

This week in history: October 14-20

14 October 2013

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

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25 years ago: Washington “bridge loan” to new Mexican government

On October 17, 1988, the US government announced plans for a record-setting \$3.5 billion “bridge loan” to Mexico. The intent of the loan financed by the US Treasury exchange stabilization fund and the Federal Reserve Board’s currency swap lines, was to encourage President-elect Carlos Salinas de Gortari to continue with his announced economic “reform program” when he was to take office on December 1. This pro-business platform included privatization of a large number of state-owned industries, reducing the fiscal deficit and eliminating restrictions on foreign investments and trade.

The Mexican elections the previous July resulted in a massive political crisis, with the ruling PRI stealing the election for its candidate, the Harvard-educated Salinas, over the opposition candidate of the bourgeois “left,” Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. The elections took place in the midst of an economic crisis resulting from a fall in oil prices in the previous years.

There was massive popular support for Cardenas’ election program of a moratorium on repayments to the IMF, in alliance with Brazil, Argentina and other Latin American debtor countries, whose economies had also been devastated. Washington maintained a stony silence on the elections at the time, but there was no question that Salinas was its favored candidate.

Years later, Miguel de la Madrid, the outgoing president at the time of the 1988 vote, admitted to the *New York Times* that the elections were rigged and that the ballots were subsequently burned to cover up for the fraud.

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50 years ago: “Sand War” between Morocco and Algeria

On October 13-14, 1963 Moroccan soldiers invaded Algeria, penetrating 25 miles into the former French colony that had gained its independence only a year earlier. King Hassan of Morocco was attempting to claim the Tindouf and the Béchar areas that France, the former colonial master of both countries, had apportioned to Algeria after oil, iron, and manganese had been discovered there.

Border clashes had begun on October 8, with Morocco taking advantage of a Berber revolt within Algeria far to the east. The Moroccan forces had superior arms, supplied by France and the US, and deployed tanks and airplanes in the attack. Algeria’s strength was its popular army, which had only one year earlier forced France to abandon its aims to split off the southern parts of Algeria, where most mineral wealth lay, from an independent Algerian republic.

Soon after the invasion, the Algerian government of Ben Bella sent a delegation to Rabat to appeal to the Moroccan government for negotiations. Algeria also appealed to the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations for mediation. Within days, however, tens of thousands of Algerians volunteered for service in the war. Morocco was able to make no territorial gains, and within three weeks an informal ceasefire had been established.

The brief war highlighted a sharp divide in the Arab world, between nationalist regimes, all falsely claiming to be socialist, and royalist regimes. On one side were Nasser’s Egypt, Ben Bella’s Algeria, and the two Baathist regimes of Iraq and Syria, and on the other the feudal monarchies of Morocco, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the lesser sheikdoms of the Arabian Peninsula. While the feudal states served as centers of imperialist intrigue against the new regimes, the nationalist governments, because they based themselves on the interests of “native” capitalist cliques, were divided and incapable of overcoming the legacy of colonialism.

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75 years ago: Karl Kautsky dies at age 84

Karl Kautsky passed away on October 17, 1938, in the Dutch city of Amsterdam, one day after his 84th birthday. Between the death of Friedrich Engels in 1895 and the outbreak of war

in Europe in 1914, Kautsky was widely considered one of the world's foremost authorities on Marxism. In his later years, he moved sharply to the right, becoming an apologist for social democratic collaboration with the imperialist First World War.

Born in Prague on October 16, 1854 to artistic middle-class parents, Kautsky moved with his family to Vienna at age seven. He studied history, philosophy and economics at Vienna University from 1874, and became a member of the Austrian Social Democrats in 1875. Five years later he joined German socialists, based in Zurich, who used clandestine methods to ship socialist material into Germany during the period of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist laws.

Between 1885 and 1890 Kautsky resided in London where Engels set him the task of editing Marx's three volume *Theories of Surplus Value*. In 1891 he co-authored the Erfurt Program of the German Social Democrats (SPD) together with Eduard Bernstein and August Bebel. For three decades he edited *Die Neue Zeit*, which became the principal theoretical organ of international social-democracy.

His significant contribution to the struggle for socialism notwithstanding, Kautsky's political trajectory followed the right-wing course of German social democracy, which adapted itself to the growth of German capitalism and trade unionism, and ultimately capitulated to German imperialism, supporting the First World War.

Kautsky subsequently became a public opponent of the Bolsheviks and the co-leaders of the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin politically broke with Kautsky upon the outbreak of war, and after the October Revolution wrote his merciless political critique *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*.

Trotsky wrote of Kautsky's death that it had "passed unnoticed." He wrote, "To the young generation his name says comparatively little. Yet there was a time when Kautsky was, in the true sense of the word, the teacher who instructed the international proletariat vanguard ... in Germany, in Austria, in Russia, and in other Slavic countries, Kautsky became an undisputed Marxian authority ... Almost up to the time of the world war, Lenin considered Kautsky as the genuine continuator of the cause of Marx and Engels."

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Kautsky was forced to flee first to Austria, then Prague and finally to the Netherlands as successive European states fell under the jackboot of fascism. The Dutch government gave Kautsky refuge for the remainder of his life. Kautsky's son Benedict spent years in German concentration camps and his widow Luise died in Auschwitz.

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On October 16, 1913, 78 Indian workers at the Farleigh Colliery in Natal struck against the £3 annual tax that had been imposed on ex-indentured Indian laborers since the end of the Boer War. The workers defied a court order to return to work and the strike rapidly spread. Within two weeks, between 4,000 and 5,000 workers, including railway workers and miners, joined the strike, led by Mahatma Gandhi.

The tax was designed to compel ex-indentured workers to return to India or back into indentured labor. However, the economic slump in the war's aftermath posed a greater economic burden on workers who were indentured after 1895.

In total 152,184 indentured Indian workers were shipped to Natal from Madras and Calcutta between 1860 and 1911. Indentured Indian laborers predominantly worked in agriculture, mostly on coastal sugar plantations and farms, on the northern coalfields and on the Natal Government Railway as well as domestic servants in many industries. More than half remained in Natal after their indenture term ended, with many thousands moving north before the outbreak of the Boer war in 1899. Free labor was in demand in the coastal regions, enabling many of these workers to improve their standard of living.

Gandhi led striking workers in an illegal border crossing north into the Transvaal, in an attempt to place pressure on the government. On November 10 striking marchers were arrested. Miners were forced back to work and many workers were sentenced to hard labor.

This sparked outrage in southern Natal, where over 15,000 workers struck. Tensions mounted and the police acted with brutal force in confrontations with strikers, killing several, injuring many and carrying out mass arrests.

By the end of November, virtually all sectors in Durban and Pietermaritzburg had been affected by the strike. Under pressure from the British government, the £3 tax was repealed in early 1914.

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100 years ago: Gandhi leads strike in South Africa