

# This week in history: February 13-19

13 February 2012

*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 council completes Hormel betrayal

Thirty former Hormel strikers made a 36-hour drive to picket the AFL-CIO Executive Council in Bal Harbour Florida, which opened February 16, 1987. The protesters, members of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local P-9, demanded that AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland come to Austin, Minnesota to hear the grievances of the workers against the UFCW bureaucracy.

The previous June, the UFCW ordered an end to the eight-month strike and put the Local P-9 leadership into trusteeship when they refused to end picketing. With the backing of a court order, the UFCW took over the union hall and signed a sweetheart contract with Hormel covering the scabs who had crossed the picket line, leaving the strikers at the mercy of the company. Not a single striker had been rehired.

Jim Guyette, the elected president of Local P-9, said at a press conference on the opening day of the AFL-CIO council, "If an international union is allowed to work with corporations to starve and break strikes, with the blessings of the AFL-CIO, the working people are in serious trouble today. What kind of a union is it that undermines and starves out its own membership in order to try and incorporate an illegitimate union, a union made of people who cross picket lines, a union that betrays its own members?" In response, Kirkland stated at a press conference that the AFL-CIO was completely behind the UFCW international throughout the strike.

The AFL-CIO Executive Council went out of its way to drive home its opposition to militant workers. It hosted a cocktail reception for Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, who was seeking support for his anticipated bid as Democratic Party candidate for President in the 1988 elections. As governor Babbitt earned the moniker "Scabbitt" from striking Phelps Dodge copper miners when he called out the National Guard to break the 1983-84 strike. It was in fact Babbitt's crushing of the Phelps-Dodge strike, with the assistance of the AFL-CIO, that paved the way for his elevation to national politics.

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## 50 years ago: One million march in Paris against Algerian war

On February 13, 1962, as many as one million workers defied a ban on public protests and marched in Paris against the French colonial war in Algeria and the French neo-fascist right. The protest was held in remembrance of nine workers, including a 16-year-old boy, brutally murdered by the Paris police days earlier at a peaceful protest against the Algerian war and the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS; Secret Armed Organization). The same day France was brought to a halt by a nationwide general strike involving millions of workers.

The march, the largest working class mobilization in Paris since 1934, extended for nearly two miles from the Place du Republique to the Pere-Lachaise cemetery where four of the victims were buried. Elsewhere, "at every provincial city of any importance," in the words of one media account, tens of thousands of workers gathered at public monuments to remember those killed in Paris.

Five days before the protest, the Paris police chief Maurice Papon, who had earlier served the Nazis during their occupation of France, ordered a police attack on socialist

workers and union members protesting the OAS. When the workers sought refuge in the Charonne metro station, police hurled heavy iron grates down on them, leading to the nine deaths.

The OAS was formed by renegade generals in 1961 opposed to the policy of the government of Charles de Gaulle, which was seeking to salvage what it could from the failure of the French effort to crush the nationalist FLN in Algeria, by securing property rights for French capitalism in a post-independence Algeria.

The OAS launched a terror campaign in Algeria and France that eclipsed by far the bombings earlier carried out by FLN militants, as well as a failed military coup in Algeria itself.

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### **75 years ago: Worker militancy spreads from Flint**

While the dust was still settling on the victory of the workers in the General Motors (GM) Flint sit down strike, on February 14 martial law was imposed upon the city of Anderson, Indiana after a series of altercations between members of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union and strike breakers and provocateurs employed by GM. In one incident, handguns and a shotgun were discharged with ten men subsequently requiring hospital treatment.

Anderson was home to two GM plants that employed a total of almost 50,000 workers. While celebrating their victory in the sit-down strike, some 300 UAW members in the city were assailed by thugs throwing projectiles. The local police force refused to intervene. The workers sought assurance from the local mayor that future meetings could go unmolested. Instead Governor Clifford Townsend chose to impose martial law. Union members and their supporters converged upon Anderson from all over neighboring Michigan to offer their support to the workers, but National Guardsmen escorted them back, under duress, to the Michigan state line.

The victory of the Flint sit-down strike had an immediate impact upon the rest of the motor industry. Packard Motor Company and General Electric matched GM's wage rise, while a number of tire companies in Akron, Ohio granted pay increases of 5-8 cents per hour to their workers.

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### **100 years ago: Political fallout from German SPD electoral success**

On February 13 1912, Peter Spahn of the Centre Party resigned the German presidency and National-Liberal Hermann Paasche quit as second vice president in reaction to the unprecedented electoral success of the Social Democratic Party. The SPD had become the largest party in the Reichstag as a result of the January 12 elections in which it gained over 4.25 million votes, 35 percent of the total. The vacant positions were filled by representatives of the bourgeois Radical Party.

On February 16, Imperial Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg devoted his official speech on the election results to a call for all non-socialist parties to bloc against the SPD in defense of the monarchy. The conservatives were concerned that the SPD vote expressed a growing radicalization of the working class.

The election campaign, in which the SPD had watered down its program and formed an alliance with the bourgeois Progressive Liberals, also expressed the growing influence of a reformist and nationalist tendency within the party. Demonstrating that conservatives were aware of this trend within the SPD, Bethmann Hollweg remarked: "As to the growth of revisionism in the Socialist Party we must wait and see." He countenanced the possibility that there were many SPD representatives who did not want to "substitute a republic for the existing order of things," but complained that they were still "undermining the monarchical sentiment of the people."

On February 15, the London Times reported that an SPD representative had delivered a "moderately-worded speech" emphasizing that the SPD "sincerely invited cooperation" with the other parties. The speech focused on the need for electoral reform and downplayed opposition to German militarism, claiming that "the English people had been deceived about German plans of aggression."

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