

This week in history: December 1-7

1 December 2014

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

25 years ago: Military coup attempt in Philippines

On December 1, 1989, rebel forces within the Philippines military began what became known as the “Christmas coup” against the government of Corazon Aquino. The coup attempt was led by the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) and military officers loyal to late president Ferdinand Marcos, who was ousted in February 1986, and later expelled from the country, dying in Hawaii in September 1989.

Since 1945-46, when the Philippines became a member of the United Nations and ostensibly independent from the US, the country was a bastion of anticommunism in the Pacific. Marcos headed a corrupt and ruthless regime which was closely allied to the US, through the time of the Reagan administration in the 1980s. A failed snap election and popular opposition to Marcos made it impossible for the US to continue backing him.

RAM, led by Lt. Col. Gregorio (Gringo) Honasan, Brig. Gen. Edgardo Abenina, retired General Jose Zumel and several others along with Marcos loyalists, came together to organize the coup against Aquino. They captured control of Villamor Airbase, Fort Bonifacio, Sangley Airbase, Mactan Airbase in Cebu, and battled over Camp Aguinaldo. Rebel forces occupied the country’s financial center, Makati, in metropolitan Manila.

The military loyal to Aquino, under her defense secretary, General Fidel Ramos, retaliated, but rebel planes and helicopters strafed their positions at military bases and the presidential palace in Manila. A hallmark of the political weakness of the government was the refusal of vice president Salvador Laurel to denounce the coup attempt, claiming that rebel forces “have the right” to try to seize power.

Aquino requested and received air support from US President Bush on December 2. The US dispatched F-4 fighter jets from Clark Air Base on Luzon. The jets flew low over the captured airbases, threatening any aircraft flying out with being shot down.

Initially US officials claimed that its intervention was decisive in defeating the coup attempt. In a subsequent reversal of its line, on the fifth day of fighting, Richard Boucher, a US State Department official, said, “this is essentially a fight that

(the Filipinos) are carrying out.” Days later, however, the rebel leaders surrendered.

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50 years ago: Mass arrest of UC Berkeley students

On December 3, 1964, the California Highway Patrol arrested 796 University of California at Berkeley students who were staging a sit-in to protest the school administration’s restrictions on campus political activity. About 1,000 supporters of the Free Speech Movement had occupied the university administration building the previous day. The action came in response to charges being filed by the college against four student leaders for their role in organizing earlier protests.

California Governor Edmund G. Brown ordered the arrests, claiming the students’ actions represented “anarchy.” Students were dragged out of the building and charged with criminal trespassing and resisting arrest. Total bail was set at \$150,000.

Student protests began at Berkeley in September after the administration announced it would no longer allow the use of campus property for the solicitation of political funds or for organizing off-campus activities. In response to the arrests, the student leaders called for a boycott of classes. The university reported that only about 20 of 85 departments were functioning normally as a result of the student strike, and that many classes were empty.

A meeting of 500 University of California faculty members adopted a resolution calling for the dropping of the charges pending against the student protest leaders, as well as liberalized rules for campus political activity. The faculty members also drafted a telegram to Governor Brown condemning the use of the Highway Patrol on campus.

Due to the political betrayals of the preceding years and decades, Marxism had little influence among the radicalizing students, or else came in a distorted form. The leadership of the campus protests included representatives of the Congress of Racial Equality, the Stalinist W.E.B. Du Bois club, as well as the Young Socialist Alliance, the youth movement of the revisionist Socialist Workers Party.

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75 years ago: Stalin establishes puppet regime in Finland

On December 2, 1939, after a massive Red Army invasion of Finland at the end of November, a puppet regime, the Finnish Democratic Government, with the Stalinist functionary O.W. Kuusinen as president, was proclaimed as the prospective future rulers of Finland in the event that Soviet military forces conquered the country.

After the failure of negotiations, when Finnish government officials refused to cede islands and ports to the USSR for military bases, Stalin sought to obtain his objectives by “sovietizing” Finland through bureaucratic military methods. On November 30 a 600,000-strong Red Army force on land, air and sea attacked strategic points along the Soviet-Finnish border from the Gulf of Finland to the Arctic Ocean, confronting Finland’s small army of 14,000.

But Stalin’s appeal to the Finnish masses failed to produce an uprising of Finnish workers to complement the Soviet invasion. As Leon Trotsky pointed out, “not only the majority of the Finnish peasants but also the majority of the Finnish workers proved to be on the side of the bourgeoisie. This is hardly surprising since they know the unprecedented oppression to which the Stalinist bureaucracy subjects the nearby workers of Leningrad and the whole of the USSR.”

Even the Finnish Communist Party Secretary General Arvo Tuominen refused to collaborate with Stalin’s puppet government as its Prime Minister alongside Kuusinen. The Stalinist bureaucrats who churned out propaganda for the Finnish workers committed ignorant blunders such as raising the demand for the eight-hour day, a concession made by Finland’s bourgeoisie to the revolutionary Finnish proletariat in 1917.

British and French imperialism, which were conducting their own intrigues with the Finnish bourgeoisie, immediately denounced the Soviet invasion, and the bourgeois press was mobilized on a world scale against the USSR.

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100 years ago: German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht votes against war credits in the Reichstag

On December 2, 1914, Karl Liebknecht, a leading representative of the revolutionary and internationalist tendency that had emerged from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), voted against war credits in the Reichstag.

His stand was the most public rejection within Germany of the betrayal of socialist internationalism by the SPD to that date. Along with most of the Second International, the SPD had repudiated its previous commitment to oppose imperialist war,

supporting its “own” ruling elite when the war broke out on August 4.

Liebknecht, despite opposing the SPD’s support for the war, had initially voted for German war credits on August 4, citing party discipline. The SPD’s capitulation reflected the intense pressure of the nationalist war hysteria that had been promoted by the entire political establishment, along with the fact that the most authoritative leaders of the party, including Karl Kautsky, effectively sanctified the SPD’s betrayal.

On August 4-5, immediately after the SPD’s betrayal, Rosa Luxemburg and six other revolutionary opponents of the imperialist war, including Franz Mehring, met and founded the embryo of the Gruppe International (International Group). The following week, Liebknecht also joined the group. In mid-September, he travelled to Belgium, where he attempted to visit Leuven, a town that was being ravaged by the German army. He was turned away by authorities, returning to Germany a vocal opponent of its military operations in Belgium. Over the following weeks, he and other members of the group campaigned within the SPD against support for the imperialist war.

On December 2, Liebknecht issued a statement to the Reichstag, outlining his opposition to the war credits. Officials refused to allow it to be read, or to enter it into the parliamentary record. It declared:

“This War, desired by none of the people concerned, has not broken out in behalf of the welfare of the German people or any other. It is an Imperialist War, a war over important territories of exploitation for capitalists and financiers. From the point of view of rivalry in armaments, it is a war provoked by the German and Austrian war parties together, in the obscurity of semi-feudalism and of secret diplomacy, to gain an advantage over their opponents. At the same time the war is a Bonapartist effort to disrupt and split the growing movement of the working class.”

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