

This week in history: November 11-17

11 November 2013

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

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25 years ago: Greenspan demands program of austerity in the US

On November 16, 1988, only a week after the US presidential election, Federal Reserve Board chairman Alan Greenspan publicly rejected President-elect Bush's economic plan in favor of "reducing the deficit directly." During the election campaign, Bush promoted the idea that the economy could "grow" its way out of the \$155 billion federal budget deficit without sharp spending cuts or new taxes.

In the week following the election, the Dow-Jones industrial average fell a total of 78 points and the dollar plunged to its lowest level in 10 months. In the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, "The excitement of the election is over, the honeymoon is over, and the economic reality has set back in."

Greenspan's declaration was made in testimony before the first hearing of the National Economic Commission, a bipartisan panel of politicians and corporate executives set up the previous year, little known to the American public. Its sudden emergence from obscurity to promote slashing the budget deficit through an enforced campaign of "national sacrifice" exposed the fraudulent character of the US elections.

The *Bulletin*, weekly newspaper of the Workers League, explained at the time, "The very existence of the National Economic Commission was largely concealed during the election campaign, as part of the calculated effort by both capitalist parties to cover up the real state of the economy and their agreement to launch an intensified assault against the working class once the election charade was over."

Fleeting references to the mapping out of plans by the commission for cuts in entitlement programs were reported

during the end of the election campaign. On September 20, the commission's Democratic co-chairman, Robert Strauss, admitted, "We have to go to Social Security; we have to go to Medicaid—entitlements generally" because that's "where the money is." He said that plans were being made for \$68.5 billion in domestic spending cuts. According the *Bulletin*, "Strauss was promptly attacked by Democratic and Republican spokesmen alike, as well as the *Wall Street Journal* ...for letting the cat out of the bag."

AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland sat on the panel as one of its Democratic Party members, underscoring the trade union federation's opposition to independent resistance by the working class to the class attacks being carried out and prepared after the elections.

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50 years ago: Nasserite coup against Iraqi Baathist Party

On November 11, 1963, a series of purges, coups, and counter-coups began in Iraq that resulted in the elimination of most leaders of the Baathist party from power and the consolidation of the authority of the Nasserite president, Abdul Salam Arif.

On November 11, a section of the Iraqi army staged an internal coup within the Baath Party, arresting "left-wing" members and deporting them to Spain, including Deputy Prime Minister Saleh el-Saadi. On November 14, four more prominent Baathists were expelled and deported on the orders of Baath Party founder Michel Aflaq, who was a Syrian citizen, and Syria's new president, Maj. General Amin-el Hafez, both of whom had arrived after the first coup in an attempt to take control in Iraq.

A counter-coup then failed, and on November 18, the army, acting under the orders of President Arif—who had until then been a figurehead—dissolved the National Guard and expelled most other Baathists from the cabinet. Aflaq and el-Hafez returned to Syria on November 19.

Arif immediately declared his admiration for Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and announced his intention of

bringing Iraq into union with Egypt. Nasser welcomed the coup, which ended the halting moves toward unification of Iraq and Syria that the Baathists had made since coming to power earlier in the year in the two countries, in coups staged in February and March, respectively. The Iraqi Baathists had been backed by the US and the UK.

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75 years ago: Spanish Republican retreat at Battle of the Ebro

The Battle of the Ebro, which had been raging since Republican forces crossed the Spanish river in late July 1938, came to an end November 16, 1938, with their retreat back across the waterway. It was the last major Republican military offensive of the Spanish Civil War, with the Republic never recovering from its losses.

The historian Anthony Beevor suggests that Prime Minister Juan Negrin's offensive was virtually suicidal. The Republic could not hope to win a set-piece battle at the Ebro because of its longstanding military weaknesses in comparison to the army of General Francisco Franco, who was heavily supported by Hitler and Mussolini and the German and Italian air forces.

The campaign had aimed to boost morale, relieve pressure on the Republican capital of Valencia, restore territorial contiguity between Valencia and Catalonia, and convince the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow that the Republican government could still hold out against the fascists. But the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia weeks earlier with the connivance of Britain and France had shifted Moscow on a course toward making a deal, and eventually the non-aggression pact, with Nazi Germany.

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100 years ago: Treaty of Athens ends war between Ottoman Empire and Greece

Hostilities between the Kingdom of Greece and the Ottoman Empire were brought to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Athens on November 14, 1913. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the Ottoman Empire lost 80 percent of its European territory, which was inhabited by around 4 million people.

The Treaty of Athens was one of several to conclude the

Balkan Wars, including the Treaty of Bucharest between Bulgaria and its former allies in the Balkan League on August 10, 1913, followed by the Treaty of Constantinople between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire on September 29, 1913, which left Edirne under Ottoman control.

The terms of the Treaty of Athens included acknowledgement by the Ottoman Empire that Thessaloniki, Ioannina, and surrounding territory belonged to Greece. Other terms included Greek sovereignty over Crete, formerly an autonomous state within the Ottoman Empire. Rights were granted to minority Turks who lived in the newly conquered Greek territories.

Although the Treaty ended hostilities and restored diplomatic relations between Greece and Turkey, the fate of the northeastern Aegean islands, including Chios, Lemnos, Gökçeada (Imbros), Lesbos, and Bozcaada (Tenedos), was not resolved. Greece had annexed these islands during the Balkan War, but the Ottomans refused to forgo their claims because Tenedos, Imbros as well as the Dodecanese, taken by Italy in the war on Tripoli, provided access to the Dardanelles, a strait of enormous strategic importance. The Great Powers were jostling for a solution in their own interests in the volatile region.

Tensions remained high between Turkey and Greece over the northeastern Aegean islands, with both sides preparing for war. The Ottomans ordered from Britain two large dreadnought battleships, including the largest ever made, the Sultan Osman Evvel. Greece attempted to buy Chilean and Argentinian warships, eventually buying one from France in the first weeks of 1914.

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