

This week in history: April 22-28

22 April 2013

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

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25 years ago: Polish strikes shake Stalinist regime

Transport workers in the cities of Bydgoszcz and Ironoclaw walked out on April 25, 1988, beginning a strike wave that spread throughout Poland. The next day, 20,000 workers at the giant Vladimir Lenin Steelworks plant near Krakow joined in. The strikes were in response to a 45 percent rise in prices in Poland over the first three months of 1988. Rank-and-file committees were built and the strikes took on a political character.

The 1988 price increases were an integral part of the Jaruzelski regime's adoption of policies modeled on the pro-capitalist *perestroika* program of Soviet Stalinist leader Mikhail Gorbachev. This included raising prices of consumer goods and increasing wage differentials between workers and management, provoking working class resistance.

The Lenin strikers adopted national demands including, in addition to a 50 percent pay increase for themselves, a doubling of the recent nationwide increase for industrial and health workers, teachers and retirees, and the reinstatement of four Solidarity activists who were fired from the mill in 1981.

At Stawola Wola in southeast Poland, 5,000 steelworkers at a huge complex employing 18,000 held a protest rally and went on strike alert, demanding higher wages and the rehiring of two victimized workers accused of trying to reestablish a Solidarity branch.

The spontaneous strikes expressed a resurgence of working class militancy that took the underground leadership of Solidarity by surprise.

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50 years ago: NLF inflicts damage on South Vietnamese government forces

Forces fighting for the National Liberation Front (NLF) killed more than 40 US-backed government forces along with one US master sergeant in an attack on a base northeast of Kontum on April 28, 1963. It was the third large-scale attack by NLF fighters on government and US troops over the proceeding ten days in the NLF's struggle against the US puppet regime in Saigon. The dead Americans brought the officially acknowledged death toll of US operations in Vietnam to 80.

Days earlier, on April 22, US Secretary of State Dean Rusk warned that the US could not "promise or expect" a quick victory in Vietnam. "I cannot understand anyone who would quit, withhold our resources, abandon a brave people to those who are out to bury us and every other free and independent nation," Rusk said in an address to the Economic Club of New York held in the Waldorf Astoria hotel. Rusk insisted, however, that the US role would remain "limited and supporting."

On April 22 the US sent its Seventh Fleet to the Gulf of Thailand, bringing warplanes within range of Laos, where another insurgency was gaining ground. On April 27 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev told assistant US Secretary of State Averill Harriman, who had been dispatched to Moscow, that the Soviet Union could not restrain the Pathet Lao forces, which were linked closely to North Vietnam and the NLF. The US asserted that the Pathet Lao forces were violating the 1954 Geneva Conference accords, which gave two northern provinces to the Pathet Lao but left the rest of Laos in the hands of the right-wing, pro-US regime.

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75 years ago: Nazis order liquidation of Jewish property

On April 27, 1938, Field Marshall Hermann Goering ordered that all Jews living in “Great Germany,” citizens or not, must report all property valued at more than 5,000 marks. The decree arrogated to the Nazi government the right to “insure utilization of the property”—that is, expropriate it without compensation from Jewish families and businesses. All still existing Jewish businesses, the decree stated, would then be “Aryanized”—that is, given to Christian and supposedly “racially pure” Germans—or else boycotted into closure.

In Vienna, Jewish men, women, and children were forced to humiliate themselves in front of taunting German soldiers and fascist crowds. Among other acts, they were compelled to scrub the pavement and to dance and sing “I’m a dirty Jew.” Media reports said that the number of Jews committing suicide in Vienna since the Nazi *Anschluss* had fallen to 15-25 per day. On April 26, the Vienna *Volkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi party organ, announced that all Jewish property and business would be “eradicated” from the city by 1942.

On April 23 some 3,000 Jews, the majority women and children, were driven from their homes in Burgenland, formerly Austria but recently made part of the Third Reich, by local Nazi organizations. They were transported to the Hungarian border, but the right-wing regime of Admiral Horthy, which was also imposing anti-Semitic laws on its population, refused to accept them. They were then forced into the Jewish ghetto of Vienna, literally dumped in the streets without money or possessions. The Jewish community of Burgenland had existed for centuries.

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100 years ago: Capture of Scutari ends First Balkan War

On April 22, 1913, after a six-month siege, Montenegro took the Albanian city of Scutari, which had declared independence from Ottoman rule in November 1912. The siege, which was part of the First Balkan War by Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro against the Turkish, or Ottoman, Empire, claimed the lives of thousands of

people on both sides.

Montenegro’s seizure of Scutari was the result of a deal struck with Essad Pasha Toptani, commander of the Turkish garrison. In return for surrendering the city, Pasha and 20,000 Ottoman troops were permitted to leave Scutari with their weapons and other supplies.

Each of the major powers had its own interests in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary, which sought to create an outpost in the southern Balkans, wanted Scutari to be awarded to Albania. Backed by Germany, it opposed the agreement and threatened to intervene militarily. Five European powers mounted a naval blockade of Montenegro, which withdrew from Scutari on May 5. This marked the final military episode in the First Balkan War, which was concluded in the Treaty of London on May 30, but only set the stage for renewed conflict.

In his insightful articles on the Balkan War as a correspondent for *Kievskaya Mysl*, Leon Trotsky wrote: “It is now six months since human blood began to be shed in the Balkan Peninsula. The appetites of the petty Balkan dynasties have been aroused, each is striving to get as large a share as possible of Turkey-in-Europe; more and more thousands of Turkish, Bulgarian, and Montenegrin peasants, workers and shepherds are still dying for Adrianople and Scutari. At the same time, relations between the Balkan allies themselves have become strained to the highest pitch of tension. It is not at all unlikely that the end of the war between the [Balkan] allies and the Turks will see the beginning of a war between the Bulgars and the Greeks or the Serbs over division of the booty.”

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