

This week in history: June 17-23

16 June 2024

25 years ago: Texas executes Canadian citizen Stanley Faulder

On June 17, 1999, Stanley Faulder, a 61-year-old native of Jasper, Alberta, was executed by lethal injection in Huntsville, Texas. His final appeal to the US Supreme Court was rejected 75 minutes before he was put to death. Faulder became the first Canadian executed in the US since 1952.

Aspiring presidential candidate and Texas Governor George W. Bush did not intervene to halt the execution. The Texas Board of Parole and Pardons voted 18-0 to deny Faulder's request for reprieve or commutation of sentence. Although Bush could not override their ruling, he could have granted a one-time 30-day delay.

Plans to execute Faulder had provoked international protest because Texas authorities failed at the time of his arrest to inform him of his right to seek assistance from the Canadian consulate. In violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, Faulder had been in prison for 15 years before the Canadian government was informed of his arrest and conviction. The United States is a signer to the treaty, although Texas claims it is not required to abide by it, as the state did not sign it.

Amnesty International, the human rights group, reported that it knew of 73 foreign nationals from 24 countries sitting on death row in the United States at the time of Faulder's execution. Of those, only three were informed of their consular rights. Texas had executed three foreign nationals—Carlos Santana, Ramon Montoya and Irineo Tristan Montoya. The state of Virginia executed Paraguayan Angel Francisco Breard early in 1998, despite protests from the International Court of Justice.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had intervened in the Faulder case, urging a full clemency review and the granting of a 30-day reprieve. The Canadian government had also called for a stay of execution. Faulder's lawyer Sandra Babcock argued as well that the 22 years the prisoner spent on death row and his nine previous execution dates constituted cruel and unusual punishment.

Faulder was convicted in 1977 for the 1975 murder of an elderly woman in Gladewater, Texas, and was sentenced to death. The victim's wealthy family hired private prosecutors, and their case relied upon the testimony of an alleged accomplice in the crime who was granted immunity. The family offered this witness a large cash payment in exchange for testimony incriminating Faulder. The prosecution also hired "expert" witnesses to testify to Faulder's supposed sociopathic tendencies.

Faulder was provided with a court-appointed lawyer, who never

brought out at trial that Faulder had suffered a massive head injury at the age of three, causing permanent brain damage and mental impairment. The attorney carried out no pre-trial investigation and called no witnesses. Texas law did not forbid the execution of the mentally impaired.

50 years ago: Pinochet establishes Gestapo-like police agency in Chile

On June 18, 1974, Chilean military dictator Augusto Pinochet reorganized the country's intelligence agency, removing it as a branch of the Army and making it an independent entity. The Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Directorate) known as DINA, then became Pinochet's Gestapo, carrying out warrantless arrests, torture, assassinations, and other forms of political terror on behalf of the dictatorship.

The DINA was essentially a local branch of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operating in Chile. While kept officially secret at the time, declassified CIA reports have confirmed that DINA took its orders directly from Washington with its head, Manuel Contreras, being a paid agent and considered among the CIA's most trusted assets.

After his coup d'état on September 11, 1973 ousted Chile's Popular Unity coalition government of the Social Democratic Party and the Stalinist Communist Party, resulting in the death of President Salvador Allende, Pinochet had already begun a campaign of political repression of all left-wing political tendencies with a series of raids and arrests of known political leaders. However, it became clear that for the military regime to hold onto power and stop mass eruptions of working class struggle it would need to construct a constant state of terror.

This was the basic purpose of DINA: to spy on and hunt down all political opponents of Pinochet and his fascist regime. The agency established a network of secret detention centers where tens of thousands of people were imprisoned, tortured, and killed.

The main targets of DINA were the leaders of the Popular Unity coalition and the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), a pseudo-left party that shared political responsibility with Allende for disarming the working class in the face of the fascist military revolt. Both within Chile and internationally with the support of the CIA, DINA tracked down and murdered virtually all the principal leaders of these organizations.

The victims included Orlando Letelier, who had served as the Chilean ambassador to the United States during Allende's

presidency. Letelier was arrested after the September 1973 coup and held for one year under harsh conditions and torture. After protests from several nations, Letelier was released and moved to the US where he represented the opposition to Pinochet in exile.

In 1976, DINA assassinated Letelier in a car bombing in Washington, D.C. that also killed his aide Ronni Karpen Moffitt. International uproar over the assassination forced Contreras to step down as head of DINA. The agency officially disbanded shortly after, but was immediately replaced by the National Information Center (CNI), which served the same purpose.

In an interview from prison after he was arrested and sentenced for the murder of Letelier in 1993, Contreras explained that it was the CIA who planned and ordered the assassination with DINA playing the role of hitman: “The CIA could not act within the United States; it could only act through foreigners. So they killed him and put the blame on us.”

In a series of trials after the fall of Pinochet’s dictatorship, Contreras was sentenced to over 500 years in prison for crimes committed while head of DINA.

75 years ago: Central Intelligence Agency Act comes into effect

On June 20, 1949, US President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Central Intelligence Agency Act, providing the legislative framework under which the recently established CIA would function. The act provided the agency with sweeping secrecy and exemptions from norms for other government bodies.

The creation of a powerful foreign intelligence agency with its tentacles stretching across the globe was inextricably linked to American imperialism’s bid for global geopolitical and economic hegemony. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a predecessor of the CIA, had been established in 1942, shortly after the US entry into the Pacific theatre of World War II, which marked a key turning point in its attempts to supplant British imperialism as the dominant world power.

In the aftermath of the war, the OSS, a wartime body, was dissolved. Under conditions of extensive US operations throughout Europe, aimed at securing preeminence on the continent, a discussion immediately developed about the need to forge a more powerful foreign intelligence service. In 1946, Truman established a Central Intelligence Group, the immediate predecessor of the CIA.

The following year, Congress passed the National Security Act at Truman’s urgings, which in July 1947 formed the CIA. The act was part of a major expansion of the federal government and consolidation of state bureaucracy associated with the developing Cold War against the Soviet Union.

The Central Intelligence Agency Act was essentially drafted by the leadership of the agency at the request of Truman. The Act exempted the CIA from having to disclose its “organization, functions, officials, titles, salaries, or numbers of personnel employed.” That set in place the conditions for the agency to

operate entirely behind the backs of the American population. The CIA was also exempted from usual procedures relating to the appropriation and use of federal funds, on similar secrecy grounds.

Civil liberties organisations would brand these exemptions as a potential violation of fundamental elements of the Constitution, including those parts requiring public legislation for the appropriation of funds.

Over the following decades the size of the CIA would balloon and it would develop criminal counterrevolutionary actions in every corner of the globe. The agency would also defy legislation prohibiting it from spying on and conducting operations against American citizens.

100 years ago: Canadian postal workers strike

On June 18, 1924, thousands of members of the Canadian Federation of Postal Employees stopped work in a wages dispute, limiting processing and delivery to first class mail.

Postal service in Ontario and Quebec “was badly crippled” according to the *New York Times*. Seven hundred postal workers in Montreal, then Canada’s largest city, had handed in their delivery bags even before the union attempted to postpone the strike for 24 hours. Toronto workers had also ignored the union executives’ attempt to delay the strike. Reports indicated that by the night of June 19, only 10 postal workers of 300 were at their jobs in Toronto.

Workers in Calgary and Ottawa voted against the strike and postmen in the Maritime Provinces largely stayed on the job. But the strike was gaining strength in Toronto, where workers held a mass solidarity meeting in the Labour Temple, and where the Railway Workers Mail Clerks Association also ordered its members to strike.

By June 20, the Canadian government was raising the possibility of forcing workers back to work under the Industrial Disputes Act. The government issued a return-to-work ultimatum, but a closed meeting of workers in Toronto rejected the demand. Talks deadlocked, with the Postmaster insisting that the strike would only be settled on the government’s terms.

The strike ended on June 29 without a firm agreement on wage issues and a promise from the reactionary government of Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King to raise the issue in a committee of the House of Commons.



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