

This week in history: June 29-July 5

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.

28 June 2026

25 years ago: Northern Ireland's First Minister David Trimble resigns over IRA decommissioning

On July 1, 2001, Northern Ireland's First Minister David Trimble, head of the pro-British Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), resigned from office, deepening the crisis of the sectarian "power-sharing" system created by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. His resignation triggered the fall of Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the Social Democratic Labour Party, though Mallon would continue to serve in an acting capacity until new elections for both positions were filled. The UUP nominated economy minister Sir Reg Empey as interim first minister.

The immediate cause for Trimble's ouster centered on the failure of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to decommission its weapons. Under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement brokered among the British, American and Irish governments, IRA paramilitary groups had to relinquish arms to enter the new governmental framework. Trimble claimed he had received personal assurances from Tony Blair and Bill Clinton on IRA decommissioning in exchange for UUP participation in the Assembly.

Following Trimble's earlier resignation threat in 2000, the IRA had agreed to put its arms "beyond use" by June 2001, but the deadline passed without IRA participation. Trimble had used this threat to fend off anti-Agreement elements within the UUP and to weaken a tough electoral challenge from Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). But the DUP exploited Trimble's failure to deliver decommissioning, gaining votes and seats at the UUP's expense. With the arms commission reporting little progress, Trimble had no choice but to honor his pledge to resign to retain political credibility.

Sinn Fein—sharing power in the new political framework of Northern Ireland—attempted to keep the Assembly together but rejected Trimble's demands as a Unionist ultimatum. As the political arm of the IRA, Sinn Fein leveraged decommissioning to resolve outstanding problems from the Agreement: reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and disarmament of the British forces in the North.

Led by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, the Irish government pressed Sinn Fein/IRA to hand over weapons to move forward with the Agreement. Although welcoming "positive aspects" of the arms decommissioning body's report, Ahern said he wanted to arrive at an IRA agreement "as quickly as possible," placing the full responsibility on the IRA. The Irish Taoiseach faced domestic political difficulties with a general

election looming and Sinn Fein expected to gain seats.

For its part, the Blair government immediately defended Trimble. Northern Ireland Secretary John Reid insisted there was "no solution" outside IRA decommissioning. Mallon, in an unprecedented move, endorsed the British government's threat to exclude Sinn Fein from the Assembly if the IRA failed to decommission.

The controversy surrounding Trimble's resignation underscored that the Good Friday framework, far from overcoming sectarianism, institutionalized it as the basis of rule on behalf of British and Irish capitalism, with Sinn Fein and the IRA seeking only a more favorable position for a nationalist bourgeois layer within that settlement.

50 years ago: Israeli commandos raid Entebbe Airport, killing over 50

On the night of July 3, 1976, Israeli commandos raided Uganda's Entebbe International Airport to free hostages from a hijacked passenger plane. The crisis began on June 27, when Air France Flight 139 was seized by hijackers, former members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the West German Revolutionary Cells, a group linked to the Red Army Faction.

The hijackers demanded the release of 53 imprisoned left-wing and Palestinian militants across five nations, including 40 in Israel and six in West Germany. After receiving permission to land from Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, the hijacked plane flew to Entebbe, where the hijackers agreed to release the non-Jewish passengers but continued to hold 106 Jewish and Israeli hostages.

On July 1, the Israeli government publicly announced that it was willing to negotiate the release of prisoners. This offer was a deliberate deception to stall the hijackers and trick them into lowering their guard while the IDF prepared its raid.

At 11:00 p.m. on July 3, Israeli C-130 transport planes landed covertly at Entebbe. About 100 commandos stormed the terminal, killing the seven hijackers and 45 Ugandan soldiers, and destroying 11 Ugandan MiG fighter jets, about half of the country's whole air force.

Three hostages died in the crossfire, and a fourth, 75-year-old Dora Bloch, who had been hospitalized in Kampala before the raid, was killed on Amin's orders as a reprisal in the aftermath.

While the capitalist press celebrated the raid as a heroic rescue, the

Bulletin of the Workers League, predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, exposed the hypocrisy of imperialist governments praising an assault that claimed over 50 lives rather than conceding to the release of political prisoners.

“The claims of [Israeli Prime Minister] Rabin and Defense Minister Shimon Peres that this was a last resort to ‘save’ the Israelis is the most cynical Zionist propaganda,” the *Bulletin* wrote. It explained that the imperialist and Zionist powers preferred a bloody military invasion to a settlement, launching the attack even as negotiations were on the verge of securing the peaceful release of all passengers.

For Yitzhak Rabin’s government, the raid was a calculated bid to whip up chauvinism amid domestic austerity and a West Bank uprising. One Israeli journalist even called the bloody raid, “the first really good thing to happen to us since the Six-Day War.”

Notwithstanding that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the PFLP explicitly disavowed any connection to the hijackers, the hostage situation provided Israel and its allies with a propaganda opportunity to paint Palestinian resistance movements as antisemitic terrorists. Additionally, a dangerous precedent was set that Israel could launch military operations far outside its borders, in violation of international law, in the name of combating terrorism. This would be used again two years later during the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

75 years ago: World Court rules against Iran in British oil nationalization dispute

On July 5, 1951, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Netherlands, issued an interim ruling that effectively declared Iran’s nationalization of its oil industry null and void.

The court ordered Iran to return full control of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company’s (AIOC) properties and to permit the British firm to “continue to carry on the operations which it was carrying on prior to May 1, 1951, free from interference.” It further demanded that Iran not sequester “any monies which the Imperial Government of Iran have purported to nationalize or otherwise to expropriate or any monies earned by means of property which they have purported so to nationalize.”

The repeated use of “purported” made the court’s position unmistakable: In the eyes of bourgeois international law, a sovereign nation had no right to take possession of resources on its own territory.

The ICJ order came in response to a case lodged by the United Kingdom on May 26, 1951, barely a month after the Iranian parliament voted to nationalize the AIOC—a company that had been a principal source of overseas profit for British imperialism since it began drilling in 1913. The UK alleged that Iran’s nationalization law violated a 1933 convention granting the company extraction rights until 1993 and warned Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh of “very serious and far-reaching consequences.”

The legal assault was only one front in British imperialism’s campaign. By the first week of July, the AIOC had slashed refinery production at Abadan—home to the world’s largest oil refinery—by 40 percent, then to one-fifth capacity, and shut down one of five oil fields entirely. All oil shipments from Iran had ground to a halt after British tanker captains refused to sign receipts naming the National Iranian Oil Company as the owner

of the oil. Meanwhile, the British cruiser HMS Mauritius was deployed off Iran’s coast, with fighter jets and paratroopers standing by for a threatened invasion.

Iran rejected the ICJ ruling as “an intervention in our internal affairs” and declared it “null and void.” Its position was that the dispute was with a private company operating on Iranian soil, and therefore fell outside the court’s jurisdiction—an argument the ICJ itself would ultimately vindicate. In July 1952, after 14 months of deliberations, the court ruled it had no jurisdiction in the matter.

But this legal victory did not halt the aggressive campaign waged by British imperialism to overturn Iranian oil nationalization. Britain imposed oil boycotts and blockades, and in August 1953, MI6 collaborated with the CIA to orchestrate the coup that ousted Mossadegh.

100 years ago: Mexican government puts restrictions on Catholic Church

On July 2, 1926, Mexico published the Calles Law, which put significant restrictions on the Catholic Church. The law, which would ban priests from wearing clerical robes in public, forbid religious education and seize church property, had been signed by President Plutarco Elías Calles on June 14. The publication of the law triggered a countdown to July 31, when it would go into effect.

The Calles Law sought to enforce anti-clerical Articles 3, 27 and 130 of the 1917 Constitution, a product of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, in which figures such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata and their peasant followers sought to break the grip of the landed gentry (the hacendados), while other more urban figures, such as Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón, sought to break the power of the church.

The Catholic Church possessed a massive, independent organizational network that rivaled the federal government. It had its own schools and hospitals and held immense influence over the peasantry.

The Church also routinely loaned money to the wealthy *hacendados* and held mortgages on their estates, tying its own financial interests to those of the wealthy elite. It extracted significant wealth directly from the poor peasantry through mandatory tithes and fees for marriages, baptisms and funerals, which drained economic resources out of rural communities.

By curbing the Church, Calles sought to eliminate a powerful rival institution and ensure that citizens’ primary loyalty belonged to the Mexican state, not to the Vatican.

The law would trigger the brutal Cristero War between Catholic rebels and the government that began in August and lasted until 1929.



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