

This week in history: February 25-March 3

25 February 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: Growing crisis over US bid to oust Panama's strongman

The president of Panama, Eric Arturo Delvalle, was forced into hiding by the military-controlled National Assembly on February 26, 1988, the day after failing in a bid to remove military strongman General Manuel Noriega. The proposal that Delvalle fire Noriega was first broached the previous January by US deputy assistant secretary of state William Walker when Delvalle came to New York on a personal junket to buy racehorses.

Immediately after the figurehead president ordered Noriega's firing, the US State Department declared its support for the action and began a propaganda campaign, supposedly in defense of democracy and against the spread of drugs in Panama. This was one of imperialism's most sordid and fraudulent disinformation efforts. Noriega was a creation of the CIA and worked closely with US Vice President George H.W. Bush to arrange the assassination of previous military ruler Omar Torrijos in 1981. This was just four years after Torrijos and US President Jimmy Carter signed a series of treaties ensuring that Panama would gain control of the canal zone.

The CIA had paid Noriega \$200,000 annually to serve as its agent. His drug trafficking was conducted with the collaboration of the CIA as part of a scheme to back the Contras in the illegal war in Nicaragua.

The failed ouster prompted Noriega to publicly accuse the US of being behind it and of conducting a campaign of "psychological warfare" against him. US President Reagan announced that his government was not behind the attempt to get rid of Noriega, but had been "very much aware of it."

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50 years ago: China, Pakistan sign border deal

On March 2, 1963, Pakistani Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed an agreement in Beijing ceding to China 2,700 square miles of Pakistani-controlled Kashmir in return for 750 square miles from China. India, which also claimed the land ceded by Pakistan to China and which had just fought a border war with China, rejected the agreement as illegitimate.

The move by Pakistan put an end to talks, then underway with India, over Jammu and Kashmir, which had been divided in a 1949 UN-brokered ceasefire, which concluded the first war between the two countries in the wake of British decolonization and partition of the subcontinent.

The crisis in the Himalaya borderlands challenged the Cold War alliance system. Britain and the US sought a "settlement of the Kashmir dispute as a means of simplifying the problem of the defense of the Indian subcontinent against Communists China," in the words of the *New York Times*.

Pakistan's rapprochement with China cut against this, as did China's now open rift with the Soviet Union—the same week Beijing revealed that Moscow had unilaterally abrogated defense and economic agreements with China. The Sino-Soviet split was at the same time drawing India toward friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

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75 years ago: Third Moscow frame-up trial begins

On March 2, 1938, the third Stalinist show trial began in Moscow with 21 defendants in the dock. Unlike the previous two trials, the defendants had been imprisoned for over a year. The late Soviet historian Vadim Rogovin noted this meant the NKVD possessed "sufficient time to extort the most fantastic testimony."

The third trial exceeded its predecessors in scope by reaching back to the pre-revolutionary period and treating

every constituent Republic of the Soviet Union. Once again the main defendants were not present at the trial—Leon Trotsky still resided in Mexico after his expulsion from the USSR and his son Leon Sedov had just been assassinated in Paris by the Stalinist secret service.

The defendants in what became known as the “Trial of the 21” could be divided into four groups. The first comprised two former members of the Politburo and leaders of the Right Opposition, Bukharin and Rykov.

A second group included three former supporters of Trotsky and the Left Opposition, two of whom, Krestinsky and Rozengolts, had broken from the Left Opposition back in 1926-27. Rogovin notes that these two had, prior to their arrest in 1937, never been expelled from the party or previously subjected to repression.

A third group facing trumped-up charges included five men charged with medical negligence: three non-party Kremlin physicians; Maxim Gorky’s secretary Kruichkov and Kuibyshev’s secretary Maksimov-Dikovsky.

The final group contained people’s commissars, secretaries of republic party organizations and other bureaucrats who had not been members of opposition groups and who were selected from amongst the hundreds of thousands of those arrested during the period of Stalin’s murderous purges.

The supposed “right-Trotskyist bloc” faced charges of espionage, wrecking, and terrorism on behalf of Germany and Japan, for the purpose of provoking war in order to dismember the Soviet Union and restore capitalism. The ludicrous indictment stated that the betrayal began in the same year the Bolsheviks took power, in 1917-18, when Trotsky and Bukharin allegedly plotted to frustrate the Brest-Litovsk negotiations and murder Lenin, Stalin and Sverdlov.

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100 years ago: Suffragettes stage protest in Washington

On March 3, 1913, 5,000-8,000 suffragettes marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC. The march drew considerable attention, as it occurred the day before Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration as US president. The leaders of the demonstration, including radical suffragist Alice Paul, said the purpose of the rally was to “march in a spirit of protest against the present political organization of society, from which women are excluded.”

The march was organized as a parade, and included numerous bands and mounted brigades. Famed political activist and author Helen Keller participated in the parade.

As the parade began demonstrators were rapidly set upon by mobs of hostile men, who hurled sexist insults and physically attacked the protesters. Participants denounced the failure of the police force to defend the parade, and newspaper reports indicated that police may have participated in the verbal abuse of the suffragettes.

The parade took place in the context of ongoing political conflicts between advocates of radical protest tactics, like Alice Paul and her close collaborator, Lucy Burns, from Britain, and the conservative leadership of the National American Women Suffrage Association [NAWSA].

While Paul and Burns advocated a political struggle against governing parties in the various states that denied female suffrage, whether Democratic or Republican, as the means to obtaining universal suffrage, NAWSA oriented to lobbying the political establishment. NAWSA endorsed the March 3 protest, on the condition that Paul and Burns would not receive any more funding from the organization.

In an article written in 1912, the prominent Polish-German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg outlined the socialist attitude to women’s suffrage, which placed the fight against the denial of voting rights to women within the context of the broader struggle by the working class against class society and all forms of oppression. Luxemburg explained, “The contemporary mass struggle for the political equality of women is only one expression and one part of the general liberation struggle of the proletariat ... through the struggle for women’s suffrage we will hasten the hour when the society of today will be smashed to bits under the hammer blows of the revolutionary proletariat.”

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