

This week in history: September 2-September 8

2 September 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: Polish Solidarity leader works to end wave of strikes by coal miners

On September 3, 1988, the end of the largest strike wave in Poland since the struggle of the Solidarity movement in 1980-81 was enforced by Lech Walesa and his advisers. Walesa, the chairman and founder of Poland's first independent trade union, spent hours in discussions with militant coal miners in an attempt to end the strikes that swept the country in mid-August.

The strikes began in the Silesian coal fields on August 16, after enraged workers saw that a wage increase offered to them in order to buy labor peace the previous May had been abruptly removed from their paychecks.

From the beginning, the workers demanded, in addition to pay increases to make up for the devastating impact of huge price increases dictated by the imperialist creditors of the regime, the legalization of Solidarity, which was banned after the imposition of martial law in 1981.

As of August 24, some strikes had been ended after threats of police action, but others continued. Miners strikes in Brynica, Morcinek and Moszczenica were ended by riot police, but 11 mines remained on strike. The strike wave in the spring was repressed with brutal military force by the Stalinist regime of Wojciech Jaruzelski, but the resurgence of the working class movement in Poland put Walesa in the fore. His campaign to end the strikes was directed at negotiating a "political solution" with the regime.

[\[top\]](#)

50 years ago: Vietnam crisis deepens over fate of Diem regime

On September 2, 1963, US President John F. Kennedy, interviewed by Walter Cronkite on CBS "Evening News," said that South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem was "out of

touch" and that "changes in policy and perhaps with personnel would be needed" to prop up the pro-US South Vietnamese government and defeat the insurgency of the National Liberation Front. US officials also indicated that they might scale back funding to the government until Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's brother and head of national security, and his wife Madame Nhu, were removed from positions of power.

On the same day, the newly appointed US ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, said the US would refuse to release three Buddhist monks who had sought refuge from the Diem regime in the Saigon embassy so long as their lives appeared to be in danger. Diem continued his wave of repression that had begun with the August 22 crackdown on Buddhists known as the Pagoda raids. On September 7, Saigon police arrested 800 demonstrating high school students, young teenagers of elite families, hauling them away in police trucks.

In response to the criticism from Washington, Diem publicly rebuked Kennedy and flatly refused to remove the Nhuses. Madame Nhu accused the US of plotting a coup d'état, as did the pro-government English-language *Saigon Times*. State Department spokesman Richard Phillips rejected the claim, saying that it "sounds like something out of [spy novelist] Ian Fleming."

In fact, Kennedy had already determined to remove Diem. On August 29 Lodge had cabled the White House, "We are launched on a course from which there is no turning back: the overthrow of the Diem government." Kennedy authorized a response the same day that stated the administration "will support a coup which has good chance of succeeding but plans no direct involvement of US Armed Forces."

[\[top\]](#)

75 years ago: Fourth International holds founding conference in France

Despite the enforced absence of Leon Trotsky, the founding conference of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, opened in Paris on September 3, 1938. It ensured the historical continuity of the struggle for socialist internationalism against the counterrevolutionary betrayals carried out by Stalin and the bureaucratic caste within the Soviet Union.

The founding congress took place in the face of extensive efforts

by Stalinist agents to assassinate the movement's leading cadre. GPU killers, acting on Stalin's orders, murdered Trotsky's political secretary Erwin Wolf in July 1937, then Ignace Reiss, a defector from the GPU who denounced Stalin and declared allegiance to the FI, in September 1937. In February 1938, Trotsky's son Leon Sedov was assassinated in a Paris hospital at the age of just 32. Two months before the Congress, Rudolf Klement, the secretary of the Fourth International, was brutally slain.

So difficult were the circumstances that the Congress was held in secret at the home of Alfred Rosmer, a longtime supporter of Trotsky, limited to a single day, and not announced to the public until six weeks later, when a lengthy account appeared on the front page of the *Socialist Appeal*, newspaper of the American Trotskyists.

This historical milestone for the development of socialism and the international working class adopted as its founding document *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*. In this document Trotsky outlined the central tasks facing the socialist movement: "Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership."

The Fourth International must be built in every country, declared Trotsky, as the only means to overcome the crisis of working class leadership created by the betrayals and bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social Democracy. To those who decried Trotsky's insistence upon the absolute immediacy of the task and his invocation of further possible tragedies befalling humanity, he responded, "The Fourth International has already arisen out of great events; the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history. The cause of these defeats is to be found in the degeneration and perfidy of the old leadership. The class struggle does not tolerate an interruption. The Third International, following the Second, is dead for purposes of revolution."

The task of the fledgling international was to create a bridge between the maturity of the objective international situation, on the one hand, and the relative immaturity of the working class and the vanguard leadership coalesced in the ranks of the Fourth International, on the other. To help raise the working class to the level of the tasks it faced, the Fourth International formulated a series of economic and political demands—expropriation of the commanding heights of the economy, the formation of a workers government—as a method of developing socialist consciousness amongst the workers of the world and exposing the counterrevolutionary leadership of Social Democracy and Stalinism.

Writing from his exile in Mexico, Trotsky noted: "The calling of this conference is a major achievement. The irreconcilable revolutionary tendency, subjected to persecutions no other political tendency in world history has in all likelihood suffered, has again given proof to its power. Surmounting all obstacles, it has under the blows of its mighty enemies convened its International Conference. This fact constitutes unimpeachable evidence of the profound viability and unwavering perseverance of the

international Bolshevik-Leninists."

[top]

100 years ago: Yeats publishes "September 1913"

This week one hundred years ago, "September 1913", written by renowned Irish poet and nationalist W.B. Yeats, was first published in the *Irish Times* under the title "Romance in Ireland." The poem reflected Yeats' preoccupation with the British oppression of Ireland, and his increasing frustration with the generally affluent and conservative political leaders who dominated the Irish nationalist movement.

The poem begins with an attack on the commercialism of the Irish bourgeoisie, and their political representatives. "What need you, being come to sense, But fumble in a greasy till,

And add the halfpence to the pence," Yeats asks. The piece was published in the midst of the Dublin transport workers strike, which had been called on August 26, in response to the sacking and lockout of 100 tram workers by one of the country's wealthiest businessmen, William Martin Murphy.

Yeats sent a letter supporting the strike and condemning the political establishment to the *Irish Worker*, the paper published by James Connolly, the leader of the socialist movement who would go on to play a central role in the 1916 Easter Uprising against British colonialism.

The first three stanzas conclude with the lament that "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,

It's with O'Leary in the grave"—a reference to John O'Leary, a prominent leader of the Irish republican movement during the 19th century who died in 1907. Yeats also juxtaposes the sacrifices of Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmett, and Wolfe Tone, republican revolutionaries of the late 18th century killed by the British, with the conservatism of the political representatives of the Irish bourgeoisie of his day.

Yeats would later write a poem commemorating the Easter Uprising, which was drowned in blood by the British authorities. Academic Nicholas Grene described that poem, "Easter 1916," as a counterpart to "September 1913," noting that "In the earlier poem, the dead patriots belonged to the lost generations of the past, irretrievably gone from the degenerate world in which contemporary Irishmen fumbled in greasy tills ... In 'Easter 1916' acquaintances whom the poet regularly met in the street, thought of as belonging in the casual comedy of modern life, were changed, changed utterly," i.e., by the social upheavals they had participated in.

[top]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact