

This week in history: January 14-20

14 January 2013

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: More than 100 killed during Philippine local elections

By the completion of the Philippine local elections on January 18, 1988 more than 100 people had been shot to death. The bloodstained elections were held less than two years after the so-called “people power revolution,” which replaced hated dictator Ferdinand Marcos with the regime of Corazon Aquino, and indicated its increasing reliance on the most right-wing forces.

Many of the shooting deaths were a product of vicious feuds between rival gangs of local warlords, the powerful landowning families who have dominated the island nation since independence in 1947. In many places, especially in Marcos’s home base of Luzon, his supporters were given places on the election slates of Aquino’s PDP-Laban party at the expense of longtime opponents of the Marcos dictatorship.

For example, Col. Rodolfo Aguinaldo, a fascist-minded military leader, ran as governor of Cagayan province. He was part of the coup attempt against the Aquino regime the previous August. Instead of being arrested, he was allowed to retain control of his force of 1,400. Speaking of his election strategy, Aguinaldo said, “At a given signal, we chop off the heads of anybody who is foolish. We will send them straight to hell, from the grandfather to the grandson.”

The government postponed elections in 11 of the 73 provinces, citing campaign violence. On election day, a campaign worker in Bacolod City, 300 miles southeast of Manila, was shot dead when he tried to stop armed men from stealing ballot boxes. A gubernatorial candidate, Roy Padilla, was murdered hours before the polls opened.

The fraud of Filipino democracy was promoted by the US in order to hold back the working class and maintain

imperialist domination over the strategic island nation in the wake of the collapse of the Marcos regime.

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50 years ago: Alabama governor calls for “segregation forever”

In his inaugural address on January 14, 1963, Alabama’s recently elected Democratic governor, George Wallace, delivered a speech in which he called for the perpetual upholding of racial segregation in the southern state.

Wallace delivered his speech from the portico of the Alabama State Capitol, noting that this was the same spot where Jefferson Davis had been sworn in as the President of the Confederate States of America in 1861. Wallace described the struggle for equal rights as federal “tyranny” against the sovereign state of Alabama.

“In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever,” he declared.

Wallace had won the Democratic gubernatorial nomination—like many southern states, Alabama was then ruled by a one-party Democratic regime—by positioning himself as the most racist candidate and most bitter opponent of the civil rights movement.

The mass movement of black workers against Jim Crow segregation in the South threatened the power and privileges of the southern Democrats, but the reformist leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., based their strategy on appealing to the northern wing of the same party, and to the Democrat in the White House, John F. Kennedy.

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75 years ago: Barcelona suffers heavy bombing

At noon on January 19, 1938, the Catalanian city of Barcelona suffered its worst bombing raid of the Spanish Civil War. In an effort to terrorize the city's revolutionary working class, two squadrons of the Italian Aviazione Legionaria, flying out of their base in the Balearic Islands, dropped high-powered explosives and incendiary ordnance over the city, which remained a bulwark against General Franco's fascist forces.

Both residential housing and industrial locations were attacked. Barcelona was a communications hub, a strategic point for the import of arms and military materials, home to hydroelectric power stations, industrial war production, and a major seaport, as well as the biggest center of the Catalanian working class, the backbone of the Republican war effort.

The raid on January 19 was the culmination of a series of aerial attacks upon Barcelona and Valencia, and indeed all urban points between the two cities. Valencia suffered four separate aerial attacks during the course of the day. During January 1938 some 600 residents of Barcelona would be killed in Nationalist air raids.

Fifteen different locations within the city were targeted by the bombers. Many residential multi-occupancy buildings had their front, back or sides ripped off during the raids, exposing the apartments within. Fires raged for hours.

The London *Times* reported the horror and carnage of indiscriminate aerial bombing. "A bomb fell in an avenue down which ran a pathway bordered with grass and flowers, where children were playing in the sun. The explosion hurled the pavement in all directions, killing children, persons taking the sun, and passers-by."

The Spanish Civil War was the first conflict where aerial warfare played a significant role. Intense bombing of the Republican rear-guard regions, like Barcelona, transformed what previously would have been far from the zone of military conflict into a war front, with the civilian population one of the main targets.

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100 years ago: Major European powers issue ultimatum to the Ottoman Empire

On January 17, 1913, the six major European powers, Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy, sent a collective note to the Ottoman Empire advising it to surrender Adrianople and the Aegean Islands. Peace talks in London between the antagonists in the Balkan War, which pitted the ailing Ottoman Empire against the Balkan

League, composed of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, had broken down on January 14.

At the beginning of the year, the Ottomans had made a peace proposal to the Balkan League in which they offered to relinquish all of their territory west of Thrace. They refused to accede to the demand of the Balkan League that they surrender Adrianople, which was viewed as a gateway to Constantinople, the capital of the empire. Peace talks were suspended on January 6 before being called off on January 14. Hostilities continued, and on January 15, the Ottomans attacked and sank a Greek merchant ship being used to transport military food supplies.

The interventions of the major European powers into the Balkan War were motivated by concern over the destabilizing implications of the conflict, and a desire on the part of the rival powers to gain the spoils of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. The period of negotiations between the Ottomans and the Balkan League, during December 1912 and January 1913, had revealed increasing fissures between the Balkan states. Greece sent its own delegation to the talks, separate from that of Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro. Tensions between Greece and Bulgaria festered over disputed control of territory won from the Ottomans.

The increasingly crisis-ridden character of the Ottoman war effort, and the intervention of the major powers, generated immense political pressures within Turkey. On January 22, the Ottomans conceded to all of the Balkan demands. The following day, a faction of the Young Turks carried out an armed coup against the government, opposing the concessions as a betrayal of the war effort.

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