

This week in history: January 21-27

21 January 2013

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

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25 years ago: Results of Haitian “gunpoint election” released

On January 25, 1988, one week after rescheduled Haitian presidential elections, Leslie F. Manigat was named the winner by the Provisional Electoral Council. Manigat was reported to have received 50.29 percent of the vote, defeating ten other candidates. Voter turnout was under 10 percent, largely as a result of a new law passed which gave the military the power to enter voting stations and force any voter to show their completed ballot.

The original elections, scheduled for November 29, were abruptly called off after violence by the paramilitary *ton-tons macoutes* resulted in the death of as many as 200 people, according to independent estimates. The military, under Lieut. Gen. Henri Namphy, ruled Haiti after the overthrow of the hated regime of Jean-Claude (“Baby Doc”) Duvalier in February 1986, and was in control of the electoral council overseeing the elections.

The new elections were held on January 17, under the shadow of imperialist warships off of Port-au-Prince. Canada sent seven ships and the US two aircraft carriers and other warships with a total of 23,000 troops. France participated in the armada as well. The US was concerned with maintaining the appearance of a normal election in Haiti to prevent a popular uprising. The US financed the military in Haiti and was prepared to intervene in the elections to maintain the illusion of democracy.

This was the first attempt at elections in Haiti since the Duvalier regime was ousted. Manigat was inaugurated in February. He was overthrown in a military coup led by

Namphy the following June.

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50 years ago: US longshoremen’s strike ends

On January 26, 1963, 65,000 longshoremen ended their 34-day strike and picketing campaign against shippers along the US East and Gulf coasts after acceptance of a deal brokered by a federal panel appointed by President John Kennedy.

The previous October, Kennedy had intervened to block the strike by invoking the reactionary Taft-Hartley Act. After the act’s 80-day suspension expired, the strike began with “100 percent effectiveness,” according to the union, the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA).

The deal, negotiated by Senator Wayne Morse, Oregon Democrat, included a small wage increase. The shippers’ attempt to attack work rules that supported employment, or so-called “featherbedding,” were not resolved one way or the other by the settlement. And while the deal ended the strike in most locations and in the major ports of New York City, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, local grievances kept workers out for short periods afterwards in Galveston, Texas, Mobile, Alabama, and Baltimore.

The strike had blocked the movement of cargo in a number of leading US ports, including the biggest, the New York City-New Jersey waterfront. It had idled 100,000 workers and 700 ships from Maine to Texas and caused an estimated \$900 million in economic dislocation. It also won the support of the National Maritime Union, a union of 50,000 sailors, who refused to cross ILA picket lines. Other maritime and transportation unions also respected ILA pickets.

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75 years ago: Romanian regime persecutes Jewish population

This week in 1938, the Romanian government stepped up its repression and propaganda campaign against the nation's large Jewish population. Government minister without portfolio Professor Alexandru Cuza, in an interview with the *New York Times* published January 21 1938, said it was his desire that "every single Jew pack up his baggage and leave Romania."

Cuza was with Prime Minister Octavian Goga the joint leader of the governing National Christian Party. Cuza also called Jews the "spawn of the devil" and an "accursed race." He went on, "I say definitely that the program of myself and my followers is to force every Jew from the country and let every Romanian come into their own before worse happens." He went on to warn of "terrible pogroms" and suggested Jews might be moved to Madagascar. Cuza linked Jews with socialism, stating that "the terrible race" had destroyed Russia, Spain, and "was destroying France."

The same week, Goga's administration appealed to the openly fascist Iron Guard of Corneliu Codreanu, stating that the government and the fascists shared "similar aims."

On January 26, the bar associations of Bucharest and Jassy stripped all Jewish attorneys admitted to the bar after 1918 of their right to practice law, pending the government's review of their right to Romanian citizenship. At least 800 attorneys lost their livelihood as a result. Cuza also singled out doctors and pharmacists for attack. For its part, the Iron Guard had organized schools to train members to eventually take over the work of Jewish professionals and shopkeepers.

Jews in Romania submitted an urgent petition to the League of Nations calling for condemnation of the regime's moves, but the democratic members of the League determined that the best way to help Romania's Jews "was to keep their pressure on in private and not bring it out publicly yet" according to the *Times*.

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100 years ago: Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs arrested

On January 24, 1913, Eugene V. Debs was arrested in his hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana. Debs was charged with bribing a witness in the government's case against the socialist journal *Appeal to Reason* of which he was associate editor. The charges followed those made against the journal's editors Fred Warren, Julius Wayland, C.L. Phifer, and Debs of sending obscene material through the mail. These charges were dropped in November 1912.

The persecution of the journal and its editors was part of an anti-socialist campaign. *Appeal to Reason* published an affidavit by A. W. Lovejoy on November 16, who claimed that US district attorney Harry Bone had given him money to provide the federal government with information on *Appeal to Reason's* attorney Jake Sheppard, Warren, and Debs with the aim of "putting them behind bars for a long term of years" and also for the purpose of "launching an attack on the Socialist and radical press." Debs was released within days of being arrested, and in May the case was dismissed.

Debs was a founding member of the American Railway Union (ARU) and the Social Democratic Party, which became the Socialist Party of America in 1901. He was a leading figure in the Great Northern Railway strike and was imprisoned for six months in 1894 for his role in the Pullman strike as the leader of the ARU, then the largest railroad labor organization with 150,000 members.

Debs' conversion to socialism took place in prison where he read Marx's *Das Kapital*. Over the succeeding years, Debs stood as the Socialist Party's candidate for president five times.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the influence and membership of the Socialist Party grew rapidly. According to official records cited by author Ira Kipnis, by 1912 the Socialist Party had "more than one thousand of its members elected to political office in 337 towns and cities. These included 56 mayors, 305 aldermen and councilmen, 22 police officials, 155 school officials and four pound-keepers." In the 1912 election Debs captured six percent of all votes, a total of 897,000.

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