

This week in history: October 7-13

7 October 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: Hundreds of Algerians killed by security forces

After six days of rioting in Algiers, known as “Black October,” more than two hundred were killed and several hundreds wounded as of October 10, 1988. Protests flared up in the city of two-and-a-half million against unemployment, rising prices, lack of food and intolerable living conditions under the regime of President Chadli Bendjedid.

Public-sector workers had taken strike action in the weeks previous, causing Bendjedid to respond with a warning of additional austerity measures. Within hours, rioting erupted. More than half of the population in Algiers were under-21-year-olds who became the most militant participants in the revolt. The violence spread to other Algerian cities, such as Benjari, Tiaret and Oran.

The government declared a state of emergency. Journalists were detained as many eyewitnesses described scenes of unprovoked shooting by soldiers on protesters. Many Algerian youth told reporters that they were inspired by the intifada led by Palestinian youth in the Israeli-occupied territories.

An official casualty toll was never released by the government.

[top]

50 years ago: Wave crests over dam in Italy, killing 2,000

At about 11 p.m. on October 10, 1963, the village of Longarone, Italy, was wiped out when a massive wave produced by landslides crested 820 feet over the top of the

873-foot-tall Vaiont Dam. The hydroelectric dam, then the third-highest in the world, had held back one of the tributaries of the Piave River, 50 miles north of Venice.

In addition to Longarone, the hamlets of Pirago, Rivalta, Villanova and Faè were destroyed by the massive wave, which is said to have blacked out the sky. Other villages suffered extensive damage. “You can’t count the dead,” a firefighter who arrived after the disaster said. “There are hundreds and hundreds of them.”

The dam had been completed only two years earlier, in 1961. Its builders had ignored numerous danger signs, beginning in the construction process itself, when land shifts and fractures were noted. The construction company, effectively a legal private monopoly, SADE (Società Adriatica di Elettricità), had been warned that the entire side of Monte Toc, above the dam, was geologically unsound.

The company and the Italian government suppressed information on ominous landslides that began in 1960. From 1961 through 1963, local residents, who had opposed the dam’s construction, complained of a series of earthquake-like incidents. In March 1963, SADE—whose founder, Giuseppe Volpi, had been Minister of Finance under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini—had transferred control of the dam to the new Italian state energy monopoly, ENEL. In late September 1963, the south side of Monte Toc began to collapse into the dam’s reservoir, but still no warning was issued to the villagers below.

[top]

75 years ago: Spanish Republican government charges POUM leadership with treason

In Barcelona on October 11, 1938, a trial began for nine leaders of the POUM (Marxist Unified Workers Party) before a special tribunal court on charges of high treason and espionage. They were charged with provoking—in collusion with fascist agents from Germany, Italy and Franco’s Falangist forces—the uprising against the Republican government in Barcelona during May 1937, often known as

the “May Days.” Other charges in the indictment included revelations of military secrets, slander against the Republican government, aiding and abetting soldiers’ desertion from the front lines, and conspiring to spread the revolt.

In April 1937 the Republican administration and the Stalinists of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) had attempted to violently wrest control of the Barcelona telephone exchange from the anarchist-led CNT union. Control of the exchange allowed for the monitoring of the Republican administration’s telephone calls. When word got out of the attack by Assault Guards, workers from throughout the city converged upon the Telefonica to defend their comrades and repulse the Republican government forces. The Barcelona working class seized control of much of the city during May 3-4.

But the leadership of both the CNT and POUM pleaded with their followers to disarm and leave the barricades. Tens of thousands of militant workers were ordered to drop their arms and return to their places of work. Only the Bolshevik-Leninist faction, supporters of the Left Opposition founded by Leon Trotsky, supported by rank-and-file POUM members and a group of anarchists organized as the “Friends of Durruti,” called for an insurrection against the Republican government.

Immediately after the workers disarmed, the Republican government launched a merciless persecution. The Republican government denounced the May Days and labeled the Catalan workers “enemies of the people.” By the end of May the POUM’s newspaper *La Batalla* was banned, their printing presses handed over to the Stalinists, and their radio station removed from the airwaves. Only weeks later, in mid-June, the POUM was outlawed, its leadership including national secretary Andres Nin, a former close follower of Trotsky, imprisoned. Nin would subsequently be seized by the Stalinist NKVD and taken to Madrid where he was tortured to death when he refused to admit to being a fascist agent.

Within weeks the entire executive committee of the POUM was behind bars, along with much of the party’s active cadre of some 20,000 workers. All the while, agents of the Soviet NKVD continued to pick up, imprison and kill left-wing opponents of the Stalinists in their numerous private prisons.

[top]

100 years ago: Mexican president orders mass arrest of legislators

On October 10, 1913, Mexican president Jose Victoriano Huerta organized the arrest of 110 members of the Chamber of Deputies who had signed a resolution protesting the disappearance of Dr. Belisario Dominguez, a Senator who had issued sharp criticisms of Huerta from the floor of parliament. The *New York Times* reported that troops established a cordon around the parliament, while several hundred others stormed inside and carried out the arrests.

The incident took place in the context of the ongoing Mexican revolution, which had begun in 1910. General Huerta had assumed the presidency in a coup against the liberal government of Francisco Madero in February 1913. Madero, who had played a prominent role in the initiation of the revolution in 1910, was elected president in 1911 with broad popular support. His government was plagued by crisis from the outset, however, failing to deliver promised social and land reforms. Social struggles of the urban poor and the landless peasantry intensified.

Conservative sections of the propertied elite conspired against Madero’s government, while Washington was increasingly concerned by the threat to American property and interests posed by the deepening political instability. Following intensive discussions with the US embassy, Huerta led a military coup against Madero on February 18, 1913. Madero, and other leading figures in his government were assassinated.

Huerta’s dictatorial regime immediately faced intense opposition from the masses, with mines, haciendas and other industries the foci of working class opposition, and as the armed rebellions that had begun with the 1910 revolution escalated.

In his criticisms of Huerta, Senator Dominguez articulated the concerns of sections of the Mexican ruling elite that the military dictatorship was incapable of stemming the growth of social struggles. According to the *New York Times*, he noted that currency depreciation, social unrest, and food shortages had all intensified under the Huerta regime, and warned that “this situation was due first and foremost to the fact that the Mexican people could not resign themselves to be governed by Huerta.”

[top]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact