

This week in history: June 3-9

2 June 2024

25 years ago: Anwar Ibrahim stands in second trial

On June 7, 1999, just two months following his conviction on four counts of corruption, Malaysian former finance minister Anwar Ibrahim stood trial for the second time on criminal charges of sodomy in Kuala Lumpur. Anwar and his adopted brother, Sukma Dermawan, were accused of sexual misconduct or indecency—a charge that carried a maximum penalty of 20 years jail and whipping for convicted persons under the age of 50.

Sacked from his government posts the previous September, Anwar had been expelled from the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and subjected to a barrage of flimsy allegations in the government-controlled press, including hindering police investigations and sedition in addition to the indecency charges. He denied the charges against him and had visible bruising to the face and neck when arrested in September and accused the police of beating him unconscious on the first night of his detention then.

The country's reactionary legislation made illegal consensual homosexual activities. The retention of such laws was aimed at conservative religious, particularly Islamic, layers in rural areas—a major social base for the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and also the opposition Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS).

Even within the framework of the Malaysian legal system, the evidence for the second charge against Anwar was as threadbare and contradictory as that used to convict him of four charges of corruption just two months prior—and to sentence him to six years in jail. The defense lawyers presented a motion to the presiding High Court Judge Ariffin Jaka to have the charges thrown out of court on the grounds of bad faith by the prosecution.

Defense lawyers pointed out that the prosecution had amended its charges twice. After initially claiming that the sexual activities took place in May 1994, the prosecution in April changed the time period to May 1992, citing a typographical error. When the trial commenced, Malaysia's Attorney General Mohtar Abdullah again shifted the time period to between January and March 1993.

The persecution of Ibrahim, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, has “revealed sharp divisions within the bourgeoisie fueled by the country's economic slump. Moreover, it has exposed the fragility of the entire post-war structure of Malaysian politics.”

50 years ago: Yitzhak Rabin becomes prime minister of Israel

On June 3, 1974, Yitzhak Rabin took office as the new prime minister of Israel after the resignation of Golda Meir in April. Rabin was the first in a long line of Israeli prime ministers to come directly out of the Israel Defense Forces and into the highest office in the state. His elevation represented a turn away from civilian control over the government.

Rabin, born in Jerusalem in 1922, was the first Israeli Prime Minister native to the territory that would become Israel. With an education steeped in Zionism, in 1941 he joined the Haganah, a Zionist paramilitary organization that would dissolve into the IDF after the latter's creation in 1948.

During the 1948 Nakba expulsion of Palestinians, Rabin served as a deputy commander and was directly involved in driving out entire populations from towns and cities. He issued orders that the residents must be immediately “expelled quickly without attention to age.” He and the soldiers under his command forced 50,000 Palestinian civilians from their homes in Lod and Ramlah at gunpoint and marched them to an area designated for Arabs.

From then on, he continually advanced in rank in the IDF until he was appointed Chief of Staff in 1964. Rabin was the primary leader and organizer of the 1967 Six-Day War. The major blows the invasion delivered to Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and the expansion of Israel's borders, brought him to favor among ruling layers in Israel and the US.

In 1968 he left the IDF to become the Israeli Ambassador to the US. His chief task was to ensure that the US became the leading military supplier to Israel. Rabin developed a close relationship with Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. In 1973 during the Yom Kippur War, he worked with the White House to carry out Operation Nickel Grass, the massive rearmament operation to supply Israel with US-made tanks and munitions. The operation was the largest military airlift in history.

After the end of the Yom Kippur War the Israeli government prepared an investigation, known as the Agranat Commission, to identify the causes for the strategic defeat. The report placed significant blame on Prime Minister Golda Meir, which led to her resignation shortly after its findings became public.

In choosing her replacement, the Israeli ruling class, with consultation from US imperialism, decided that the Zionist state required more direct control by the military to prepare for future operations. With his long record of unapologetic military brutality and having been officially outside the IDF during the Yom Kippur defeat, Rabin was picked as the ideal candidate.

In his address to the Knesset on the day he accepted office, Rabin declared, referring to the official signing of a ceasefire agreement with Syria that same week, “The separation-of-forces agreements between Israel and Egypt and between Israel and Syria

are not peace agreements... We must look upon these agreements from the viewpoint of the historic struggle of the Jewish people for the establishment and consolidation of the State of Israel.”

75 years ago: US Communist Party leaders sent to jail for contempt in frame-up Smith Act trial

On June 3, 1949, Judge Harold Medina jailed three leaders of the Communist Party (CP) for contempt in a trial he was presiding over in New York. The three, John Gates, Henry Winston and Gus Hall, were among eleven defendants charged under the Smith Act with educating and preparing the overthrow of the American government.

In addition to being a major attack on civil liberties, the proceedings pointed to the way in which the trial was being used to further a broader witch-hunt of CP members and sympathizers.

Gates was the first witness for the defense. Under cross-examination, chief prosecutor John McGohey began to demand information from him about the posts held by other CP members on trial. Gates initially sought not to answer but provided the information at the agreement of his codefendants. McGohey turned to a pamphlet Gates had written on the conditions facing military veterans. When the prosecutor demanded the names of three coauthors, Gates refused, noting that they were privately employed and citing his First and Fifth amendment rights.

With the jury sent out, Medina quickly declared Gates “guilty of a willful and deliberate contempt,” to be punished by up to thirty days in jail. Winston condemned this as “monstrous” and Hall denounced the “kangaroo court,” prompting them to join Gates in jail.

An article for *The Militant* by Farrell Dobbs, a leader of the Socialist Workers Party, then the Trotskyist party in America, noted that the proceedings pointed to a developing pattern. The ultimatum from the judge was essentially, “Be a stoolpigeon or go to jail.”

Pointing to the broader implications of the prosecution, Dobbs explained: “Since the Stalinists are falsely represented by the prosecution to be genuine adherents to the principles of scientific socialism and firm opponents of imperialist war, it follows that a precedent would be established for the government to attack all advocates of socialism and all opponents of the war that is now in preparation.”

Dobbs exposed the claims of the Stalinists that Gates’ conduct showed they would never betray. He pointed to the Stalinists’ decades-long record of treachery, in service of the Soviet bureaucracy. This had included support for American imperialism throughout most of World War II, including assisting to enforce a no-strike pledge against workers and cheering on the 1941 prosecution of Dobbs himself and other SWP leaders under the same Smith Act now being used against the CP.

100 years ago: Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb indicted for murder in Chicago

On June 5, 1924, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, two University of Chicago students, were indicted for the murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks. The two had confessed.

Leopold and Loeb had committed the crime, one of the most notorious in American history and a cause célèbre at the time, after choosing Franks at random, kidnapping him, and killing him to commit the “perfect crime.” To cover their tracks, they sent a ransom note to Franks’ family, although he was already dead. They were arrested after police discovered eyeglasses belonging to Leopold and were able to trace them back to him.

Both came from wealthy families and were extraordinarily intelligent. They had come under the influence of the 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the “superman” who was not subject to the same moral law as the rest of society.

The arrest sparked an enormous witch-hunt by the capitalist media, which had overtones of homophobia and anti-Semitism.

The families of Leopold and Loeb retained Clarence Darrow as their attorney, one of the leading progressive lawyers of the era, who decided to have the two plead guilty to avoid the death penalty under conditions of massive and negative publicity. Darrow was deeply opposed to the death penalty. As the WSWS noted in an article on the case, Darrow sought to bring out the social conditions behind the crime:

“The defense sought to bring before the court, as mitigating circumstances, the boys’ social maladjustment and mental illness. The privileged upbringing of Leopold and Loeb had warped their personalities. Their parents taught them that anything they wanted could be bought. They grew up believing that they were beyond any responsibility.”

Darrow ended his famous speech to the court with the words: “I am pleading for a time when hatred and cruelty will not control the hearts of men. When we can learn by reason and judgment and understanding and faith that all life is worth saving, and that mercy is the highest attribute of man.”

They were both sentenced to long terms in prison. Loeb was killed in a fight with another convict in 1936 but Leopold was released on parole in 1958. He became a medical technician and contributed to the study of Puerto Rican wildlife.

The case sparked a number of films and books, including Alfred Hitchcock’s 1948 *Rope* and Meyer Levin’s 1956 novel *Compulsion* and its 1959 film adaptation by Richard Fleischer. Richard Wright’s 1940 novel *Native Son* was also influenced by the case.



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