

## This week in history: June 24-30

24 June 2019

### 25 years ago: US government reopens Guantanamo Bay prison for Haitian refugees

On June 27, 1994, the US Coast Guard intercepted and detained over 1,300 Haitian refugees fleeing north in small boats across the ocean towards Florida, the largest number in a year. Officials said the Coast Guard vessels were overwhelmed by the numbers, and the Pentagon reopened a detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in response.

The detention center had been ruled unconstitutional on June 8, 1993 by US District Judge Sterling Johnson, Jr., but the decision was vacated in order to house the new and larger incoming wave of Haitian refugees. Camp Bulkeley was known for deplorable living conditions and inadequate infrastructure. Prisoners were routinely denied necessary medical care, served rotten food, and deprived of any legal recourse.

The increase in immigration was due to high numbers of civilians attempting to escape imprisonment, torture and dictatorship following the military overthrow of President Jean-Bertrande Aristide. The Clinton administration blamed the influx on a slightly relaxed immigration policy implemented a month prior, under which refugees intercepted by the Coast Guard could receive asylum hearings aboard ship instead of immediately being sent back to Port-au-Prince. About one third of refugees were granted refugee status in comparison to just 5 percent under the previous policy.

Calls for a full-on military invasion of Haiti continued in the media following the refugees' detention at Guantanamo as tensions escalated. There were significant disagreements and debate on policy in the US ruling elite, with the Clinton administration opposed to the new regime, but big business and the US military regarding it as a more dependable guardian of imperialist interests than Aristide.

On June 22 the US Treasury froze all Haitian bank accounts and suspended all commercial flights to and from Port-au-Prince, and the State Department canceled all entry visas for Haitian citizens. The *New York Times* noted, "the United States is not eager to dismantle the Haitian Army, which despite its shortcomings is the only functioning institution in the country." Clinton administration officials told the paper that a full occupation of the island would

require 12,000-14,000 troops on the ground.

Refugees held at Guantanamo Bay were forced to register their identity, including photographs and fingerprints, when repatriated to Haiti and were labeled Aristide supporters, placing them in extreme danger. US President Bill Clinton originally campaigned against forced Haitian repatriation when seeking office in 1991, but reneged and switched sides after taking office under the pretext of reestablishing the Aristide presidency and democracy, under significant pressure from US military officials.

Up to 21,000 Haitian refugees were held at Guantanamo for some period of time. The last of the Haitian refugees left Guantanamo on November 1, 1995.

### 50 years ago: Gays clash with police outside Stonewall Inn in New York City

On the night of June 28, 1969, patrons of the Stonewall Inn and residents of the Greenwich Village neighborhood in New York City clashed with police after a raid on the bar, known for openly serving gay, lesbian, and transgender customers. The clash became known as the Stonewall riot, and touched off a political movement in opposition to discrimination and violence against gays and lesbians.

Raids by police on gay bars were commonplace, and virtually routine, in New York City. Bar owners would bribe police to know when a raid was coming so they could hide their alcohol that was being sold without a license. In addition to seizing alcohol, police would harass and arrest the gay patrons for cross-dressing or "public immorality."

The raid on Stonewall the night of the June 28 was an attempt to gather enough evidence of "illegal" activity to permanently close the bar. When the police entered the bar to begin their arrests, some customers attempted to escape but the doors were barred shut. The police attempted to carry out their normal process at gay club arrests, which involved checking individual's genitals and arresting women who did not have three pieces of female clothing.

However, during this raid the customers resisted arrest and fought back against police. Those who were able to get out before the doors were barred gathered outside, protesting the raid. Other Greenwich residents and homeless youth joined the protests and the crowd grew to at least 500, trapping

police inside the bar.

The NYPD responded by sending the Tactical Patrol Force riot squad to break up the crowds. The demonstrators stood against the police lines as they were charged with batons. The protesters threw anything they could find to defend themselves, from spare change to bricks from a nearby construction site. Thirteen were arrested the first night.

After word of the riot spread, demonstrations continued the following night with a larger crowd of about 1,000 gathering and multiple NYPD precincts being called in to further suppress the demonstrations. Clashes continued until the crowd was dispersed at 4:00 a.m.

### **75 years ago: Copenhagen workers battle Nazi occupation**

On June 26, 1944, opposition to the German occupation forces exploded in Copenhagen as workers launched strikes and demonstrations against Nazi executions, including a death sentence against 13 railway workers in Jutland.

Following the June 6 Allied landing at Normandy, workers and the Danish underground had stepped up their actions against the Nazis. Factories working for the German war effort were sabotaged and the largest munitions manufacturing plant in Copenhagen was blown up in broad daylight.

In the first wave of demonstrations, led by the Copenhagen shipyard workers, German patrols were overwhelmed in the streets by jeering crowds. Hitler ordered German terror gangs and the Danish Nazi Schalburg Corps to be unleashed against the workers.

Streetcar workers, telephone operators and truck drivers called strikes. Workers in one factory after another joined the strike, followed by office workers and shopkeepers. Danish puppet officials and the employers association appealed for a return to work.

By July 1 the movement had coalesced into a general strike. Barricades were thrown up and bloody street fighting erupted. As German forces with their superior firepower cleared one street and moved to the next, workers would regroup and erect new barricades. Copenhagen workers suffered 700 dead and over 1,000 casualties.

German authorities turned off gas, water and electricity and called in military forces from all over Denmark to surround Copenhagen. But the strike movement spread to other cities and was joined by farmers.

The Freedom Council, Denmark's bourgeois-dominated underground movement backed by the Allies, intervened with a proposal to end the general strike if Germany would lift the curfew, withdraw the Danish SS and not carry out reprisals. The council's offer was readily accepted.

### **100 years ago: Signing of the Treaty of Versailles**

On June 28, 1919, the fifth anniversary of the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the political spark for the First World War, the German delegation to the Paris Peace Conference put its signature to the Treaty of Versailles in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, outside Paris.

The proposed treaty had been submitted to the Germans on May 7. The chief of the delegation, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, protested the punitive conditions, but the victorious imperialist powers—the US, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan—made only slight modifications.

Germany was to reduce its army to no more than 100,000 men, accept sole guilt for the war (the infamous Clause 231) and pay reparations to the tune of \$442 billion in 2019 dollars.

The treaty's terms included considerable territorial cessions by Germany. Germany lost over 7 million people and 25,000 square miles. Alsace-Lorraine went to France. The Saar area was to be put under international administration for 15 years, after which a plebiscite would be held, France exploiting the coal mines in the meanwhile. Northern and central Schleswig were to decide their allegiance—to Denmark or Germany—by plebiscite.

In addition, Germany was to cede the greater part of Posen and West Prussia to Poland; Danzig was to be a free state within the Polish customs union; and plebiscites were to be held in parts of East Prussia. Perhaps most significantly, all German colonies were ceded to the Allied imperialists, to be organized as mandates under the official supervision of the League of Nations.

The treaty became a linchpin of the “stab in the back” myth put forward the Nazis and other nationalists that Jews, Social-Democrats and Communists had lost the war for Germany—although the 1918 revolution broke out after German forces were in headlong retreat on the Western Front—and helped to impose the onerous conditions of the peace.

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