

This week in history: November 23-29

23 November 2009

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

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25 years: US normalizes ties with Saddam Hussein's Iraq

Following a White House meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz on November 26, the Reagan administration restores normal diplomatic relations with the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. Diplomatic relations had been severed since the Arab-Israeli War of 1967.

Iraq is in the fifth year of a bloody war with neighboring Iran. While the US remains officially neutral, it has increasingly tilted toward Iraq, a long-time client state of the Soviet Union, against the Iranian Islamic regime, which in 1979 toppled the pro-US Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The full normalization follows two recent visits by Reagan administration special envoy Donald Rumsfeld, who was instructed to make clear US support for Iraq and "his close relationship" to Hussein.

The US supplies Iraq with economic aid, "dual use" civilian and military equipment, and intelligence, which the Hussein regime uses to suppress Kurdish opposition by use of chemical weapons.

In Iran, Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi declares, "US pressure on the Islamic Republic will have no effect other than provoking hatred of the people against the United States." Behind the scenes, however, and in violation of US law, the Reagan administration is making preparations to supply military hardware to Iran, with Israel as the intermediary, in order to fund Contra death squads in Nicaragua.

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50 years: Riots in Japan against US security treaty

A crowd estimated at 27,000 rioted outside the Japanese Diet against approval of a new security treaty with the US on November 27.

The protest, comprised largely of workers and students, breaks through a police cordon and advances on the grounds of the Diet. Over 500 are injured in the melee. The hatred for militarism among Japanese workers is intense, a legacy of the devastation of World War II.

The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security deepens US-Japanese defense ties. It requires both countries to increase their military capabilities. Its mutual defense component applies only to attacks on Japan or on US soldiers stationed on Japanese territory, in keeping with Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution,

which limits Tokyo's ability to send forces abroad.

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75 years: Bolivian president overthrown in coup

Bolivian President Daniel Salamanca is overthrown in a coup d'etat on November 27, 1934. Salamanca is imprisoned by General Enrique Peñaranda and his officers while visiting their headquarters in Villamontes, following the president's attempt to replace Peñaranda as commander of the armed forces.

The coup takes place in the midst of the Chaco War, waged between Bolivia and Paraguay for control of the Gran Chaco region of South America, which spans large sections of the two countries and smaller parts of Argentina and Brazil.

Behind the war is the question of oil and great power politics. US oil giant Standard Oil has major holdings in Bolivia, and its British-owned rival Dutch Shell has its own holdings in Paraguay and Argentina.

When oil is also found at the foothills of the Andes, prompting many to believe the Gran Chaco region might also be rich in oil, the importance of controlling the area is only intensified.

The resulting war to secure the strategic Gran Chaco region by South American surrogates of US and British capital is the deadliest conflict fought in the Americas in decades.

Tensions between President Salamanca and the Bolivian military high command escalate as the war turns in Paraguay's favor, culminating in the coup of November 27. Installed as the country's next president is Salamanca's vice president, José Luis Tejada.

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100 years: 20,000 shirtwaist makers strike in New York City

A unanimous vote at New York's Cooper Union launches a general strike of New York shirtwaist garment workers, mostly in Manhattan.

Largely women immigrants, Jewish and Italian, the strikers are protesting the brutal conditions in the city's garment factories and sweatshops. The women demand a 25 percent increase in hourly pay to \$10 per week, union recognition, and a reduction in the work week to 52 hours.

The strike is the outcome of a walkout that began two months earlier at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in Manhattan. But the struggle is fading when the Cooper Union meeting takes place. American Federation of Labor (AFL) President Samuel Gompers addresses the crowd, as does socialist politician Meyer London. But by all accounts, it is a socialist garment worker, Clara Lemlich, who evokes the biggest response.

Addressing the crowd in Yiddish, Lemlich's speech helps to precipitate the general strike of garment workers known as the "Uprising of the 20,000." It is a major step in the growth of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, one of the first industrial unions in the US.

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