This week in history: March 25-31

25 March 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: Nationalist conflicts emerge in Soviet Armenia

This week in 1988, Soviet troops and helicopters were sent into the Armenian capital of Yerevan to enforce Moscow's March 24 ban on demonstrations. Beginning in February, more than a million Armenians had engaged in strikes and demonstrations to demand that the Nagorno-Karabakh region become a part of Soviet Armenia. The region was administered by Azerbaijan even though 85 percent of its population was ethnic Armenian.

Massacres of Armenians by Muslim Azerbaijanis followed the protests, indicating the re-emergence of longstanding national-ethnic divisions, which six decades under Stalinist rule had been incapable of solving.

Within Nagorno-Karabakh the Armenian majority faced oppression. The administration of the region, dominated by Azerbaijani Stalinists, meant schools and access to broadcast networks weren't in their native language.

The general economic crisis within the Soviet Union exacerbated the conflicts, as promises of improvements made by Moscow failed to materialize. The ruling bureaucracy in Azerbaijan admitted that in 1987 there were 250,000 unemployed.

The entry of Soviet troops into Armenia was a manifestation of the deepening crisis in the Soviet Union and its inability to provide economic solutions for the working masses of all ethnic and linguistic groups. It heralded the beginning of the breakup of the USSR and the emergence of bloody nationalist conflicts in the region.

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50 years ago: New York city newspaper strike comes to an end

On March 31, 1963, 19,000 workers striking against eight leading New York City newspapers, including the *New York Times*, the *Daily News*, and the *Herald-Tribune*, ended their 114-day walkout, which had stopped the circulation of the main daily publications in the largest US city.

The central issue in the strike was over wages paid to the various unions that comprised the industry, including those representing pressmen, stereotypers, printers, photo engravers, plate molders, straighteners, and drivers. For example, New York newspapers (represented in the Publishers Association) offered a $8 per week wage increase, spread out over two years, to photo engravers. The engravers demanded $16. Ultimately the raise, negotiated by New York Mayor Robert Wagner, split this difference at $12.63.

The unions also demanded, and won, a common expiration date for their contracts, April 1, 1965, thereby assuring the various unions would enter into negotiations at the same time. A union representing printers agreed to a stipulation allowing publishers to introduce tape in the production process, so long as there would be no resulting layoffs and the union would receive financial compensation for any workforce reductions achieved through attrition.

It was estimated that the newspapers involved in the strike lost $100 million in advertising and circulation revenues. Workers lost over $50 million in wages. Circulation dropped by about 10 percent in the aftermath of the strike, and within months the Hearst Corporation's *New York Daily Mirror* had closed down. The *Times* and *Herald-Tribune* announced they would increase their sale

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price from 5 cents to 10 cents an issue.

Meanwhile, a strike of Cleveland newspaper unions, in its 123rd day, continued.

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75 years ago: Military reverses for Republican Spain

The week beginning March 25, 1938, was marked by a series of defeats and reverses for Republican forces across the battlefronts of the Spanish Civil War. On March 25 Franco's forces crossed the River Ebro and thereby joined together what had previously been a two-pronged attack in north and south Aragon. With Huesca falling to the Nationalists on the same day, fighting between the two sides now waged along a 100-mile front from north of Huesca to south of Alcaniz. The campaign had begun two weeks earlier when the fascists, fresh from their decisive victory at Teruel in late February, had launched an offensive in Aragon which aimed to reach the Mediterranean coast and thereby split Republican-controlled Spain in two.

During the week the Republican side lost strategic assets, including the Utrillas coal mines near Montalban and the Republic's largest sugar plant at Puebla de Hyar. By March 28 the Nationalist standard was flying on Catalan soil for the first time during the conflict, and the failure to stem the tide of fascist advance led to desperate scenes in Barcelona. The fevered state of affairs in the city was exacerbated by air raids over the weekend of March 26-27, when nearly 1,000 civilians, including over a hundred children, were killed.

The drive by Franco witnessed the largest-scale assault of the Spanish Civil War thus far with the Nationalist forces drawing upon greater artillery and air force backing than previously mustered, even during the assault upon Teruel. A number of strategic retreats in Aragon by heavily out-gunned Republican units had turned into routs, and Franco's air superiority, furnished by the Italian and German air forces, was proving decisive.

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100 years ago: The Battle of Adrianople

On March 26, 1913, the Turkish city of Adrianople was seized by Bulgarian and Serbian armed forces, following a five-month siege of the city. The fall of Adrianople, a geo-strategically critical gateway to Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, was a major development in the final stages of the first Balkan War, which pitted the ailing Ottoman Empire against the Balkan League, composed of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro.

Adrianople was heavily fortified and had been considered virtually impregnable. The city was subjected to heavy bombardment, and supply lines to Constantinople were cut off, prompting food shortages. On March 24, Bulgarian forces launched a siege of the city, rapidly securing control of external fortifications and taking over the fortress of Adrianople on March 25. The following day, the Ottoman commander of Adrianople, Mehmed ?ükrü Pasha, formally surrendered. Bulgarian troops were accused of pillaging Turkish property, and brutalizing Ottoman prisoners.

The fall of Adrianople took place in the context of heavy Ottoman defeats on all fronts, and growing pressure from the major powers for a peace deal unfavorable to Turkey to be signed. On March 6 Turkey had surrendered Ioannina to Greek forces.

The fall of Scutari in modern-day Turkey to Montenegrin troops on April 22 precipitated the signing of the Treaty of London, which ended the war, with the Ottomans ceding their territories in Europe to the victorious Balkan League.

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