 1, 2001, Nepal's ruling monarchy imploded. The bizarre and bloody events unfolded in the lavishly decorated banquet room at the royal palace in Kathmandu. Prince Dipendra, in a bout of furious revenge, massacred the royal family. He then shot himself and was proclaimed king in a comatose state.

Armed with automatic weapons and drunk, Dipendra stormed into the room and killed his parents, King Birendra and Queen Aiswarya, and at least eight other royals, before pulling the trigger on himself. He died three days later. With much of the Shah dynasty dead, the line of succession passed to his uncle Gyanendra, who now encountered the explosive political turmoil and fallout.

The apparent spark for the bloodbath was Dipendra's parents refusing to approve, for political reasons, of his marriage to Devyani Rana. The queen had opposed the bride's Indian connections. But the official line blamed the deaths on a weapon exploding, a version widely viewed with skepticism and rejected by many Nepalese. Protests soon erupted over the cover-up; demonstrators shouted, "Dipendra is innocent" and "We don't want Gyanendra." The feeble monarchy ordered security forces to impose a shoot-on-sight order, leading to several people being killed and dozens wounded.

The international bourgeois and media attempted to mold dead King Birendra into a popular martyr. Fearing social unrest and the strategic implications of a potential new regime installed in Nepal, they loaded adjectives describing him as "beloved monarch" and the "incarnation of Vishnu." But no amount of propaganda could whitewash the despotic and bloody history of Birendra, whose regime killed large numbers of pro-democracy protesters in 1990. The newly formed constitutional monarchy he had announced only brushed some new paint on a decaying and privileged regime. Under the surface, the king remained above the law, his income was tax-exempt, and he retained emergency powers to suspend democratic rights.

For the major powers in the region—the US, China, Russia and India—a territorially small Nepal of 23 million people held a strategically powerful position between China and India. Washington and its allies strongly encouraged Indian opposition to expanding Chinese influence in Nepal, and also against a growing Maoist insurgency.

China had feared that the 30,000 Tibetan exiles could form a political movement opposed to the Stalinist regime in Beijing and worked to prevent a pro-US-Indian regime from emerging.

The circumstances converging into the explosive denouement at the royal palace revealed the political intrigue and rot of the Shah monarchy. It exposed a decaying feudal order riddled with factional conflict and

foreign interference and facing deepening popular discontent.

### 50 years ago: 11 killed in Teton Dam collapse

On June 5, 1976, the newly constructed Teton Dam in southeastern Idaho collapsed, releasing 80 billion gallons of water and triggering a human and social catastrophe. The disaster began in the morning when workers noticed water leaking through the structure, rapidly washing away the tightly packed soil and clay core inside. Despite frantic last-minute efforts by bulldozer operators to block the breach, the dam collapsed just before noon.

A wall of water up to 30 feet high roared downstream, obliterating the communities of Wilford, Sugar City, and Rexburg. The flood claimed 11 lives, drowned over 13,000 head of livestock and displaced thousands of working class families. The victims included local retirees like 79-year-old Clarence Daw and his wife Florence, 76, who drowned when the wave hit their home in Wilford.

The youngest victim, David Benson, just 21, was fishing with his friend Daryl Grigg on the Teton river when the dam breached. Grigg, who survived but suffered broken ribs and a punctured lung, recalled, "That was the last time I saw David. There were thousands of logs, so I grabbed onto one of them. I didn't have to swim after that. I just remember looking around. It was unbelievable, everything was tearing everything else up. I couldn't hardly hear anything because of the noise. Then I saw a couple of houses get wiped out."

This devastation was entirely preventable. Built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to supply irrigation water to commercial agriculture, the Teton dam project was pushed forward despite repeated warnings from U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) geologists.

Experts warned that the canyon's highly fractured volcanic rock was completely unsuitable for holding a reservoir. During excavation, crews discovered massive fissures—some large enough for workers to walk inside—running directly through the canyon walls. Rather than halting construction to re-engineer the project, the Bureau of Reclamation pumped in over 500,000 cubic feet of pressurized cement grout as a futile half-measure to seal the cracks.

The project proceeded under intense political pressure. When environmental lawsuits and geological concerns prompted the Department of the Interior to initiate a safety review in 1971, Idaho's political establishment intervened.

Politicians, including Democratic Senator Frank Church, successfully pressured federal officials to abort the safety review on behalf of local

agribusiness interests. In one congressional session Church dismissed scientists' warnings of the dangers as "stalling tactics."

In the aftermath of the disaster, no criminal charges were filed against any federal official or the lead corporate contractor, Morrison-Knudsen Company. No individuals were held legally or financially accountable for the deaths or the ruin of thousands of lives. Instead, the federal government settled its liabilities through a special act of Congress, paying out over \$300 million in property claims.

### **75 years ago: US Supreme Court upholds anti-democratic Smith Act in *Dennis v United States***

On June 4, 1951, the United States Supreme Court upheld the convictions of 11 Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA) leaders, who had each been tried, convicted and sentenced to five years imprisonment based on the Smith Act. Also called the Alien Registration Act of 1940, this law criminalized "knowingly or willfully advocating for the overthrow or destruction of the Government of the United States by force or violence."

CPUSA General Secretary Eugene Dennis and ten other party leaders were arrested in 1948 and tried for conspiracy to overthrow the government by violent force. During the nine-month trial, the prosecution argued that the CPUSA based itself on texts which advocate for revolution, such as the *Communist Manifesto*. Because of that, the defendants were deemed personally guilty of advocating for the overthrow of the government and hence convicted for violating the Smith Act.

The 6-2 ruling by the Supreme Court in *Dennis v. United States* upheld those convictions with the assertion that the restriction on free speech contained within the Smith Act did not violate the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The Court's opinion asserted that the alleged advocacy by Dennis and others for the overthrow of the government presented a "clear and present danger," justifying restrictions on freedom of speech.

In his dissenting opinion, Justice Hugo Black warned that the decision was a "virulent form of prior censorship of speech and press, which I believe the First Amendment forbids." Justice William Douglas noted in his dissenting opinion that the ruling set a dangerous precedent for restricting not only freedom of speech, but freedom of thought and opinion.

The Trotskyist movement at the time in America, the Socialist Workers Party, described the ruling as "the severest blow against civil liberties in modern American history." It noted that all three arms of government, Congress, the Truman administration, and the Supreme Court, were "in league against the rights of the people."

The claim that the CPUSA was advocating revolution was a fraud. In reality, it was a Stalinist organization that had rejected socialist revolution decades before, and whose activity was oriented to the big business Democratic Party. The CPUSA's rotten record and its opportunist maneuvers oriented to the political establishment meant that it was incapable of waging any fight against the onslaught on civil liberties associated with the Cold War.

That rotten record had included supporting the prosecution of leaders of the SWP under the Smith Act in 1941, under conditions where the CPUSA supported the imperialist war effort of the US, while the Trotskyist movement advanced a principled, socialist anti-war position.

### **100 years ago: After May coup, Pilsudski crony becomes president of Poland**

On June 1, 1926, Ignacy Mościcki, the longtime associate of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who had overthrown the Polish government in a coup, became president of the Polish Republic. He held the largely ceremonial office until the 1939 German-Soviet invasion of Poland. Piłsudski remained the *de facto* dictator of the country in that period and Mościcki never showed any signs of dissent.

Between May 12-14 Piłsudski led a military uprising against the elected government of the new Polish state.

Poland in 1926 was gripped by a deep and unresolved social crisis rooted in the contradictions of a weak, newly formed capitalist state. The Second Polish Republic had been born not out of a completed bourgeois revolution but out of the collapse of the Tsarist, German and Austro-Hungarian empires—combined with the October Revolution's decisive impact on Europe.

The Polish bourgeoisie that inherited this state was economically and politically feeble. The years following the Polish-Soviet War of 1920 brought uninterrupted political and economic instability—chronic governmental infighting, fragile parliamentary coalitions, rampant inflation and mass impoverishment of workers and peasants. The ruling elites were paralyzed by factional struggles and incapable of stabilizing capitalist rule through normal parliamentary means.

Crucially, as the WSWS notes, Piłsudski's coup was the Polish bourgeoisie's attempt to "save its rule from the threat of socialist revolution." The Polish working class was radicalized, shaped by the proximity of the Soviet workers' state and the influence of communist and socialist movements. The bourgeoisie, unable to resolve the social crisis democratically, turned to Piłsudski's authoritarian "Sanacja" (cleansing) regime—establishing what the WSWS describes as "an authoritarian regime with fascist elements"—to smash the left, suppress the workers' movement and consolidate class rule through open military force.

The Polish Communist Party (KPP) made the catastrophic decision to support Piłsudski's coup—driven by Stalin and Bukharin's "two-stage theory," which instructed communist parties in "underdeveloped" countries to support the national bourgeoisie.

The KPP, which should have been the heir to the great Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg's internationalist tradition, instead capitulated to bourgeois nationalism, with devastating consequences. From the moment the Sanacja regime consolidated power, the KPP was driven underground. Piłsudski's government-imposed conditions of strict illegality on the KPP, making it a criminal offense to organize or propagate communist ideas. The apparatus of the authoritarian Polish state—secret police, courts, concentration camps—was turned against communist militants.

The KPP was eventually dissolved and physically destroyed by Stalin in 1938, its leadership murdered in the Soviet purges on charges of "Trotskyist deviation."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**