

This week in history: July 6-July 12

6 July 2020

25 years ago: Thousands killed at Srebrenica massacre

On July 11, 1995, the Bosnian Serb takeover of the besieged town of Srebrenica began, leading to a mass killing of Bosnian Muslims that lasted the entire week. The Bosnian Serb Army, under the command of Ratko Mladic, murdered over 8,000 Bosniaks, mostly men and boys. It was the largest mass murder in Europe since the Second World War.

The United Nations had declared Srebrenica a safe area under UN protection, but failed to prevent its capture and the ensuing massacre. The safe areas themselves had served as military bases for the Bosnian Muslim government. A UN report published in May 1995, issued by Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, noted: “In recent months, [Bosnian] Government forces have considerably increased their military activity in and around most safe areas, and many of them ... have been incorporated into the broader military campaign.”

The United States, France, Britain and Germany had intensified their military intervention into the Bosnian civil war, part of the larger decade-long effort to destroy Yugoslavia, which had united in one federation Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Muslims, Albanians, Montenegrins, and others.

The imperialist powers encouraged the declarations of independence by Croatia and Bosnia, both former subdivisions of Yugoslavia, which suddenly placed their local Serb populations in a minority status. Bosnia, in particular, had no majority, but was populated by Muslims, Serbs and Croats, widely distributed across the republic, with considerable intermarriage. The civil war was preceded by decades of nationalist and communal agitation which served to exacerbate tensions among all three ethno-religious groupings.

The grisly Srebrenica war crime carried out by the Serbs against the Muslims only played into the imperialists’ hands and paved the way for further crimes and the acceleration of fratricidal wars in the Balkans.

In the aftermath of the massacre the US Senate passed a resolution calling for the unilateral lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia, an action which virtually assured the withdrawal of the United Nations Protection Force, which had initially been deployed in the guise of the defense of Muslim civilians in the so-called United Nations “safe areas” of eastern Bosnia.

50 years ago: Police shoot 46 in Asbury Park riot

On July 7, 1970, police shot at demonstrators protesting against inequality and unemployment in the beach resort city of

Asbury Park, New Jersey, wounding as many as 46. The wounded included a 14-year-old boy and a 75-year-old man.

Young black working-class residents of Asbury Park had been demonstrating since the Fourth of July, when clashes with police took place following a late-night dance at the West Side Community Center. Police began arresting youths leaving the dance claiming that they had been involved in breaking nearby store windows. The following night hundreds of residents turned out to protest against the police and social inequality in their city.

Demonstrations grew each night after July 4 and spread from the working-class west side into the business district. After the first few nights of rioting the city declared a curfew and state of emergency. State police were called in to bolster the local police forces and overwhelm demonstrators. Residents fought back against heavily-armed police with bottles and stones, culminating in the violence of the night of July 7.

Witnesses reported seeing police fire their weapons indiscriminately into the windows of black-owned stores. One woman, Susan Baldwin, told the *New York Times* that the police had pointed guns at her and told her they were going to “give you n****r something to remember.”

Tony Maples, president of a community organization the United Black Brothers spoke on Asbury’s inequality saying, “This is a resort town. When you go over and look at the beach, everything is beautiful and shining ... when you come over here all you can see is hell.”

The riots continued until July 10 when the curfew was lifted. Talks had begun between city officials and some prominent black figures in the city. Damages to the city were estimated at \$5 million, about \$33 million in 2020 dollars. Efforts were made to restore damages to the wealthy shops and resorts. However, many older buildings that had been burned in the working-class areas were left as rubble.

Asbury Park was home to a number of beach resort hotels and tourist shopping centers that made up much of the city’s economy. Asbury Park’s black residents, who made up about one-third of the city’s population of 22,000, were often denied jobs at the resorts and retail stores.

75 years ago: Soviet Union hands West Berlin to Britain and the US

On July 12, 1945, British and US troops took control of West Berlin, after it was formally relinquished by the Soviet Union

the day before. The handover was part of the carve-up of Germany into zones controlled by the different Allied powers, following the defeat of the Nazi regime in May.

The Soviet Red Army had played the decisive role in the capture of Berlin, breaking a last stand by Nazi forces in the city through April and into early May. The fierce fighting had laid waste to much of the German capital, decimating its military and civilian infrastructure. It was not until almost a month after the May 8 German military surrender that British and US soldiers entered Berlin.

The Yalta Conference of Allied leaders had, in February 1945, finalized plans for the division of Germany into four occupation zones at the end of the conflict, to be controlled by the Soviet Union, Britain, the US and France. This supplanted an earlier London agreement that had excluded France. The carve-up would be ratified at the Potsdam Conference, which began on July 17. Under the terms agreed at Yalta, France was to control northwest Berlin, Britain the west, and the US the southwest of the city, while eastern Berlin would be administered by the Soviet Union.

The handing over of West Berlin to Britain and the US followed the adoption by the four Allied powers of the Berlin Declaration on June 5. Because the German surrender had only been signed by Nazi military authorities, the Berlin declaration provided for the formal liquidation of all national and local governing and administrative structures set in place by the Third Reich.

The Berlin Declaration asserted the power of the Allies to redraw Germany's borders, formalizing the relinquishment of its World War II conquests, including Poland. Domestically, the declaration ratified the takeover and carve-up of the country into zones by the Allies. Its eleventh article mandated the arrest and trial of Nazi leaders and those who had been involved in war crimes. Article thirteen gave the Allies the power to direct economic, legal and political institutions within the zones under their control.

The division of Berlin in July occurred amid ongoing discussions among the Allied powers over the post-war carve-up of Europe and the entire world. The Soviet Union, ruled by the privileged Stalinist bureaucracy, was no less determined than the other Allied powers to prevent the emergence of a revolutionary socialist movement of the European working class at the end of the war. Throughout western, southern and eastern Europe it sought to prevent any settling of accounts with capitalism by workers who had been radicalized by the experience of fascism and war.

In 1945, the bureaucracy had no plans for encouraging socialist measures in any part of Germany. Its overriding aim was to expand its own sphere of influence, especially in Eastern Europe, as a bulwark against any future imperialist invasion of the USSR.

100 years: Martial law in Beijing

On July 10, 1920, authorities under Duan Qirui, leader of the Anhui Clique of warlords, declared martial law in Beijing as forces from the Zhili Clique, led by Cao Kun, converged on the city. Another warlord, Zhang Zuolin, who controlled most of Manchuria, backed Kun in the attack. The short and bloody war that followed is known as the Anhui-Zhili War. It concluded on July 23, after thousands of deaths, with Duan's ouster.

China, unlike most of Africa and South Asia, had not been formally carved up into colonial possessions by the imperialist powers. However, the Republic of China, known as the Beiyang Government at this time, was divided into territories run by feuding warlords who were supported by the various imperialist governments. The Anhui Clique was assisted by Japanese imperialist troops. The Zhili Clique had the favor of American and British imperialism.

The imperialist powers feared that the situation in China could develop into a civil war, jeopardizing commercial interests, which they were prepared to defend. The *New York Times* on July 11 noted that there were 275 US Marines in Beijing but that 1,500 soldiers could be called up from Tianjin, 80 miles from Beijing. Just as significantly, in the eyes of the American, French, British and Japanese great powers, was the fact that an anti-imperialist movement had begun to take root in the Chinese masses. Already the May Fourth Movement of 1919 showed the beginnings of socialist sentiment in the Chinese intelligentsia. The Communist Party of China would be founded in Shanghai in July 1921.

The development of the working class and the emergence of socialism posed the historical question of which class would lead the Chinese revolution, including in its basic national tasks of unifying the country and destroying the imperialist "spheres of influence." The dominance of the warlords already demonstrated that neither the Chinese landlord class nor the bourgeoisie, inextricably entwined with it, were capable of carrying forward the struggle against imperialism.

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