

This week in history: March 16-22

16 March 2015

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

25 years ago: Frame-up of striking Greyhound bus driver

Greyhound driver Roger D. Cawthra was arrested and jailed on March 16, 1990, on frame-up charges stemming from the alleged shooting of a scab bus on March 12 in Farmington, Connecticut. Cawthra was dragged by police out of his house in Stratford and taken to Superior Court in Hartford. He appeared without an attorney before Judge Allen Smith, who declared, “I detest strike violence” and doubled the bail requested by prosecutors from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

Greyhound Bus drivers went on strike March 2, 1990, for better wages and conditions following the expiration of their contract. The strike became one of the most bitter struggles in the US labor movement. Strikebreaking operations were launched immediately in hundreds of cities by the company. On the second day of the strike, Robert Waterhouse, a 59-year-old striking driver, was run over and killed on the picket line by a strikebreaker in Redding, California.

The first week of the Greyhound strike saw a wave of violence and state repression against the members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). Strikers were hit by scab buses in Houston, Toledo, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Dallas, Jacksonville and Olympia, Washington. Court injunctions were imposed against pickets in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Portland, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Philadelphia, Jacksonville and Camden, New Jersey. Four strikers were arrested in Philadelphia and Mt. Laurel, New Jersey.

Cawthra was held in prison for eight days before he was able to post bond. The prosecution’s case was based entirely on the testimony of a professional strikebreaker. Even though Cawthra had evidence that he was miles away when the shooting allegedly took place, the court refused to allow him to present corroborating testimony on a legal

technicality.

The ATU, the union organizing the 6,300 striking drivers, isolated the strikers and refused to defend workers who came under attack. ATU Chief Counsel Earl Putnam later declared, “We’re not posting bonds or financing the defense of these people. We’re not in any way condoning or supporting such acts.”

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50 years ago: Bandaranaike coalition defeated in Ceylon

On March 22, 1965, the coalition government of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was defeated in parliamentary elections in Ceylon. The right-wing United National Party won the largest bloc, 66 deputies of the 151 seats in parliament.

Bandaranaike’s bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party retained only 41 seats, while her coalition partners, the revisionist Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Stalinist Communist Party of Sri Lanka, won 10 and four seats respectively. Bandaranaike resigned despite protests by the LSSP, which organized demonstrations calling on the SLFP to attempt the formation of a new government.

UNP leader Dudley Senanayake centered his campaign on denouncing the SLFP government’s relations with the Chinese Stalinists. He coupled this with demagogic appeals to the Tamil minority, whose struggle for language and citizenship rights had been cynically abandoned by the LSSP to win favor with their bourgeois allies.

The LSSP, former supporters of the Pabloite United Secretariat, entered the bourgeois government of Bandaranaike in June 1964, in a betrayal with vast historical significance for the Trotskyist movement. The LSSP betrayal decisively exposed the role of Pabloite opportunism as an agency of imperialism in the workers’ movement. Covering up the organization’s right-wing policies, the Pabloites lavished uncritical praise on the LSSP as the “only really mass Trotskyist party.”

The LSSP betrayal in Ceylon had followed by only one

year the unprincipled reunification of the US Socialist Workers Party with the Pabloites. Ernest Mandel, leader of the United Secretariat, had blocked discussion of the opportunist degeneration of the LSSP on the grounds that this would impede the “unity” of the Trotskyist movement.

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75 years ago: War crisis brings down French government

On March 20, 1940, in a secret session of the French parliament, liberal premier Edouard Daladier resigned after losing a vote of confidence. Three hundred socialist and conservative deputies abstained, with only 239 supporting the government. Daladier’s resignation made way for the conservative Paul Reynaud to accept an invitation to become premier and name a cabinet.

The restructuring of the government came as a result of great dissatisfaction in the French bourgeoisie over Daladier’s failure to aggressively prosecute the war with Germany. Other French deputies castigated Daladier for going to war “light-heartedly in a formidable adventure” against Nazi Germany and not against the main enemy—the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet-Finnish war, deputies criticized Daladier for not having intervened to take advantage of “a miraculous opportunity to vanquish the Soviet Union.”

The elevation of Reynaud to the premiership signaled a demand for an offensive war policy. His nomination brought a favorable response from Chamberlain and Churchill in Britain, and immediately the two countries set to work on their plans to invade Norway and cut off ore shipments to Germany.

The French ruling class was more afraid of the French working class than of the armies of Nazi Germany. There were frequent desertions and rebellions in the army, reflecting the militancy of the workers. Just before reshuffling the government, the state had reacted to the crisis in the army by arresting 16 Trotskyists, members of the Fourth International, for advocating revolutionary defeatist propaganda against the French capitalists.

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100 years ago: Allied naval attack on the Dardanelles repelled by Turkey

On March 18, 1915, Allied naval forces launched a major attack on Ottoman defenses in the Dardanelles, the geographically critical strait connecting the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea. The attack involved a fleet of 18 British and French ships, and civilian trawlers used for minesweeping. It ended in a major defeat for the allies.

The Dardanelles were of critical importance as a supply route between Britain and France and their ally, Tsarist Russia. At the beginning of 1915, Russia, having suffered devastating casualties to German and Austro-Hungarian offensives, was facing a supply crisis and was effectively cut off from its allies. Overland trade routes to Russia from Britain and France were blocked by the Central Powers, sea routes in the Arctic and the Far East were icebound, while the Baltic Sea was blockaded by the German Navy. British control of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus would create a supply line to Russian naval forces in the Black Sea.

On March 18, the first British and French lines, comprising four ships each, opened fire on guard posts defending the first five Ottoman minefields in the strait. Heavy exchanges of fire ensued, with the French ships all taking hits. Once the Ottoman defenses went silent, the third British line of ships was moved into the battle and attempted to advance beyond the initial Ottoman guard posts.

Allied forces had failed to identify all of the mines. The *Bouvet*, one of the French battleships, struck a mine and sank within minutes, killing 639 of its crew. The British HMS *Irresistible* also went down after hitting a mine, with around 150 casualties, and the HMS *Ocean* was also sunk. Two other ships were severely damaged in the course of the battle.

The remaining Allied battleships pulled back. The next month, on April 25, Allied forces would launch a coordinated naval and ground attack in the area, the infamous Gallipoli landing.

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