

This week in history: November 29-December 5

29 November 2010

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: AFL-CIO admits to aiding right-wing groups in France

On December 2, 1985, AFL-CIO spokesman Murray Seeger admitted to *Bulletin* reporter Barry Grey that the US union federation had been secretly supplying right-wing forces in France with funds through the Reagan administration's National Endowment for Democracy (NED). He defended the practice, declaring that US union members would support such use of their dues. The NED had been founded a year earlier to support pro-US and anti-communist forces in a number of countries.

The revelations first emerged in a newspaper sympathetic to the French Socialist Party, *Liberation*, which learned that \$1.5 million in AFL-CIO money had been earmarked for rightist and even neo-fascist groups in France. Part of the money went to Force Ouvrière, the trade union movement closely linked through the Socialist Party of François Mitterrand to the French state. Another \$732,000 was funneled to anti-communist groups, including the right-wing National Inter-University Union, which was linked to a neo-fascist assassination squad called Service for Civic Action that had been responsible for at least six political murders.

Liberation published a memo from Eugenia Kemble of the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute warning the NED that France was one of several countries where disclosure of its activities and financial links would cause "danger or embarrassment." Alongside France, Chile, the Philippines,

Paraguay, and Poland were listed.

The AFL-CIO's links with counterrevolutionary and rightist political forces all over the world continued at the same time as the union federation sought to isolate and suffocate a wave of strikes in the US against wage cuts and layoffs. The two policies both flowed from the union bureaucracy's subservience to the profit demands of US corporations and the "competitiveness" of US capitalism on the world stage.

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50 years ago: Lumumba arrested in the Congo

After attempting to flee captivity in Leopoldville, Patrice Lumumba, the democratically-elected leader of the Congo, was arrested in Kasai province on the orders of Colonel Joseph Mobutu.

En route to his prison from Leopoldville airport, Lumumba was put on display in the back of a truck, hands tied, where crowds were invited to taunt him. Mobutu, who had been Lumumba's principal military backer prior to organizing the coup against him, announced that the deposed nationalist leader would be tried as a rebel. Later in the week, before being taken to appear before Mobutu, soldiers were seen beating and kicking Lumumba. He was then sent off to a military garrison 86 miles from Leopoldville in Thysville.

Alongside the US and Belgium, the United Nations had played an instrumental role in toppling Lumumba, by curtailing his ability to fly soldiers through the far-flung nation and by blocking his access to airwaves when President Kasavubu first attempted to depose him. After his arrest, UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold hypocritically requested that Lumumba be afforded "due process of law"—at the hands of a coup regime. The UN

postponed discussion of the Congo question during the week, and when a Soviet bloc delegate demanded Lumumba's release from the floor, the General Assembly president shut off his microphone. A report at the end of the week, made public by Hammarskjold, revealed that Lumumba had suffered injuries from his beatings and was being held in "inhumane" conditions.

Clashes between Lumumba supporters and the Congolese army in Kikwit, 250 miles southeast of Leopoldville, resulted in at least nine dead.

[top]

75 years ago: New Zealand elects first Labour premier, Michael Savage

Michael Joseph Savage was elected as the first Labour Premier of New Zealand on November 19, 1935, in the midst of the Great Depression. In the elections for the country's 25th parliament, the Labour Party heavily defeated the governing coalition of the United Party and the Reform Party with a program of social welfare and moderate market reform. The Labour government led by Savage introduced a minimum wage, restored wage cuts, guaranteed prices for primary produce, expanded social welfare and sponsored public work programs.

Dependent upon agriculture, farming and extractive industries, New Zealand was badly affected during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Plummeting commodity prices and export demand forced workers' wages and living standards down. Savage campaigned to save capitalism by forcing reforms, vigorously touring the country, campaigning for the introduction of a welfare state. With the aid of his pioneering radio broadcasts, he became a popular public figure.

Born into a poor working class Irish family in Victoria, Australia in March 1872, Savage emigrated to New Zealand in 1907 in search of work. The Australian was elected by the voters of West Auckland as one of eight Labour Party members of Parliament in the general election of 1919. Succeeding the more militant Harry Holland as leader of the party in 1933, Savage took the opportunity to move the party rightwards. One historian described Savage as "smelling of the church bazaar" rather than "the barricade" and Savage himself referred to Social Security as "applied Christianity." Moving politically further to the right after the early radicalism of his days in the Australia trade union movement, Savage eventually rejected rationalism and

returned to the Catholic faith of his childhood.

[top]

100 years ago: Italian Nationalist Association founded

This week in December 1910, the right-wing Italian Nationalist Association (ANI) was founded in Florence, prefiguring many of the characteristics of fascism as it would emerge a decade later. The party's primary objective was war with Austria-Hungary for the "unredeemed" Italian-speaking lands of the upper Adriatic, and more generally the promotion of Italy in the sphere of Great Power politics.

The ANI's nationalism was novel, however, in that it borrowed language from anarcho-syndicalism (a radical form of trade unionism strong in Italy) and socialism. "We are the proletarian people in respect to the rest of the world," the party's manifesto states. "Nationalism is our socialism. This established, nationalism must be founded on the truth that Italy is morally and materially a proletarian nation."

The concept had been developed by ANI founder Enrico Corradini, a novelist, as a response to the phenomenon of mass emigration from Italy. Corradini envisioned an empire in Africa that could absorb Italy's millions of emigrants. He sometimes used the term "national socialism" to describe his thought.

From this, the ANI arrived at corporatism, the argument that the explosive class and regional divisions within Italy had to be subsumed and suppressed in the name of advancing the national interest, which, it was argued, would benefit the entire population. Corradini and the ANI were above all else opposed to a revolutionary movement of working class, preoccupied with the major gains the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) was making and the explosiveness of the class struggle.

[top]



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