

This week in history: June 1-7

1 June 2020

25 years ago: US fighter jet shot down as Bosnian war escalates

On June 2, 1995, a United States Air Force F-16 jet was shot down by Bosnian Serb forces over Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it was patrolling a NATO no-fly zone. The rescue effort for its pilot, Captain Scott O'Grady, was used by the Clinton administration to divert public attention from the crisis of US foreign policy and the drift toward an all-out war in the Balkans that had been escalating in prior weeks. O'Grady eluded capture for a week before his rescue on June 8.

The enormous efforts by Washington to rescue the downed pilot came in the midst of a dramatic escalation of the Bosnian crisis, a chapter in the imperialist break-up of Yugoslavia, a series of wars and massacres that led to tens of thousands of deaths and made millions of refugees among all of the region's ethnic and religious communities.

UN sources reported that the Bosnian Muslim government was massing up to 30,000 soldiers outside Sarajevo in preparation for an offensive aimed at breaking the siege of the Bosnian capital, and had reportedly given an ultimatum to a Canadian battalion of the UN peacekeeping forces to withdraw. One UN official told Reuters, "There's never been a massing of troops like this in the Bosnian war."

Bosnian Serbs, meanwhile, had announced a general mobilization to counter the military buildup. After Bosnian Serbs seized hundreds of UN troops as hostages, UN officials signaled that they would no longer order NATO air strikes against Serb military targets. Britain, which along with France had the largest contingent of UN troops in the former Yugoslav republic, warned that a Muslim offensive around Sarajevo could potentially provoke a UN withdrawal.

Before the plane was shot down, the US, Britain, and France had all dispatched military reinforcements in response to the mounting crisis between UN and Bosnian Serb forces. The month prior saw not only the shelling of Sarajevo and Tuzla by Serb gunners, but also the May 1 Croatian government offensive against the Serb-populated region of the western Slavonia region, which claimed hundreds of lives and turned thousands more into refugees.

50 years ago: Nixon and intelligence chiefs draw up "Huston Plan"

On June 5, 1970 US President Richard Nixon met with four heads of American intelligence agencies to draw up a new

domestic spying plan. The "Huston Plan," named after White House aide Tom Charles Huston who authored its original draft, outlined a massive expansion of operations against anti-war and left-wing organizations.

Present at the meeting were J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI, Richard Helms of the CIA, Noel Gayler of the National Security Administration, and Donald V. Bennett of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Hoover, whose career as anti-democratic bureaucrat stretched back to World War I, served as the chair of the meeting. According to documents declassified in 2003, the purpose of the Huston Plan was for the FBI, CIA, NSA and DIA to provide the president with information on "the efforts of new left subversive groups in directing dissident activities in the United States."

The plan outlined the removal of significant restrictions on intelligence collecting. Powers granted to the intelligence groups would include the intensification of phone surveillance, the intercepting of the mail of targeted groups and individuals, an expansion of the number of groups designated for infiltration, and the monitoring of students studying or traveling abroad. Some elements of the Huston Plan were not new and had been staples of the FBI's COINTELPRO, which had been operating since 1956. The Huston Plan was intended to deepen this work and expand its tactics and collaboration across all of the intelligence branches, dissolving the constitutional and legal barriers between foreign and domestic espionage, to create a single, massive spying network.

The Huston Plan was officially called off by Nixon in July 1970, just one day before it was to go into effect. However, much of the framework and strategy of the plan continued to be used by the intelligence agencies. Some of the activities prompted by the plan included the creation of Nixon's special intelligence group the "Plumbers Unit" and the raid on the office of Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg in 1971.

The Huston Plan came one month after massive anti-war demonstrations shook the US in the wake of the illegal invasion of Cambodia. Nixon and the ruling class response was to meet these protests with brute force, exemplified in the killing of students at Kent State in Ohio and Jackson College in Mississippi.

75 years ago: Pope Pius XII warns of the threat of revolution in Europe

On June 2, 1945, Pope Pius XII warned in an address to the College of Cardinals that the “fragile peace” established in Europe with the defeat of the Nazi regime by the Allied powers could give way to socialist revolutions of the working class.

The war, the Pope stated, had created “one of the gravest perils not only for religion and morality but also for harmonious relations between men. It has, above all, created those mobs of dispossessed, disillusioned, disappointed and hopeless men who are going to swell the ranks of revolution and disorder, in the pay of a tyranny no less despotic than those for whose overthrow men planned.”

The Pope condemned any attempts to establish “a new political or cultural system.” He cited Jesus, declaring: “Poor world, to which then might be applied the words of Christ: ‘And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.’” In other words, the prospect of the establishment of workers’ power was worse than the fascist regimes.

Pius made this plain by bemoaning the sweeping advances of the Soviet Red Army throughout Eastern Europe, where it overthrew right-wing dictatorships that had been aligned with the German Third Reich and the Vatican. His comments were made amid mass ferment throughout Western Europe and internationally, as millions of workers and anti-fascist partisans strove for a decisive settlement with the capitalist system, which they correctly recognized as the source of the horrors of the previous six years.

Much of Pius’ speech was a tortured attempt to explain away the Church’s signing of a concordat with Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler when he came to power in 1933. This, he claimed, had been the only way for Catholics to gain an “assurance of respect for their convictions, for their faith, rights or liberty of action.”

Pius’ hypocritical denunciations of the Nazis as “satanic” were aimed at covering up the Church’s collaboration with the fascist regimes and preparing broad sections of the clergy, who had supported those extreme right-wing governments, to make the necessary adjustment to align with the victorious Allied powers.

The Church had not only colluded with Hitler, but was also intimately involved in the war crimes committed by Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime in Italy, along with the brutal suppression of the Spanish Revolution and the establishment of a military dictatorship under General Francisco Franco. As he was speaking, senior figures within the Church were involved in establishing “rat lines” that would allow fascist criminals to escape justice, including by fleeing to Latin America.

100 years ago: Ku Klux Klan launches recruitment drive

On June 7, 1920, William Simmons, the Imperial Wizard of the fascist Ku Klux Klan (KKK), hired the Southern Publicity Association (SPA), a reactionary PR firm owned by Klan member Edward Young Clarke, and Mary Elizabeth Tyler, a member of the Klan’s women’s organization, the Daughters of

America, to conduct a systematic recruitment drive for new members.

Under the guidance of the SPA, Klan propaganda aggressively targeted blacks, Jews, Catholics, immigrants and socialists, and advocated “100% Americanism.” The SPA hired organizers and the firm received a portion of the \$10 initiation fee. In six months the KKK had grown to 85,000 members. At its peak in the mid-1920s, it had 4-5 million members.

Simmons had founded the “second Klan,” in 1915 after he had seen *Birth of a Nation*, the film by D.W. Griffith, which depicted the “first Klan” of the reconstruction period following the Civil War as heroic. Simmons also utilized the imagery and ideology in the novels about Reconstruction on which the film was based, *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902), *The Clansman* (1905), and *The Traitor* (1907) by white supremacist author Thomas Dixon. Dixon was also deeply anti-socialist and wrote a novel that was turned into the 1919 film, *Bolshevism on Trial*.

The growth of the Klan was the product of the reaction by the ruling class and sections of the lower middle class to the tumultuous struggles of the working class after the war, including the great coal and steel strikes of 1919, and the formation of the Communist Party, which was spurred on by the Russian Revolution of 1917.

As a battering ram against the working class, the Klan operated with the tacit encouragement of the federal government. It marked in several respects a carryover from the state-sponsored nationalist propaganda during World War I and the government’s efforts to suppress the working class, especially the assault on socialists, Communists and anarchists by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer after 1919.

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