

This week in history: April 21-27

21 April 2014

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: Chinese pro-democracy protest takes over Tiananmen Square

The funeral of former Chinese leader Hu Yaobang on April 22, 1989 became the occasion for a protest of 100,000 students in Tiananmen Square. The week of April 24 began with the boycott of classes by students in Beijing, leading to increasingly larger demonstrations at Tiananmen Square.

Since Hu's death the previous week, mourners began gathering in the square at the center of Beijing, expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of democratic reform by the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy. Hu was ousted as General Secretary of the Communist Party in January 1987, blamed by the hard-line party elite for a wave of student pro-democratic protests that swept the country.

An editorial published in the state-run *People's Daily* on April 26 headlined, "The Necessity for a Clear Stand Against Turmoil," denounced the protest activity as illegal. It declared, "Their purpose is to poison people's minds, create national turmoil and sabotage the nation's political stability." The statement added, "This is a planned conspiracy which, in essence, aims at negating the leadership of the [Communist] Party and the socialist system." The statement was rebroadcast over loudspeakers at university campuses in Beijing. Students jeered the announcements.

The following day, a million demonstrators filled Tiananmen Square in defiance of the official ban on protests and threats of a crackdown. Students repeatedly overwhelmed massed ranks of police and army troops, pushing their way into and then filling the vast square. Crowds lined the route of the march, cheering the students onward. Most significantly, large organized groups of workers joined the students, realizing the bureaucracy's worst nightmare. This was despite stern warnings of reprisals and firings posted in workplaces over previous days

by Stalinist authorities.

The demonstration was the largest since the Chinese Revolution 40 years earlier and marked a historical challenge to the rule of the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy.

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50 years ago: Civil rights demonstration at World's Fair

On April 22, 1964, police carried out mass arrests of civil rights demonstrators who had attempted to block the opening of the New York City World's Fair. The anti-segregation demonstrations cut attendance at the fair to 90,000 from an anticipated 250,000-500,000.

Some 265 were arrested, among them James Farmer, head of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Five courtrooms were required to arraign the activists. The protests included the picketing of pavilions, a sit-in at the subway, and a "stall-in" of automobiles on roads leading to the World's Fair.

Farmer and the leaders of six other major civil rights organizations denounced the "stall-in" tactic, which they said would inconvenience the public. The national leadership of CORE suspended its Brooklyn chapter when it refused to cancel its plans to go ahead with the action.

At the fairgrounds, demonstrators forced the closure of the Ford Motor Company pavilion, and 100 young protesters heckled a speech by President Lyndon Johnson.

The most violent clash of the day came at the subway station at Roosevelt Avenue in Queens, where demonstrators tried to stop trains en route to the fair. The demonstrators blocked doors to the trains and several even lay down on the rails. Police brutally attacked the protesters, leading 20 away in handcuffs, many with bloodied heads. Four police were injured.

The same day the city of Chester, Pennsylvania, announced the closing of its 18 schools because of civil rights demonstrations. Demonstrations had been held daily for the preceding month protesting segregation in the city's school system. Hundreds were arrested in the protests organized by the Committee for Freedom Now and the

75 years ago: Bolivian President proclaims totalitarian state

The self-appointed President of Bolivia, Colonel German Busch Becerra, declared the Republic of Bolivia a totalitarian state on April 24, 1939. Becerra simultaneously issued a decree dissolving the Bolivian Congress and suppressing the constitution. The deposed Cabinet resigned but at the request of Becerra remained temporarily in office. Becerra denied that the new administration was influenced by the political left or right but was instead “purely Bolivian.”

The president’s manifesto declared that energetic measures were required to remedy the malaise prevailing throughout Bolivian society. He was referring to the open emergence of the class struggle between a working class, predominately residing in major cities like the capital La Paz and in localities where the extractive industries predominated, and the Bolivian oligarchs, mainly big tin barons and ruling class elements aligned with Standard Oil, increasingly disgruntled with the impositions placed on capital by the military government.

With the old Bolivian Liberal and Conservative parties politically incapable of implementing social and economic policies designed to placate workers’ demands, the Bolivian military stepped into the political vacuum with a program which became known as “Military Socialism,” a program that favored government intervention in the economy, the introduction of a rudimentary labor code, and recognition of the Native American population of Bolivia.

Becerra, the figure most associated with “Military Socialism,” had risen rapidly through the military, especially after his role in the Chaco War with Paraguay. He had played a central role in the coup d’état conducted by young military officers that deposed President Daniel Salamanca in November 1934. Two years later Becerra removed Salamanca’s replacement, former vice-president José Luis Tejada. In July 1937, Becerra overthrew Tejada’s replacement, David Toro, and declared himself president.

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100 years ago: US Occupation of Veracruz

On April 21, 1914, more than 700 United States marines and sailors landed in Veracruz, the main port of Mexico and gateway to the capital, Mexico City. President Woodrow Wilson ordered the US occupation to prevent an arms shipment allegedly arriving from Germany, ordered by the government of General Victoriano Huerta, from landing in Veracruz during the Mexican Revolution.

The occupation followed the April 9 Tampico incident when Huerta loyalists arrested American sailors unloading cargo, mistakenly believing they were attacking a bridge. The US refused to be appeased by a verbal apology, demanding instead a 21-gun salute and the raising of the American flag. Huerta refused to accede to these demands, prompting Wilson to send a fleet to the Gulf of Mexico to strengthen forces in Tampico.

Wilson sought approval from Congress to use military force against Mexico. However, Congress had not reconvened when Wilson received word that the German liner *Ypiranga* was preparing to unload arms and ammunition for the Huerta government in defiance of a US embargo. The Huerta government, opposed by the US for its close relations with Germany, had ordered the weapons the previous year, when the arms embargo by the US had been imposed. The embargo was lifted earlier in 1914 to enable the US to offer assistance to right-wing Constitutionalist Venustiano Carranza against Huerta, who appeared to be winning the civil war.

The US invasion took place without warning, or a declaration of war. Upon landing, the American forces engaged in gunfights with Huerta loyalists, who suffered some 420 casualties. Nineteen US soldiers also died. By April 30 US forces controlled the entire city, led by Brigadier General Funston in command of a force of 7,000 men.

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