

This week in history: October 21-27

21 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: Civil service employees in Honduras begin national strike

A national strike by 60,000 government workers in Honduras paralyzed 90 percent of all government offices, shutting down schools and hospitals beginning October 26, 1988. In the first such strike in 50 years, workers demanded pay increases, paid vacations and job security.

The next day, workers rejected an edict from President José Azcona del Hoyo ordering the strikers back to work and declaring the strike illegal. In a press statement, Public Employee Association leader Obdulio Cheves announced that the strike hit almost all ministries and would continue until the government issued a law guaranteeing work stability and regular wage increases.

The army was placed on alert and stationed around all government buildings. Workers in other unions stopped work in solidarity with government workers.

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50 years ago: 225,000 students walk out on “Freedom Day” in Chicago

On October 22, 1963, about 225,000 Chicago public schools students, about half the district’s enrollment,

boycotted classes on a “Freedom Day” protest in favor of black equality.

The size of the walkout “surprised even the promoters of the demonstration” who were expecting 100,000 fewer participants, the *New York Times* noted. About 6,000 students joined a rally of 10,000 calling for the removal of Superintendent Benjamin Willis and an end to discrimination in the schools.

In St. Louis three days later, Judge Michael Scott sentenced 10 protesters to jail terms of six months for contempt of court, bringing to 19 the number of people, both black and white, jailed in a bid to challenge racial discrimination in hiring at a regional bank. On October 26, 4,000 marched for racial equality in Trenton, New Jersey. On October 27 a demonstration of about 10,000 black workers rallied in Cincinnati for jobs.

The civil rights movement, the movement of workers and youth for racial and social equality, increasingly shifted from the South to the urban North during the 1960s. While a plethora of laws and regulations, overseen by police and vigilante terror, imposed a more formal racial caste system in the South, in the cities of the North racial discrimination took the form of a de facto residential and occupational segregation, enforced by city political machines, zoning commissions, banks, real estate agencies and corporations.

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75 years ago: Chinese cities Canton and Hankou fall to Japanese attack

The Imperial Japanese Army entered the southern Chinese port city of Canton (Guangzhou) on the afternoon of October 21, 1938. Evacuated and partly burned by the Chinese military before its retreat, Canton was China’s last remaining effective maritime

contact with the outer world.

Before fleeing the city, the Chinese military destroyed the local power station and other public utilities, the Pearl River Bridge, and many factories. Local banks transferred their holdings and shopkeepers shipped their stock away to Wuzhou and other Guangxi cities. The Canton radio station fell silent during the morning of the incursion but was broadcasting once again in the afternoon after moving operations to Shameen.

Japanese forces had landed at Daya Bay only one hundred days earlier, advancing over tough terrain with astonishing rapidity. The “Canton Operation” was aimed at snuffing out China’s ability to receive arms. Tayeh and Kishui on the south and north banks of the Yangtze River fell to Japanese control at approximately the same time, and just three days later Hankou was captured. With the latter’s fall the Japanese held China’s five largest cities: Beijing and Tianjian in the north; Shanghai in the east; and Canton in the south.

Japan controlled all the ports, railway lines and industrially productive parts of northern and central China. Behind the Japanese invading army followed legions of Japanese industrial officials who organized “development companies” to exploit the mineral resources and run the basic industries in the newly conquered territories.

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100 years ago: Monarchist conspiracy suppressed in Portugal

This week in October 1913, the republican government of Portugal suppressed an attempted coup d’état by monarchist forces. The incident was a continuation of protracted political instability stemming from the ousting of King Manuel II in the revolutionary upheavals of October 1910.

The monarchist plot began on the night of October 21, with groups of armed men appearing at various strategically important points throughout Portugal. They blew up two bridges, cut telegraph lines, disrupted railway tracks, and attempted to free jailed co-thinkers before being dispersed by the government,

which claimed to have had advanced knowledge of the scheme.

Many of the leaders of the plot, realizing that their conspiracy had been discovered, went into hiding and did not participate. In the following days, the government of Manuel De Arriaga, the septuagenarian leader of the Republican Party who had assumed the presidency in 1911, carried out the arrests of hundreds of suspected plotters.

The monarchist revolt took place in the context of deepening political schisms within the Republican bourgeoisie along with growing opposition in the working class. De Arriaga, a widely respected lawyer, professor, and former courtier to the royal family, had been elevated to the presidency because it was hoped that he would be able to appease opposing tendencies in his party.

Schisms had developed between Republican factions who made an appeal to anti-clericalism and those who sought a conciliatory relationship with the Church, as well as over personal rivalries and financial interests. The *Times* of London noted that the monarchist uprising took the spotlight away from a widely publicized case of corruption involving Alfonso Da Costa, one of the government’s senior ministers.

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