

This week in history: June 24-30

24 June 2013

This Week in History provides brief synopses of important historical events whose anniversaries fall this week.

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: US government makes quarter-million dollar payoff to the Socialist Workers Party

The week of June 27, 1988 the Socialist Workers Party announced on the front page of its weekly, *The Militant*, that it had received a payment of over a quarter-million dollars from the US government. This was the first part of a settlement resulting from the SWP's 15-year lawsuit over FBI spying and harassment.

In its report at the time, the *Bulletin*, the newspaper of the Workers League, stated,

“This payment by the federal government completely confirms the charges made by the International Committee of the Fourth international and the Workers League, based on a 10-year investigation into Security and the Fourth International, that the SWP has been taken over by US government agents.”

The SWP limited the scope of its suit to the smallest of the countless crimes perpetrated by the FBI. Despite the fact that by the FBI's own admission, there were more than 1,600 of its spies in and around the SWP between 1960 and 1976, the lawsuit did not uncover the name of one of these government agents.

Federal District Court Judge Thomas P. Griesa awarded \$264,000 in damages in August 1987, but the government was staunchly opposed to any admission of guilt or any payment to the SWP and said it would appeal the ruling. That position was reversed within the highest levels of the Reagan administration. The US Solicitor General—the immediate subordinate of Attorney General Edwin Meese—decided on March 7 that the government would not appeal Griesa's ruling.

The *Bulletin* added, “No capitalist government would voluntarily pay a quarter million dollars to a party which claimed to be a revolutionary socialist organization. ... Forty-seven years ago, the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, which was then the Trotskyist party in America, were prosecuted by the federal government under the Smith Act

for their opposition to World War II, and 18 of them were sent to prison. Today, there is nothing left of the Socialist Workers Party but the name: it has been transformed into an agency for political spying inside the workers' movement.”

In August an additional payment was made, mainly to cover legal expenses, of \$410,000, bring the total settlement to almost \$700,000.

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50 years ago: John F. Kennedy in Berlin

US President John Kennedy delivered his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech on June 26, 1963, before an audience of several hundred thousand gathered at the Rathaus Schöneberg [West Berlin's city hall] and against the backdrop of the Berlin Wall, which had been built by the Stalinist German Democratic Republic (GDR) nearly two years earlier.

Kennedy pledged to defend West Berlin, and warned against “popular fronts” and singled out Europeans “who say we can work with the Communists”—a warning to Western European states reaching accommodations with the Soviet Bloc or national Communist Parties. At a speech later at the Free University in West Berlin, Kennedy indicated that the US was prepared to ease Cold War tensions, provided that Communist regimes “do not interfere with the free choices of others”—a reference to Soviet assistance to various nationalist movements in the decolonizing Third World, a vast arena that the US sought to dominate.

Kennedy's reception in Berlin marked a symbolic high point in the influence of US liberalism abroad in the post-World War II period. All told, upwards of one million Berliners came to see the American president; along the route from Tegel airport to the US mission in southwest Berlin every foot along Kennedy's route was reportedly filled with friendly crowds.

Kennedy also sought to strengthen the US relationship with West Germany against French influence and Soviet overtures. France, under Charles DeGaulle, had recently concluded a new treaty with West Germany, under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and economic relations had been strengthened though the Common Market.

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75 years ago: Austrian Jews dismissed from workplaces by Nazis

On June 26, 1938 the National Socialist Party (Nazi) in Austria directed Jewish-owned firms and commercial enterprises to dismiss their Jewish employees within the following two weeks. Earlier, after Austria was annexed into Greater Germany through the *Anschluss* of mid-March, 1938, non-Jewish Austrian firms were directed to sack their Jewish employees. Approximately 40,000 Jews lost their work and livelihood through these measures.

Responsibility for executing these new Austrian laws rested with 5,000 minor Nazi party officials, the so-called block and cell leaders, who received a circular with the following orders: “Every Jewish employee must be removed from Jewish firms within 14 days. Discharge without notice and without compensation is possible on the basis of the Law of May 21, 1938, concerning contracts.”

Other forms of humiliation were stipulated in similar instructions being distributed throughout Austria. The Austrian Small Traders Institute was issued instructions detailing the officially accepted nature of their interaction with Jews: “Of course, good National-Socialists will have only the minimum business relations with Jews, and ‘necessity’ is an excuse and not an exoneration for having such relations.”

The Austrian public was asked that everyday courtesies customarily used at the beginning and closing of correspondence should not be used when addressing Jews or Jewish-owned businesses. Jews were also banned from four of the Austrian capital’s city parks. At Modling, a resort near Vienna, neither local nor visiting Jews were allowed to don traditional Alpine garb.

The laws and decrees were meant to force Jews to surrender any wealth and property they owned and emigrate from Austria by rendering their daily lives unbearable. Sigmund Freud and Stefan Zweig were notable Austrian Jews who fled shortly after the Nazis annexed the central European state.

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100 years ago: The outbreak of the second Balkan war

On June 29, 1913, the second Balkan war, which pitted Bulgaria against its former allies Greece and Serbia, broke out with the Bulgarian army launching attacks on the forces of those countries in Macedonia. The conflict resulted from dissatisfaction with the division of the spoils of the first Balkan war, which had seen the Balkan League, composed of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, defeat the ailing Ottoman Empire.

The Treaty of London, which concluded the first Balkan

war in June 1913, did not resolve the division of territories ceded from the Ottomans. Earlier treaties between the Balkan states had provided for the division of Macedonia in the event of an expulsion of Ottoman occupying forces, with a large portion to be allocated to Bulgaria. However, the creation of an independent Albania as a result of the first Balkan war obstructed Greek and Serbian plans for territorial expansion, and led the Serbian government to lay claim to portions of Macedonian territory that Bulgaria felt entitled to.

In early June, Greece and Serbia had signed a secret treaty to aid each other in the event of an attack by Bulgaria. Montenegro and Romania, which also had territorial disputes with Bulgaria, indicated publicly that they would support Serbia if war broke out. Russia, anxious to prevent a war between two of its allies offered to arbitrate, but was rapidly convinced that Bulgaria was preparing to attack, and repudiated its alliance.

Despite its isolation, Bulgarian forces launched a surprise attack on the night of June 29, without a prior declaration of war. The war would go on to result in an estimated 91,000 losses on all sides, before concluding on August 8, with a Bulgarian defeat.

Leon Trotsky, a newspaper correspondent in the Balkan wars, explained that the regional tensions were inextricably tied to great power machinations, later noting: “The Balkan War disposed of European Turkey, and thereby created the conditions necessary for the solution of the Bulgarian and Greek questions. But Serbia and Rumania, whose national completion could only be achieved at the expense of Austria-Hungary, found themselves checked in their efforts at expansion southwards, and were compensated at the expense of what racially belonged to Bulgaria—Serbia in Macedonia, and Romania in Dobrudja. This is the meaning of the second Balkan War and the Peace of Bucharest by which it was concluded. The mere existence of Austria-Hungary, this Turkey of Middle Europe, blocks the way to the natural self-determination of the peoples of the South-East. It compels them to keep constantly fighting against each other, to seek support against each other from the outside, and so makes them a tool of the political combinations of the Great Powers.”

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