

# This week in history: July 8-14

8 July 2013

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

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## 25 years ago: PRI steals Mexican presidential election

One week after the Mexican presidential elections took place, the official results were finally released on July 13, 1988. The night of the election, opposition candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, a longtime Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) leader, claimed that he was winning. Cardenas broke with the PRI after opposing the nomination of 40-year-old Harvard-educated Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and ran as the candidate of the National Democratic Front.

Cardenas was the son of General Lazaro Cardenas, who as president of Mexico in the 1930s nationalized the US-controlled oil industry and granted Leon Trotsky political asylum. His name conveyed an impression of populist radicalism, although the junior Cardenas was a loyal operative in the ruling PRI and only rebelled when he was denied further advancement through the party hierarchy.

The official figures showed that Salinas was elected president with barely over 50 percent of the vote. This was the lowest percentage of any candidate in the 60-year history of the PRI, which had ruled Mexico since its formation in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. In a 2004 autobiography, former Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, who hand-picked Salinas as his successor, confirmed that the 1988 elections had been rigged.

Cardenas, as well as representatives of other opposition parties, accused the government of “planning massive fraud” to guarantee its candidate a comfortable margin. There were reports that some voting stations opened with their ballot boxes already stuffed, while at others the doors opened late or ballots never arrived. The ruling party was also accused of using “floaters,” or people who voted repeatedly at different polling stations.

While poll watchers reported extremely heavy voting, official returns showed barely 50 percent of eligible voters turned out. The disparity has been attributed by many to PRI election officials simply tossing out large numbers of ballots cast for

Cardenas.

During the elections Cardenas criticized Salinas for failing to impose a moratorium on debt repayment to international banks and form a united front with Brazil, Argentina and other Latin American debtors. Though the US Reagan administration maintained a stony silence on the events in Mexico, it was clear that Salinas was the preferred candidate of Wall Street.

Cardenas claimed victory in the elections and warned that if the ruling PRI refused to acknowledge defeat, it would amount to the “technical equivalent of a coup d’etat.” He went on to found the PRD, the “left” bourgeois opposition party in Mexico.

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## 50 years ago: US-backed coup in Ecuador

On July 11, 1963, Ecuadorian president Carlos Julio Arosemena Monroy was removed by a military coup and replaced by a four-member junta headed by Captain Ramon Castro Jijon of the Navy. Monroy had expressed some sympathy for Fidel Castro and the nationalist revolution in Cuba and had also made critical comments about the United States. The junta also alleged that Monroy was a drunkard.

The constitution was immediately suspended, and martial law and strict press censorship declared. A 9 p.m. curfew was imposed, with the junta warning that those who disobeyed would be shot on sight. Top ministerial portfolios were handed over to military officers. On July 12 the junta outlawed “Communist organizations” and vowed to crush “pro-Castro” bands in the countryside. Over 100 “reds” were arrested, including a reporter for the Soviet press agency Tass and the noted painter Oswaldo Guayasamín. The coup resulted in three deaths, but Monroy was allowed to flee for Panama.

The CIA supported the coup, and the Kennedy administration quickly granted diplomatic recognition to the junta. Washington’s role exposed the hypocrisy and political bankruptcy of Kennedy’s “Alliance for Progress” in Latin America. A year earlier Kennedy had criticized a coup in Peru, but had subsequently granted diplomatic recognition to the Lima junta. Recent coups in Argentina and Guatemala had also been tacitly backed by Kennedy.

Monroy had himself come to power less than two years earlier in another CIA-backed coup, when he was elevated from the vice presidency after President Jose Marie Velasco Ibarra was removed from office by the military for the fourth time in his career on November 7, 1961. Ibarra had attempted to cultivate friendly relations with Cuba.

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### **75 years ago: Rudolf Klement kidnapped and executed by Stalinist agents**

On July 13, 1938, Rudolf Klement was kidnapped in Paris and murdered by the Stalinist GPU, the secret police of the USSR. At the time of his kidnapping and murder, Klement was the secretary-designate of the Fourth International. He had been organizing its founding conference. His headless corpse was found later in the river Seine.

Born in 1908, the young German student from Hamburg arrived in Turkey in 1933 to serve as the secretary to Leon Trotsky, the co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution and implacable opponent of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow. Already possessing precocious skills in five languages, Klement added Russian to his repertoire within months of arriving at Trotsky's residence in exile at Prinkipo. Klement accompanied Trotsky to Barbizon in France and remained there to work on behalf of the International when Trotsky was expelled to Norway in 1935.

Klement actively participated in the collection of material for Trotsky's defense in the face of the Moscow frame-up trials. He did an enormous amount of work both in translating, corresponding with the sections of the Fourth International, keeping files, and writing articles for the press and internal bulletins. After the murders of Trotsky's son Leon Sedov and his secretary Erwin Wolf, it was Klement who drove forward the work of the International Secretariat and in particular the task of preparing for the Founding Conference of the Fourth International.

Five days before Klement's kidnapping, he had a briefcase containing political papers stolen while he travelled on the Paris Metro. He immediately informed all the sections of the Fourth International about the theft and requested that they stop sending mail to the old addresses.

Klement was the sixth of Trotsky's secretaries to be slain by the Stalinists. Four were killed inside the Soviet Union, while Erwin Wolf died at the hands of the GPU killers in Spain.

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### **100 years ago: Romania and Turkey intervene in the second**

## **Balkan War**

This week in July 1913, Romania and Turkey launched attacks on Bulgarian armed forces, while fighting between Bulgaria and its erstwhile allies, Greece and Serbia intensified. The escalation of hostilities followed the outbreak of the second Balkan war, which pitted the former allies of the Balkan League, whose defeat of the Ottoman Empire had been formally registered just a month earlier in the Treaty of London, against one another.

The conflict had begun on July 29 with a Bulgarian attack on Serbia and Greece in Macedonia. It was prompted by disputes over the division of the former European possessions of the Ottoman Empire won in the First Balkan War, particularly Macedonian territory.

While Bulgaria's surprise attack, launched late at night, and without a declaration of war, initially saw it gain the initiative, Greece and Serbia, which had forged an alliance in May, rapidly launched a counterattack. The bulk of the fighting centered on Macedonia, where Serbia focused 70 percent of its active armed forces. On July 8, the London-based *Times* reported that the dead and wounded from all sides on the Macedonian front was in the vicinity of 30,000.

On July 11, Romania took the opportunity to attack, sending forces across the Danube River to invade northern Bulgarian territory. The Romanians opposed Bulgarian possession of the fortified town of Silistra, and were concerned about the implications of a strong Bulgaria on its southern border.

On July 12, Turkey, buoyed by the divisions among the Balkan states, launched an attack on Bulgaria in the southern Thracian region, with the aim of regaining Adrianople, which had been one of the centers of its empire in Europe. Historian, Richard C. Hall noted that as a result of Turkish and Romanian interventions, "Bulgaria became the only country in modern Europe to suffer invasion on every frontier from every neighbor."

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