

This week in history: October 27-November 2

27 October 2014

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

25 years ago: Anti-Stalinist demonstrations spread in East Germany

Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in three major cities in East Germany (GDR) on October 30, 1989. A source in Leipzig said, “the whole of the city is full,” as up to 300,000 people were reported to be in the streets. Some 80,000 were reported demonstrating in Schwerin, a northern city. In Halle, a march of thousands on the local headquarters of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (the official name used by the Stalinists) was reported. Unlike earlier demonstrations on October 7-8, which were broken up by police, these protests faced no interference from state forces.

The Stalinist ruling party replaced Erich Honecker, the long-standing head of the GDR, with Egon Krenz on October 24. As the new head of state, Krenz declared that one-party rule would continue. One of the new regime’s first acts was to announce an amnesty for demonstrators and the hundreds of thousands of refugees that fled to West Germany or were apprehended in the process.

The amnesty also applied to everyone who fled East Germany since the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, some 670,000 people. Several thousand were expected to be freed from prison.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney was visiting West Berlin and pledging Washington’s military commitment to Germany. He called West Berlin “an outpost of freedom in a Communist world.” Speaking to troops of the US Army’s 3rd Armored Division, he warned that, “It is far too soon for us to declare that the Cold War has ended or that peace is at hand.” Some 6,000 US troops were stationed in West Berlin at the time.

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50 years ago: General strike brings down Sudanese government

On October 31, 1964, General Ibrahim Abboud resigned as prime minister of Sudan, after a week-long general strike and escalating protests against his government. The authorities declared martial law, threatening to use force against demonstrators and “rioters.” Those joining the growing strikes included teachers, government employees, newspaper and radio staff, and communication workers.

Student demonstrations in Khartoum were initially sparked by the brutal government repression of a secessionist movement in the non-Arab southern Sudan region. Strikes and protests rapidly spread as workers and students demanded the overthrow of the ruling military council which had seized power in a 1958 coup. Communications were cut off as strikes and protests spread while the government answered the growing opposition by ordering tanks and armored cars to open fire on demonstrators in the capital of Khartoum, killing scores and wounding hundreds. Demonstrators attempted to burn down the American embassy, chanting “Down with the traitor government” and slogans against American imperialism.

Abboud’s dissolution of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and promises of a return to civilian government failed to stop the growing disorders. The National Democratic Front, comprised of Sudan’s banned opposition parties including the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP)—one of the largest in the Arab world—announced that it would not support the soon to be convened Central Assembly, Abboud’s puppet parliament.

The military ruler was replaced by bourgeois opposition leader Sirr Al-Khatim Al-Khalifa. The new bourgeois regime was backed by the SCP.

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75 years ago: Soviet Union expropriates capitalist property in Poland

On October 28, 1939 the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy announced the expropriation of capitalist property in the eastern Polish territory that had been annexed by the Red Army after the Stalin-Hitler pact.

Large Polish banking concerns, extractive industries and factories were bureaucratically confiscated and regional capitalist government structures were liquidated in the former eastern Polish territory. Stalin cynically declared that the transformation was “the free will of the people,” but Polish workers had played no role. The Soviet bureaucracy, not a proletarian revolution, carried out the nationalization of the means of production, resulting in a state that was bureaucratically deformed from its origins.

Socialist-minded Polish workers who initially hoped that their incorporation into the Soviet Union would bring about their liberation were soon targeted by the Stalinists. Nowhere was Marxism, embodied in Leon Trotsky’s Fourth International, more ferociously persecuted than by the parasitic bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Stalin and his henchmen had wiped out those who had led the October Revolution, except for Trotsky, exiled in Mexico.

The NKVD secret police crushed all activity by Polish communists and ruthlessly suppressed independent political action by workers. The “workplace committees” established by the Stalinists to supposedly exert “workers control” over the economy were manned by NKVD operatives.

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100 years ago: Trotsky writes *The War and the International*

This week in October 1914, the Russian Marxist leader Leon Trotsky finalized his work *The War and the International* for serialized publication the following month in *Golos*, a daily socialist newspaper in Paris. The contents of the work had been written during the preceding two months, when Trotsky had lived as an émigré in Zurich, Switzerland, having fled Vienna to escape persecution from the Austro-Hungarian authorities.

On October 31, he wrote a preface to the work outlining

his central thesis that the world war that had broken out in August was a product of the contradiction between the integrated global economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation-states.

Trotsky explained, “The forces of production which capitalism has evolved have outgrown the limits of nation and state. The national state, the present political form, is too narrow for the exploitation of these productive forces. The natural tendency of our economic system, therefore, is to seek to break through the state boundaries.” The war, he stated, was “at bottom a revolt of the forces of production against the political form of nation and state. It means the collapse of the national state as an independent economic unit.”

The pamphlet denounced the betrayal of the Second International and its largest party, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which had capitulated to imperialist militarism by supporting the war efforts of their “own” governments. While acknowledging the enormous role the sections of the Second International had played in politically educating the working class, Trotsky explained that their betrayal stemmed from the fact that they had “become ingrained in the national states” and functioned as national parties.

Trotsky predicted mass revolutionary upheavals of the working class, and insisted on the necessity for constructing a new international party to provide them with revolutionary leadership. He declared that, “War is the method by which capitalism, at the climax of its development, seeks to solve its insoluble contradictions. To this the proletariat must oppose its own method, the method of socialist revolution.”

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