

This week in history: July 22-28

21 July 2024

25 years ago: World leaders mourn a ruthless despot, King Hassan of Morocco

On July 23, 1999, King Hassan of Morocco died at the age of 70 in Rabat after 38 years on the throne. Known as the “great survivor” by his political opponents, Hassan became the longest-reigning monarch in the Arab world after the death of King Hussein of Jordan. He became king in 1961, after the death of his father. His crown remained intact while monarchs of Libya, Iran and Iraq toppled. He survived half a dozen coups and assassination attempts.

In the 38 years of his despotic rule, he played a crucial role in assisting the survival of Israel as a Zionist state at the expense of the Palestinians. He suppressed the Polisario rebels in phosphate-rich Western Sahara and Islamic fundamentalists in Morocco itself. He opened up the Moroccan economy as a platform for cheap mineral resources and manufactured goods, particularly clothing for the European market.

Delegations and representatives from more than 60 countries flocked to the Moroccan capital to pay their respects to the loyal servant of imperialism. That more than a few put aside their public differences with each other and Morocco to attend spoke volumes for the unstable character of international relations.

The US delegation included President Bill Clinton, who broke off a fund-raising trip to Colorado to attend; former president George H. W. Bush; and two former secretaries of state who played key roles in earlier Middle East peace processes—James Baker and Warren Christopher.

President Jacques Chirac represented France, which ruled Morocco under the Treaty of Fez from 1912 to 1956. “We have lost a man who loved France and the French people—we feel immense pain,” Chirac said. King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia represented Spain, which also once ruled part of Morocco. Prince Charles and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook represented Britain.

Yassir Arafat came from Palestine. Hafez el-Assad, the Syrian President, pulled out at the last moment but sent his deputy, Mohammed Zuhair Masharqua. President Hosni Mubarak represented Egypt. All these leaders had, publicly at least, opposed Hassan for maintaining friendly relations with Israel, represented at the funeral by Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Secretary David Levy. Shimon Peres, a former Israeli prime minister, said, “With his passing we lose one of the most experienced and wisest leaders that this region has enjoyed in the last half century.”

50 years ago: Portugal concedes independence to colonies

On July 24, 1974, António de Spínola, the president of the military junta that recently took power in Portugal, announced that his government would support the independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa and officially end the colonial wars that had bankrupted the former fascist regime. The announcement came amid a period of revolutionary upsurge of both Portuguese workers and masses of oppressed people in Angola, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea.

At the time of the announcement, Portugal was just three months into the popular revolution that overthrew the fascist Estado Novo regime founded by Antonio Salazar in 1926. Amid a period of mass strikes that threatened to develop into a revolutionary movement in the working class, the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), with Spínola at the head, seized power on April 25, 1974.

The military coup was intended to preempt a socialist revolution by the working class and end the mass strikes of workers by promising a series of reforms. However, the working class responded to the coup with even greater mass action occupying the streets and continuing strike action in the major industries.

One of the major demands of the Portuguese workers was for an immediate end to the wars that had ravaged Portugal’s African colonies for more than 13 years. Beginning with the 1961 uprising by oppressed colonial workers in Angola, a series of national liberation movements and guerilla struggles developed throughout Portuguese-ruled Africa, the last colonial empire on that continent.

The dictatorship responded with a massive military effort to suppress the uprisings. Salazar instituted a draft for all Portuguese men, who were generally required to serve at least a two-year tour in Africa. The war imposed a massive financial cost on Portugal, which by 1970 was spending nearly half of its budget on the military.

An entire generation of young workers in Portugal was forced to go to war and saw first-hand the oppression of the African colonies by the Salazar regime. Upon returning home, the soldiers confronted a society that granted them no genuine democratic or political rights on top of low wages and high inflation.

The wars became widely hated among workers. The demand for an immediate end to the wars and the independence of the colonies became a central demand in workers’ strikes and protests.

Spínola, constantly scrambling to head off an independent mobilization of the working class, announced his support for colonial independence with the hope that it would stave off an all-out revolution. In his official announcement Spínola said that, “The recognition of the principle of self-determination, with all its

consequences, includes the acceptance of independence for overseas territories.”

Over the next several months the Portuguese MFA junta entered into negotiations with the various nationalist movements in the colonies to discuss the military and colonial withdrawal. By the end of 1975 all the former Portuguese colonies had officially formed their own independent governments.

75 years ago: Truman pushes major arms bill as he signs North Atlantic Treaty

On July 25, 1949, US President Harry S. Truman signed the North Atlantic Treaty, the militarist pact outlining the framework for the NATO alliance. This would become a central instrument of US imperialist dominance, bringing together Washington and the major European powers against the Soviet Union.

Underlining the global offensive, the president introduced an arms bill on the same day providing for the implementation of his “Truman Doctrine,” under which the US would intervene anywhere in the world. This was supposedly to ensure “democracy” and “freedom” against “totalitarianism,” but was really aimed at establishing the untrammelled hegemony of American imperialism following World War II.

An article in the *Militant*, then the newspaper of the American Trotskyists, warned: “Truman’s ‘arms bill’ truly encompasses our entire planet, empowering him to extend any time he pleases ‘military assistance’ not alone to any country but also any ‘foreign group’ he may designate.” The statement warned that such aid could be provided to Spain’s military dictator Franco, as well as the warlordist Kuomintang, which was then being defeated in the final stages of the Chinese revolution.

The *Militant* noted that in requiring only presidential authorization for such funding, the bill also represented a major attack on democratic rights. It wrote, “Never in this country’s history, either in peace or war, has any piece of legislation been proposed vesting such sweeping powers in a single individual as this bill does.” This was a turn, it warned, towards dictatorial presidential powers and the unchecked rule of unelected military generals and agencies.

Eventually, amid partisan conflicts and demands that the funding be congressionally approved, the bill was revised, specifying recipients and dollar amounts to be provided.

100 years ago: British Communist Party publishes article that ignites downfall of Labour government

On July 25, 1924, the *Workers Weekly*, the principal organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, published an anti-militarist article that became the object of right-wing witch-hunting in parliament. In what has come to be known as the Campbell Case,

named after the editor of the *Workers Weekly*, J.R. Campbell, the dispute over the article would lead to the dissolution of the Labour government in August and the calling of new elections.

Campbell had published “An Open Letter to the Fighting Forces,” addressed to workers in the military that said, in part:

... let it be known that, neither in the class war nor a military war, will you turn your guns on your fellow workers, but instead will line up with your fellow workers in an attack upon the exploiters and capitalists, and will use your arms on the side of your own class...

On August 6, an announcement was made in the House of Commons that the attorney general for England and Wales, Sir Patrick Hastings, a Labour MP since 1922, would seek to prosecute Campbell under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797.

Labor backbenchers forced him to withdraw the charges, but the Liberals and Conservatives were now able to allege that the Labour government was controlled by left-wingers. The veteran Liberal leader Sir John Simon proposed a motion to investigate the reasons for the withdrawal of charges, which passed 364 to 198.

The Labour government of Ramsey MacDonald regarded this as a vote of no confidence and agreed to a dissolution of the government. New elections in October brought the Conservative to power.

After the fall of the first Labour government, the *Workers Weekly* published a statement by Campbell that defended the original article: “[T]he Communist Party of Great Britain had to call attention to the fact that the Labour Government, while talking of its attachment to the cause of peace, was continuing the policy of the previous imperialist government.”

Campbell was tried in 1925 on new charges of violating the Incitement to Mutiny Act, along with other Communist leaders, convicted and sentenced to six months in prison.



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