

This week in history: June 10-16

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago.

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25 years ago: NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia ends

On June 10, 1999, NATO halted its bombing campaign of Yugoslavia after its president, Slobodan Milošević, acceded to Washington's terms paving the way for the break-off of the predominantly Albanian province of Kosovo from Serbia. On June 12, soldiers of NATO's "KFOR" 30,000-strong occupation army began entering Kosovo, though in a significant embarrassment to Washington, the NATO soldiers were beaten there by a counter-peacekeeping force sent by the Russian Federation.

The halt to bombing brought to a conclusion the imperialist break-up of Yugoslavia, which a decade earlier had included Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The western powers, led by the US and Germany, had used the restoration of capitalism in Yugoslavia to foment nationalist and religious divisions. They were aided by the various Yugoslav Stalinist ruling cliques which, in each region, sought to hoard the country's wealth and re-create themselves as a new capitalist class.

Serbia, as the largest and strongest of the Yugoslav republics, was the central target of the imperialists. Washington presented its predatory aims as a human rights crusade, insisting that Milošević and the Serbian people were responsible for all crimes, though atrocities were committed on all sides. The pseudo-left, then emerging as a distinct right-wing political tendency among former radicals, provided ideological cover.

The NATO bombing campaign against Serbia had nothing to do with the defense of human rights. Without the backing of a United Nations resolution and without a formal declaration of war from the US Congress, the Clinton administration and its British, French, German, and Italian allies killed thousands of Serbs and destroyed the country's infrastructure. Serbia was defenseless. Not a single NATO soldier died in the bombing campaign, which lasted unchecked for three months and two weeks and consisted of some 35,000 sorties. The most immediate outcome of the "humanitarian intervention" was the ethnic cleansing of over half of the Serbian population of Kosovo, which was now ruled over by NATO ally the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), in essence a criminal drug cartel given state power.

On the evening of June 10, US President Bill Clinton appeared on national television to boast that NATO had "achieved victory" in Yugoslavia. He used the speech to level new threats against the Serbian people, promising the US would "provide no support for the reconstruction of Serbia" so long as Milošević remained in power.

On June 14, the *World Socialist Web Site* published a lecture by David North, chair of its international editorial board, summarizing the critical historical lessons of the experience, titled *After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War*. North noted,

Far from representing a humanitarian break with the past, the Balkan War of 1999 signals the virulent resurgence of its most malignant characteristics: the legitimization of the naked use of overwhelming military power against small countries in pursuit of strategic "Big Power" interests, the cynical violation of the principle of national sovereignty and the de facto reestablishment of colonialist forms of subjugation, and the revival of inter-imperialist antagonisms that carry within them the seeds of a new world war. The demons of imperialism that first arose at the beginning of the twentieth century have not been exorcized by the international bourgeoisie. They still haunt mankind as it enters into the twenty-first.

50 years ago: Cop who shot and killed 10-year-old boy in New York acquitted

On June 12, 1973 Thomas Shea, a white New York City police officer, was acquitted of murder charges in the killing of Clifford Glover, a 10-year-old African American boy in April of 1973. In the days that followed the acquittal, riots broke out in the Jamaica neighborhood in Queens, where the Glover family resided.

The verdict, reached by a nearly all-white jury, ran so counter to the facts of the case that it can only be compared to the acquittals of Ku Klux Klan members for lynching black men in the South. Virtually every member of the jury was selected because they had close personal ties to NYPD officers. The one black member of the jury was a parole officer.

During the trial, forensic evidence was presented that Shea had drawn his weapon on the 10-year-old Glover and fired shots into his back as he attempted to flee the officers. Shea in fact admitted to shooting Glover, but claimed "self-defense."

The facts of the case demonstrated that Shea's motivation for stopping Glover, who was walking with his stepfather on his way to work, was racism. Shea claimed he and his partner had been searching for two suspects in a robbery. The description given to the officers was two black men in their 20s. Add Armstead, the boy's stepfather, was 51, while the young Glover did not yet stand five feet tall. During the trial, Shea admitted his own racist motivation, telling the court, "I was just looking at their skin."

In Armstead's account of the events, a car pulled up on him and Glover and then an armed man jumped out shouting, "You black son of a bitch!" Believing they were being robbed, the pair instinctively attempted to turn and run. Shea was in plainclothes, not his police uniform.

Only moments after they attempted to flee, Shea fired shots at Clifford Glover, hitting the child in the back. Armstead ran around the corner and flagged down a patrol car to report the attack, still unaware that his assailant was an officer of the NYPD. When he arrived back at the scene with the other officers they discovered the boy dead in a pool of blood. Shea claimed that Glover had a weapon and fired shots backwards while running.

“It was cold blooded murder,” Armstead told the *Bulletin*, “I didn’t have a gun and the boy didn’t have a gun. I have been on my job for 28 years and haven’t caused trouble. I don’t feel I got justice.”

“Everyone is lying about the shooting of my brother like they’re lying about Watergate,” said Nettie Dobson, Glover’s older sister. “The police, Nixon, all of them are guilty. All these people are crooked.”

75 years ago: US appeals court upholds HUAC witch-hunting of Dalton Trumbo

On June 13, 1949, the US Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington upheld a conviction for contempt of Congress of screenwriters Dalton Trumbo and John Howard Lawson. The ruling insisted that those hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had to fully cooperate with its police state witch-hunting of those accused of communist and socialist sympathies.

Trumbo and Lawson were among the “Hollywood Ten,” a group of film professionals who had been cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to cooperate with HUAC’s activities. All were charged with contempt and blacklisted from the Hollywood film industry.

Trumbo and other members of the 10 had been targeted by far-right muckrakers. Trumbo was among the first to be vilified, having been accused of being a communist sympathizer by William R. Wilkerson, publisher and founder of the *Hollywood Reporter*, in July 1946. He was hauled before HUAC the following year and courageously refused to answer questions about his political sympathies and those of others in Hollywood.

The Court of Appeals ruling was part of a broader push to mandate that citizens inform on the political views of others. Only weeks before, a leader of the Communist Party, among a group of defendants charged with advocating the overthrow of the government under the Smith Act, had been found in contempt of court for refusing to identify other Communist Party members and supporters.

In an indication of the atmosphere that was being whipped up, the day before the appeal ruling in Trumbo and Lawson’s case, the University of California, Berkeley announced that it would require all 4,000 of its faculty members to swear an oath disclaiming support for “any party or organization that believes in, advocates or teaches the overthrow of the Government of the United States by force or by any illegal unconstitutional methods.”

Also this week, President Harry S. Truman agreed with reporters at a news conference there was a danger of “hysteria” sweeping the nation. Truman drew a parallel with developments after the passage of the Alien and Sedition laws in 1790. Despite spy scares, “Hysteria finally died down, and things straightened out, and the country didn’t go to hell, and it isn’t going to now.”

The comments were a cynical attempt to distance Truman from the witch-hunt that he had helped to instigate and lead. It was a domestic manifestation of his government’s shift to an aggressive Cold War program aimed at securing US imperialist domination throughout Europe and internationally.

100 years ago: Anglo-Iraqi Treaty ratified

On June 10, 1924, the Iraqi Constituent Assembly in Baghdad ratified the Anglo Iraqi Treaty of 1922. The treaty made Iraq a protectorate of British imperialism, giving Britain control of Iraq’s foreign affairs and Iraq nominal control over its domestic affairs.

The conditions of the treaty had been worked out by the Cairo Conference of March 1921, in which British colonial officials met secretly to determine the concrete conditions of British imperialist rule in the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I. The League of Nations had awarded the British and French control over large areas of the Middle East formerly governed by the Ottoman Empire, which had surrendered to Allied imperialism in 1918.

British and French imperialism had previously decided, in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, to divide the Middle East between them. These plans did not consider the desires of the oppressed peoples of the region for national independence. An anti-British uprising developed in Iraq in 1920, which the British suppressed, including with air bombardment using chemical weapons.

The Cairo Conference sought to resolve the situation by creating a series of nominally independent puppet states and putting them under the control of Arab potentates. The conference also reaffirmed British support for the Zionist colonization of Palestine, but sought to placate the Palestinians.

Plans were laid for a Kingdom of Iraq ruled by Faisal bin Hussein for his brother Abdullah to rule over the area known as Transjordan, today the Kingdom of Jordan. The two brothers had been born in Mecca, now in Saudi Arabia.

Faisal was crowned in August 1921. The treaty of 1922 was significantly delayed because of opposition in both Britain and Iraq. The Iraqi Constituent Assembly only ratified it in 1924 after the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Dobbs, threatened to nullify the Iraqi Constitution. The Treaty was viewed with contempt by the Iraqi people.



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