

This week in history: August 12-18

13 August 2013

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

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25 years ago: Pakistan President killed in military plane crash

Pakistani dictator Zia ul-Haq was killed on August 17, 1988 in the crash of a military transport plane, along with several top-level US and Pakistani military officials. Zia and his entourage had just observed a demonstration of the US M1 Abrams tank in Bahawalpur and were en route to Islamabad when the Lockheed C-130B Hercules crashed mysteriously. Witnesses claimed the aircraft began flying erratically after a smooth takeoff, then nosedived and exploded on impact.

Among the 32 killed with Zia were American Ambassador to Pakistan Arnold Lewis Raphel, Brig. Gen. Herbert M. Wassom, the head of the US Military aid mission to Pakistan, General Akhtar Abdur Rahman, chairman of Pakistan's Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, who, from 1979 to 1987 served as director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and Brigadier Siddique Salik, a close associate of Zia.

In 1977, as Chief of Army Staff, Zia deposed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and imposed martial law in Pakistan, assuming the presidency in 1978. Zia orchestrated a dubious trial of Bhutto, ending with his execution in 1979. General Zia was a crucial partner in American efforts to destabilize the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan. In what marked a key turning point in the Cold War, US President Jimmy Carter and his successor Ronald Reagan jettisoned the previous policy of détente and actively sought to destabilize the Soviet Union by transforming Afghanistan into "Moscow's Vietnam."

The ISI worked hand-in-hand with the CIA in its largest ever "covert" operation, recruiting, funding, arming and training a huge network of Afghan mujahedin backed by tens of thousands of Islamist fanatics from across the globe.

With US backing, Zia actively promoted religious backwardness and right-wing Islamic parties within Pakistan as a battering ram against the working class, attacked the rights of women and inflamed sectarian divisions. The ISI-coordinated guerrilla war in Afghanistan was funded in part by drug-

running on a vast scale, which led to the development of a drugs and gun culture that continues to corrode Pakistani society today.

The board of inquiry investigating the crash concluded "the most probable cause of the crash was a criminal act of sabotage perpetrated in the aircraft." It raised the possibility that toxic gases were released inside the aircraft, incapacitating all onboard. This would explain why no distress signal was given. A black box was never found despite the fact that C-130s had them installed.

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50 years ago: Three-day uprising in Congo-Brazzaville

From August 13 to August 15, 1963 a series of strikes and riots rocked Congo-Brazzaville (formerly the French Congo and subsequently the Republic of the Congo). The uprising came to be known as the *Trois Glorieuses*, or Three Glorious Days, a reference to the July Revolution of 1830 in France. The former French colony had become independent only three years earlier.

The uprising began on August 12 among workers and unemployed who demonstrated for higher pay and the release of political and labor prisoners against anti-communist President Fulbert Youlou, a former Catholic priest. Soldiers opened fire on one demonstration, killing three. On August 13 striking workers in the former French colony's capital city, Brazzaville, marched on the prison and forced the release of all inmates. Five were killed in the storming of the prison, as demonstrators braved live ammunition and grenade fire. On August 14 the homes of unpopular ministers were torched.

On August 15—the third anniversary of independence—Youlou was forced to resign after the military refused his orders to fire on demonstrators who surrounded the presidential palace. He was replaced by Alphonse Massamba-Debat on August 16. The deal with the military was brokered by the Congolese Youth Union, and the trade union, the Confédération générale aéfienne du travail, both of which formerly had ties to the French Communist Party. Youlou had attempted to suppress both organizations.

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75 years ago: AFL rebaits CIO unions

At a hearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) on August 15, 1938 John P. Frey, chief of the Metal Trades Department and vice president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), sought to rebait the rival Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

The prominent role of the Communist Party and other leftwing groups in the struggles of 1936-37 that gave rise to the CIO was no secret, despite Frey's effort to portray it as a conspiracy. The representative of the privilege craft union bureaucracy was making common cause with the most rightwing factions of the employers and the US ruling class against the mass movement of the working class that had revolutionary potential.

Frey declared that communism had historically made no inroads into the ranks of American trade unions until the CIO was formed, and that now there were some 500 Communist Party members on the CIO payroll. Frey named 284 and promised another 230 names. He also submitted a mass of unauthenticated documents as "evidence" of his charges against the CIO, and claimed that communist penetration went beyond the unions into the spheres of American religion, education and even Federal relief.

Frey was careful however to state that John Lewis, the head of the CIO, was not himself a communist, nor was most of the membership. But he claimed that the militant tactics the CIO unions had successfully employed to win struggles in auto and other basic industries were communist-inspired.

"The sitdown strike and mass picketing have been used in our country as a training camp in which the communists can become familiar with the tactics that they are to apply when their revolutionary program is put into action" he declared, "as front line trenches in which the mass revolutionaries of the future are to receive experience and training to equip them for the day when the signal for revolution is given."

Frey drew his evidence to a close on August 16 with a direct appeal to congressional Democrats, warning that the alleged penetration into the labor movement by communists would discredit President Roosevelt's New Deal reform program.

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100 years ago: Over one thousand killed in battle of Canton in China

On August 13, 1913, heavy fighting between troops from the

northern army, loyal to Chinese military ruler Yuan Shikai, and armed forces in Canton who had joined the nationalist uprising against the central government, resulted in an estimated 1,200 deaths.

The fighting was part of a rebellion, centered in the southern provinces, launched by the Kuomintang (KMT) in opposition to president Yuan Shikai's adoption of increasingly dictatorial powers, including unilateral appointments of provincial authorities, and absolute control of a subservient cabinet. The Chinese military ruler had secretly garnered a loan from the major powers, and used some of the proceeds to fund his personal army. He had also signed a treaty with Russia, granting it privileges in Outer Mongolia, provoking opposition from the KMT.

The governor of Kwangtung province, Ch'en Ch'iung-Ming, who had political ties to Sun Yat-Sen, the head of the KMT, supported the rebellion when it was launched in July.

Yuan's military forces rapidly suppressed the uprising, defeating the strongest KMT military force, centered in Jiangxi, at the beginning of August. Intense fighting took place in the opening weeks of August, as the army of the central government attempted to take Canton, then under KMT control. Britain responded to the fighting by dispatching an Indian regiment from Hong Kong to guard British property, implicitly backing Yuan's forces.

Yuan's seizure of Canton essentially marked the end of the rebellion. His success reflected the lack of active support for the KMT rebellion by workers, the urban poor and the peasantry, many of whom thought that the 1911 revolution, nominally led by figures in the KMT leadership, had done little to improve their lives.

The KMT was oriented to winning the backing of the major imperialist powers. This was not forthcoming, however, as the major powers were anxious to ensure political and financial stability in China. Prominent Chinese merchants were likewise hesitant to support the rebellion. Sun Yat-Sen and other leaders of the KMT fled to Japanese-controlled Taiwan at the beginning of August, as it became clear that the rebellion was facing defeat.

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