

# This week in history: April 23-29

23 April 2018

## 25 years ago: “Human rights” crusade for bombing of Serbs

On April 26, 1993, President Bill Clinton issued an order aligning the US with United Nations sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia. The sanctions aimed at a total embargo, not just on Yugoslav exports and imports, which had been in effect since 1992, but even on the transshipment of goods through Yugoslavia. The extreme sanctions, passed by a UN Security Council vote that saw Russia and China abstain, came amidst a growing crescendo of hysterical calls for military intervention in the Bosnian civil war in the name of “human rights.”

Clinton was said to be preparing a plan by which the US would launch missile strikes on Bosnian Serb positions, while simultaneously lifting an arms embargo so that military equipment could be delivered to Bosnia’s Muslim army. Britain and France were also readying their air forces for strikes.

The Bosnian civil war, pitting the nationalist ex-Stalinist cliques among Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim Bosnians, was precipitated by the imperialist-backed breakup of Yugoslavia. There were warnings that any escalation of Western involvement would also lead to a civil war in Kosovo as well, pitting its Albanian majority against the ruling Serb minority. This was of no interest to the war crusaders, who, spearheaded by the *New York Times*, suddenly discovered in Bosnia not just “ethnic cleansing”—a recently-deployed neologism—but now also a “Holocaust” and “genocide” for which “the Serbs” alone must be blamed. The answer, according to the liberal warmongers, was to bomb them.

“Does the World Still Recognize a Holocaust,” screamed an April 25, 1993, headline over a commentary by *New York Times* chief foreign correspondent John Darnton. Comparing the Serbs to the Nazis, Darnton asked, “When does dithering negotiation turn into appeasement?” Darnton hailed Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and self-proclaimed human rights advocate, who days earlier had called for a US intervention during the dedication of the new Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

“If you decide to go, you have to prevail,” Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton of Indiana told the *Times* on April 30. “And if the steps you take are insufficient to achieve your objectives, then you have to increase the steps you take.”

At the same time, Slobodan Milosevic, president of Serbia, was pressuring the Serb faction in Bosnia to accept some

territorial concessions in negotiations among the rival factions that were slated to resume. The Serbian Bosnian militia then controlled an estimated 70 percent of Bosnia.

## 50 years ago: Students occupy buildings at Columbia University

On April 23, 1968, students began an occupation of Hamilton Hall at Columbia University in protest against the institution’s ties to a Vietnam War research firm, the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), and against its construction of a new gymnasium whose design plan appeared to offer segregated access to black residents of Harlem, which was adjacent to the building’s lower side.

Five buildings were occupied in all, and a dean briefly held hostage. Hundreds of students participated in the occupation, and hundreds more supported it. It lasted for just over a week, garnering major media coverage.

The occupiers demanded the reinstatement of six students suspended for protesting against the IDA, an end to the construction of the gym, amnesty for all students joining in the occupations, and the reversal of an edict by university president Grayson Kirk banning indoor protests.

After one week, Kirk called in the New York City police, who cut off water and power to the buildings. On April 30, at 2:20 in the morning, some 1,000 police brutally attacked the students. Police wielding axes smashed through wooden doors, and phalanxes of officers stomped through students passively resisting, smashing limbs and clubbing heads with truncheons and flashlights. Plain-clothed police, without badges, savagely beat a number of students. Cops dragged students by their feet down the buildings’ concrete steps. In the police riot several journalists were also beaten, and photographic equipment smashed, in the police riot.

Within three hours the occupation was crushed. About 720 students and faculty were arrested, and 136 demonstrators suffered injuries in the police attack.

## 75 years ago: British and US governments reject assistance for Jewish refugees

This week in April 1943, delegations representing the British and US governments met in Hamilton, Bermuda, to discuss the unprecedented refugee crisis stemming from the Nazi war of extermination against the European Jewish population.

The gathering, held from April 19 to 30, underscored the

contempt of the Allied powers, who claimed to be waging a war for democracy against the fascist powers, for the plight of millions of European Jews who were being dispatched by the Third Reich to concentration camps.

Over the months preceding the conference, hundreds of thousands of Jews had been sent to their deaths across Europe, after the German government's January 1942 Wannsee Conference approved the so-called "final solution." The US and British delegates gathered in Bermuda as Polish Jews who had carried out a heroic uprising against the genocide were being butchered amid the defeat of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

The Bermuda conference had been called to assuage intense anger among British and American workers over the plight of European Jews. Widespread demands had been raised in both countries for mass migration intakes and military measures to halt the genocidal campaign of the Nazis.

Both governments, however, signaled their indifference to the plight of European refugees by sending junior delegations. The US was represented by Harold Dodds, the president of Princeton University, while the British contingent was led by Richard Law, a junior minister in the foreign office.

During the conference, representatives of the two nations discussed widespread calls that they approach the German government through an intermediary to offer to settle large numbers of Jewish refugees.

The spokesmen for the Roosevelt administration in the US and the British government of Winston Churchill in Britain made clear that they rejected such a course of action. Law said: "If Hitler accepted a proposal to release perhaps millions of unwanted persons, we might find ourselves in a very difficult position ... he might say 'all right, take a million or two million'. Then because of the shipping problem, we should be made to look exceedingly foolish." In other words, the British government was fearful that the mass intake of refugees would divert its navy from the task of securing the interests of its ruling elite.

In response to the conference, and the crushing of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Szmul Zygielbojm, a member of the Polish government in exile, committed suicide. A note he left stated that it was not only the Nazis who were responsible for the Holocaust, but that indirect responsibility also fell on "on the peoples of the Allied nations and on their governments, who up to this day have not taken any real steps to halt this crime."

### **100 years ago: John Reed arrested amidst wave of repression in the US**

On April 29, 1918, John "Jack" Reed was arraigned under the Espionage Act a day after he returned to the US from Russia where he had been witness to the October Revolution. His papers—including the manuscript and notes for his book *Ten Days that Shook the World*—were seized. The charge

against Reed, as well as Max Eastman, the editor of *The New Masses*, was that their work in the newspaper was a conspiracy to obstruct the operation of the American military. Reed was released on bail and two subsequent trials failed to convict him and Eastman.

Days earlier, on April 26, Reed's friend—the well-known "muckraking" writer and socialist Lincoln Steffens—was barred from delivering a public speech titled "The Menace of Peace" at a church in San Diego. Police Chief McMullen explained that "no man who criticized the Government as Steffens had done" could speak in the city.

On April 24, Senator Hiram Johnson of California gave a speech criticizing the removal of a clause from the impending anti-democratic Sedition Act protecting utterances "of what is true, with good motives and justifiable ends." Other senators defended the removal of the language, which had only been put in as a fig leaf. So did the *New York Times*, which referred in its news article on the subject to freedom of speech as "a privilege," not a right.

On April 25, the Harlem Newspaper Dealers Association, under pressure from "patriotic" organizations, announced that its 400 members would no longer sell German-language newspapers. On April 26, the city of Greenwich, Connecticut, banned the sale of German language newspapers. On April 27, the superintendent of Philadelphia police issued an edict banning all meetings in the German language.

On April 28, William Edenborn, a naturalized American citizen of German birth and an industrialist who was one of the richest men in the US, was arrested for a speech he gave in which he said it was more probable that the US would face invasion by Great Britain than by Germany. On April 30, it was reported that German and Austrian born members of the Metropolitan Opera had been dismissed. Earlier in the week, a theater in Milwaukee announced that it would no longer allow plays in the German language.

Also on April 30, a language instructor at Vassar College was jailed by federal agents. Agathe Richrath was arrested and interned for the remainder of the war as an "enemy alien" after a search of her room allegedly revealed a picture of Kaiser Wilhelm. College President MacCracken conceded that "Miss Richrath has been under observation for some weeks" but that he had heard of "no exhibition of alien sympathies in the college class rooms."

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