

This week in history: July 23-29

23 July 2018

25 years ago: Clinton administration proposes anti-immigrant legislation

The administration of Democratic President Bill Clinton announced a new round of attacks on immigrants and democratic rights on July 27, 1993, unveiling new legislation titled the “Expedited Exclusion and Alien Smuggling Enhanced Penalties Act,” to be sponsored in Congress by the leading Senate liberal, Edward Kennedy.

The proposed new law was drawn up by a 12-agency task force led by Vice President Al Gore. At a media event where he was flanked by Gore and Attorney General Janet Reno, President Clinton called on Congress to boost the Immigration and Naturalization Service budget by 10 percent, including the hiring of 600 new Border Patrol officers, and then cynically claimed the new laws were directed against smugglers and terrorists.

In reality Clinton’s proposals were aimed at blocking thousands of immigrants seeking refuge in America, while providing the state with all-encompassing powers to intimidate immigrant families already living in the US. The law would abolish the right of immigrants arriving in the United States and seeking political asylum to have a judicial hearing with appeal rights, including *habeas corpus*.

Instead, a newly established INS Asylum Corps would interrogate the immigrants seeking refugee status and decide whether they displayed a “credible fear” of persecution if forcibly returned to their home country. INS officers would be empowered to immediately deport anyone they consider “not genuine.”

In the name of a crackdown on “smuggling” of undocumented workers, the INS would be given additional powers to tap phones, intercept mail and seize the property, bank accounts or assets of anyone suspected of contravening US immigration laws. Up to \$5 million would also be made available to reward informers who provided intelligence leading to the arrest and conviction of “smugglers or terrorists.”

American passport photographs would be digitized and funds provided to install electronic visa and passport scanning devices at airports and expand pre-inspection of American-bound passengers at foreign airports.

Playing upon the hysteria whipped up by the media and the government over the World Trade Center bombing in New York, Clinton equated immigrants seeking political asylum

with smugglers and terrorists and called for the INS to be given the same powers accorded to the FBI under the notorious RICO “antiracketeering” law. This would mean that police-state methods originally adopted on the pretext of fighting the mafia will be employed against immigrant families who attempt to secure entry into the US.

50 years ago: Cleveland under martial law after riots in Glenville

A shootout between police and black nationalists in the east Cleveland neighborhood of Glenville touched off a week of rioting and the occupation of the city by the National Guard, during this week in 1968. The violence was triggered by police who targeted the home of Ahmed Evans, a former Army soldier who ran a bookstore called the Afro Culture Shop, which they had previously raided repeatedly. Evans headed a group called the Black Nationalists of New Libya.

Police claimed that the nationalist group was planning an “uprising” on July 24, citing information from a paid FBI informer who was reportedly under the influence of drugs. Officials went to Evans’ home, where he told them about ongoing police harassment. Shortly after the officials had departed, a shootout began, under circumstances that remain unclear.

The police and media maintained that several armed men emerged from Evans’ home and began firing on police cars. There are also claims that Evans ambushed and shot a driver of a tow truck in the area. But an official government report stated that it was more likely that the tow truck had just been caught in the crossfire. In any event, on the night/early morning of July 22-23 there was an exchange of gunfire between Evans and 16 of his followers and 125 Cleveland police. The result was a total of seven deaths: three black nationalists, three police, and one bystander. Evans surrendered to police and was eventually tried, convicted of killing the three policemen and the bystander and sentenced to life imprisonment. He died of cancer in 1978.

For the next week riots broke out in the Glenville area. Protesters clashed with police by throwing rocks and occasionally Molotov cocktails. Cleveland’s black mayor, Carl Stokes, at first ordered that only black police officers be allowed into Glenville to deal with the protesters. But this made no difference, and rioting continued. White police rebelled against being excluded from the repression, and began

to refuse to go out on calls, even denouncing the mayor in explicitly racist terms.

On July 25, Stokes allowed white officers to enter the area once again. More significantly, over 3,000 National Guard troops were deployed to place Cleveland under martial law. During the suppression of the riot, there are endless accounts of police brutality and beatings. The National Guard was recalled on July 27, but there was one final violent outbreak that occurred on July 28. This time the police quickly responded in full riot gear and brutally beat two photographers who were covering the event.

75 years ago: Royal Air Force destroys Hamburg with fire-bombing

On July 27, 1943, more than 729 British Royal Air Force bombers dropped some 2,326 tons of bombs on the German city of Hamburg. Although the raid lasted only 43 minutes, its effects were devastating. The incendiary bombs and high explosives, coupled with the warm temperatures and low humidity, created the conditions for a gigantic firestorm.

Starting in the working-class area of Hammerbrook, a hurricane-like storm with winds raging at 150 miles per hour, ripped through a four-square-mile area of the city. More than 35,000 residential buildings were incinerated. An earlier raid on July 24 had knocked out most of the city's fire services. The July 27 firestorm raged for three hours before it finally died down, leaving 44,600 civilians and 800 soldiers were dead. An estimated 1 million others fled the city in the aftermath.

The bombing was the second raid of Operation Gomorrah, a British bombing campaign lasting more than a week. Further raids were conducted on July 29 and August 2. Additional daytime raids were launched by the US Army Air Force on July 25 and 26.

One British airman recalled: "The burning of Hamburg that night was remarkable in that I saw not many fires but one. Set in the darkness was a turbulent dome of bright red fire lightened and ignited like the glowing heart of a vast brazier. ... Above the city was a misty red haze. I looked down, fascinated but aghast, satisfied yet horrified. I had never seen a fire like that before and was never to see its like again."

Operation Gomorrah was part of a larger Allied strategy to shatter German morale and cripple its industrial production. This included the systematic targeting of residential and working-class areas. Arthur Harris, commander of RAF bombing operations, stated that targeting workers was as effective as bombing factories. "If you can't hit the works, hit the workers," Harris said. Dozens of other cities were similarly targeted.

100 years ago: Riots begin in Japan against high price of rice

On July 23, fisherwomen in the small seaside village of

Uozu, in Toyma Prefecture on the west coast of Japan's largest island, Honshu, assembled on the beach and began peacefully protesting against the high price of rice with petitions to the authorities and rice merchants. Many women in the area worked in the fishing industry since their husbands were away in cities as wageworkers.

The price of rice, the staple food of Japan, had risen precipitously over the previous months. One contributing factor to the high cost was the need to supply the Japanese imperialist forces in the Siberian Intervention against the young Soviet Republic with foodstuffs.

Over the next few weeks demonstrations spread to major cities such as Kobe, Kyoto, Nagoya, Osaka and Tokyo. Police were unable to contain the protests, and in many places the military was called out. Houses of the rich were besieged, and police stations were firebombed by insurgents, as were government institutions and newspaper offices.

The riots, by August, had a semi-insurrectionary character and were led by the young Japanese working class in larger cities. Some sources estimate that as many as a quarter million joined demonstrations in Osaka alone, and that 10 million participated nationwide (out of a population of about 55 million).

While the riots were sparked by the high price of rice, they were a reaction to the breakneck development of capitalism in Japan. As one historian notes, they were "a protest against the extreme exploitation which workers, tenant farmers and others were suffering."

The authorities reacted with extreme severity: 25,000 people were arrested, of whom 8,200 were convicted of various crimes. A number were executed.

The Great Rice Riots were unprecedented in modern Japanese history and caused the fall of the government and resignation of the militarist prime minister, Count Terauchi Masatake, in September. The movement, along with the Russian Revolution a few months earlier, had a tremendous impact on the development of socialist thought in Japan.

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