This week in history: July 28-August 3

28 July 2014

25 years ago: Push to restore capitalism in Poland and Hungary

This week in 1989, the new leader of the Polish Communist Party, former Prime Minister Miecsyslaw Rakowski, proposed that party officials be awarded personal ownership of some of the factories and companies that were slated for privatization.

At the same time, the Hungarian Stalinist regime officially notified its creditors in 24 countries that it was irreversibly committed to the restoration of capitalism regardless of the social consequences. Hungary had held membership in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund since May 1982.

The *Bulletin*, US forerunner of the *World Socialist Web Site*, analyzed the developments in a commentary written by David North, and headlined "Stalinist Frenzy for Capitalist Restoration." North wrote: "Rakowski's proposal for the conversion of Stalinist bureaucrats into capitalist entrepreneurs would, if accepted, merely provide official sanction to a process that is well-advanced in Poland. A money-making craze is sweeping through the ranks of the bureaucracy, who are now preoccupied with making their fortunes out of the destruction of the nationalized economy."

The article cited the description of the Stalinists of Polish playwright Janusz Glowacki from an article in the *New York Times*: "Astute enough to sense the beginning of the end of socialism, they have used their foreign contacts and other privileges to invest money in the private firms they were officially suppressing."

North continued, "While these Stalinist scavengers reap the fruit of their ultimate betrayal of socialism, millions of Poles face desperate poverty and the threat of starvation after the latest giant step toward the restoration of the market; the unleashing of huge food price increases."

In the one-day period of July 31 to August 1, beef prices exploded by 1,000 percent and dairy products by 350 percent in Poland, as a result of the removal of subsidies.

50 years ago: Riots in Jersey City

Just two weeks after riots erupted in the Harlem section of New York City, a nearby urban center, Jersey City, New Jersey, was gripped by rioting on August 2-4, 1964. Thousands of youth armed with stones, and in a few cases homemade bombs, clashed with hundreds of police. Dozens of rioters and several policemen were injured. Two youth were treated for gunshot wounds in the clashes, described by the *New York Times* as "a small military battle." The immediate trigger for the riot was the arrest of two young workers on disorderly conduct charges on August 2, which precipitated a march on a local police precinct. The deeper causes were police brutality and lack of jobs and adequate housing in the city of 250,000 across the Hudson from New York City.

On August 3, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered the removal of 1,200 National Guardsmen from Rochester, New York, where they had been deployed to quell an urban uprising. Four had died and 350 were injured in rioting that began, once again, with the attempted arrest of a young black worker. A citywide curfew had been in effect until July 28.

It was becoming increasingly apparent that the middle-class civil rights movement leadership had diminishing influence over the urban youth. On July 31, leaders of four civil rights organizations, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., issued a call for a "broad curtailment, if not a moratorium," on "mass demonstrations" until after the November 3 general elections in order to support Johnson's reelection against the Republican nominee for president, Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

James Farmer of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and John Lewis of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) refused to sign the pledge. A leader of the New York City school bus boycott said "the people throwing bottles in the streets won't listen to these leaders anymore." Malcolm X, who was not invited to the summit, called the leaders "campaign managers" for Johnson.

© World Socialist Web Site

75 years ago: US House passes anti-communist Smith Act

On July 29, 1939, the US House of Representatives voted 273-48 to pass the anti-communist Smith Act, named after the leader of the right-wing bloc in Congress, Virginia Democrat Howard W. Smith. When it was signed into law by President Roosevelt one year later, the bill was officially known as the Alien Registration Act of 1940.

The Smith Act made it a criminal offense for anyone residing within the United States to advocate, whether in public or private, the overthrow of the US government, or to be a member of an organization whose intention was to overthrow the State. The Smith Act was the first statute passed in the United States since the Alien and Sedition Act of 1798 to outlaw the mere advocacy of ideas.

The bill restricted individual freedom of speech and expression as well as the freedom of the press. It also weakened the constitutional guarantees against searches and seizure by state authorities were weakened. Membership in an "anarchistic" organization became grounds for deportation. This part of the bill was applicable retroactively. All non-resident citizens of the US had also to report to authorities and submit to a mandatory recording of their fingerprints.

With an eye towards the upcoming global war—already prefigured in regional conflicts like the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia—the bill prohibited "incitement to dissatisfaction" within the American armed forces.

The Smith Act effectively outlawed membership in socialist organizations advocating the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state. The act rendered their propagandist and organizational efforts and publications unlawful. Prison sentences of up to 20 years for violations of the Smith act were clearly intended to intimidate American-born and immigrant working class communities alike within the US.

100 years ago: French socialist leader Jean Jaurès assassinated in Paris

On July 31, 1914, the socialist leader in the French Chamber of Deputies, Jean Jaurès, was shot and killed in a Paris cafe by a 29-year-old nationalist and student of archeology. Raoul Villain, the assassin, claimed to have shot Jaurès because of the socialist leader's opposition to compulsory military service. The murder occurred under conditions in which the major bourgeois parties were promoting a climate of feverish jingoism and militarism on the eve of the First World War.

Fifty-five years old at the time of his death, Jaurès had been elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1885 on a Republican ticket. Of middle-class origins, and a professor of philosophy early in his career, he was among a layer of academics and professionals who turned to the French social-democratic movement in the 1890s.

Jaurès played a prominent role in the establishment of the French Socialist Party in 1902. The party was based on a program of class collaboration, and called for alliances with "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie. The implications of this program had been demonstrated in 1899, when Alexandre Millerand, a political collaborator of Jaurès, entered the cabinet of Waldeck-Rousseau, the first time a politician claiming to be socialist had entered into a capitalist government. While the party would unify with the socialist tendency led by the revolutionary-minded Jules Guesde in 1905, as a section of the Second International, Jaurès continued to promote a national-reformist perspective.

Jaurès' response to the growth of militarism and the impending world war was to call for strikes by the working class, aimed at pressuring the capitalist elites not to risk the threat of a global conflagration, while he sought to exert personal influence on bourgeois politicians. His promotion of French nationalism and reformism had not prepared the working class for the calamities that it confronted in the ensuing decades.

Leon Trotsky, the famous Russian revolutionary paid tribute to Jaurès' commitment to progress, and the working class, along with his oratory, and noted that his politics had reflected the contradictions of the Second International prior to the outbreak of war. In an article published in 1909, Trotsky had explained that "among his gifts Jaurès lacks one: the ability to wait…He wants immediately to switch over to the jangling coinage of practical success, to the great traditions and the great opportunities. From there he falls so often into insoluble contradictions 'in shallows and in miseries' of the Third Republic…"

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site