

This Week in History: November 9-15

9 November 2009

This Week in History provides brief synopses of important historical events whose anniversaries fall this week.

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 Years Ago: Pinochet imposes state of siege on Chile

This week in 1984, Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet unleashes the military on working class neighborhoods in Santiago, arresting thousands, and shutting down opposition media. The actions followed the president's declaration of a national state of siege on November 6.

The largest raid comes on the La Victoria neighborhood on November 15, an area of the capital city where clashes against the government have occurred frequently since Pinochet's brutal seizure of power in 1973. The neighborhood is surrounded by tanks and army vehicles, and then police move from house to house, seizing every male over the age of 16. Thousands of men and boys are swept up and herded into a soccer stadium for questioning. Hundreds are imprisoned indefinitely as a result of the crackdown.

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50 years ago: Iraqi prime minister touts nationalist measures

In a nationwide radio speech delivered on November 14, 1959, Iraqi Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qasim declares that his nation has been made "rich" by what

he describes as its rejection of western imperialism. It is his first speech since being wounded in an assassination attempt a month earlier.

Qasim speaks of measures his bourgeois nationalist government, which came to power in a 1958 coup, has taken to reduce western influence. In the preceding months, it withdrew from the US dominated Baghdad Pact, which included Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Britain. British forces withdrew from Iraq as a result. The Qasim government rejected the Eisenhower Doctrine, which proclaimed US intent to provide military aid to countries facing "aggression." And Iraq removed itself from the Sterling Area, a currency grouping comprised largely of former British colonial possessions.

The *New York Times* writes that Qasim's speech "tended to confirm Western fears that his government, after tottering dangerously on the borderline between nationalism and communism, had swerved toward the latter."

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75 years ago: "Cabinet of Truce" collapses in France

The conservative national unity government under Gaston Doumergue collapses on November 8, 1934, after only eight months. It is replaced the next day by a government led by Pierre-Étienne Flandin.

Installed in office in the wake of the February 6, 1934 fascist riots in the Place de la Concorde, and days before the general strike of February 12, Doumergue has pursued a deflationary economic policy, deepening discontent in the midst of the Great Depression. Leon Trotsky calls Doumergue's government one of "senile

Bonapartism," that "bases itself not on the 'democratically' elected majority but directly and immediately upon the bureaucratic apparatus, the police and the army."

His demand that Parliament approve constitutional reforms that would strengthen the power of his office, without parliamentary debate, is the immediate cause of his government's collapse, but French ruling circles fear that Doumergue's policies will provoke a social eruption in the working class.

The night before his resignation, Doumergue reviews a parade of the fascist Croix de Feu militia.

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100 years ago: Coal mine disaster in Cherry, Illinois claims the lives of 259

As it has done so many times in the past, the familiar sound of the mine siren brings the women and children of little Cherry, Illinois to the mine head on November 13. Whose father, husband, or brother has died or been maimed today?

This day is different. A fire has erupted in the shafts, burning alive or suffocating 259 miners, men and boys. Hundreds of widows and children are left behind, with no guarantee that they will receive any compensation for the loss of their loved ones. There are no workers' compensation laws in place.

Rescue efforts continue for eight days, when, miraculously, 13 miners are found. The men had sealed themselves from the noxious fumes in a deep seam of the mine and survived on nothing but water.

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