

# This week in history: March 23-29

23 March 2015

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## 25 years ago: Australian Labor government narrowly survives election

The Labor government of Prime Minister Bob Hawke barely remained in office for its fourth term after the general election held on March 24, 1990. It suffered a 6 percent swing against it nationally to send the Australian Labor Party's vote to a historic low of 39.8 percent. The vote for the Liberal-National coalition, led by Andrew Peacock of the Liberal Party and Charles Blunt of the National Party, was so close in several seats that determination of the winner took days.

The seething hostility in the working class to the Labor government after seven years of attacks on living standards, working conditions and union rights was expressed in swings of up to 20 percent in working class electorates compared to the previous election in 1987.

The vote for the capitalist, small business-based "third party," the Australian Democrats, rose by 5 percent and a plethora of petty-bourgeois parties, such as the Greens and independent candidates, obtained a 3 percent increase. These formations came forward as a parliamentary safety valve, cultivated by the capitalist media.

Even before the election campaign was over, the assault on the working class was being intensified, with warehousemen near Sydney threatened with imprisonment, seizure of their property and multimillion-dollar damages for striking; meat workers in Melbourne locked out by employers seeking pay cuts of \$100 to \$200 a week; and Ford Motor Company warning of plans to end most car assembly in Australia by 1991.

As soon as the election was over, the capitalist media was full of demands for a "strong" government to ensure savage economic measures to impose the full burden of the bankruptcy of Australian capitalism and the imminent recession on the back of the working class. Rupert Murdoch's *Australian* called for a "reign of pain" to deal with the gross foreign debt of more than \$135 billion and the recurring balance of payments deficit of more than \$20 billion annually.

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## 50 years ago: Civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo murdered

On March 25, 1965, civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan near Lowndesboro, Alabama.

The wife of a Teamster official in Detroit and the mother of five children, Liuzzo was shot in the head while driving on US Highway 80, as she was returning to Montgomery from Selma to pick up civil rights workers who had participated in the just-concluded Freedom March. A car pulled alongside her, and gunmen shot her in the head, killing her instantly and causing her car to run off the road and crash. Another civil rights worker in the car survived the crash and played dead when the Klansmen stopped to inspect their bloody work.

The shooting occurred after the 25,000-strong rally at the state capitol in Montgomery called by civil rights organizations to demand an end to racial discrimination in Alabama. The rally was the culmination of a two-month-long campaign for voting rights led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The shooting of Liuzzo was the third murder in five weeks in the Alabama voting rights struggle. On February 18, Jimmie Lee Jackson, a young black worker, was fatally wounded by police during a protest in Marion, Alabama. On March 9, the Rev. James Reeb, a white liberal from Boston, was beaten by racists in Selma. He died two days later.

The FBI fraudulently claimed that it was conducting an investigation of Liuzzo's death. However, the murder was in fact a government provocation. Subsequently it was revealed that an FBI informer working inside the Klan, Gary Rowe, instigated and helped carry out the murder along with other brutal attacks on blacks and civil rights campaigners.

Rowe was sitting in the back seat of the car from which shots were fired into Liuzzo's car, killing her. The FBI concealed his role for decades, instead leaking salacious lies to the media, claiming Liuzzo was having an affair with a young black civil rights worker who was travelling in the car with her. (Volunteers frequently travelled in pairs for safety).

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## 75 years ago: Ali Jinnah advocates separate state for Indian Muslims

At the Muslim League conference in Lahore on March 24, 1940, the group's President Muhammad Ali Jinnah publicly advocated the division of the Indian subcontinent along religious lines. His demagogic call, "I will give my life to achieve it," was reportedly nearly drowned out by the cheers of the assembled Muslim elite.

Not only was separatism along religious lines profoundly reactionary, but given the geographic dispersion of Muslims, a minority in India overall but a majority in certain states, including Punjab and Bengal, separation could only be accomplished through the breaking up of states, cities, towns and even villages, leading ultimately to forced removal of those who constituted a religious minority in any given territory.

The call for independence by the Congress Party of India, and its attempts to recruit among Indian Muslims, was portrayed by the Muslim League as an attempt to establish Hindu dominance in a future state. The League feared being shut out of future government posts, commercial influence, and denied their cut of the vast potential wealth derived from the exploitation of India's workforce after independence.

Promoting ethnic division and chauvinism, Jinnah told the Lahore audience that the two communities represented two separate and distinct civilizations, and that Indian Muslims could not accept any constitution which resulted in a Hindu-majority government. A resolution was proposed that no constitution was viable unless it was based upon territorial adjustments and the creation of independent states in areas where Muslims were in the majority. Delegates warned that civil war would follow any attempts to establish Congress rule.

While formally opposing partition, the Congress Party's bourgeois program, which opposed the mobilization of the subcontinent's hundreds of millions of oppressed, implicitly laid the basis for it. British imperialism, which had long promoted the communal division of the subcontinent, encouraged the divisions as a means of slowing the move toward independence, and in the event of that policy's failure, putting weak and divided semi-colonies in the place of the British Raj.

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## **100 years ago: Karl Liebknecht mustered into the German army**

On March 25, 1915, Karl Liebknecht, a leader of the revolutionary wing of German Social Democracy (SPD), was mustered into the German army and assigned to the eastern front despite his immunity as a member of the Reichstag, the German parliament.

On March 23 Liebknecht had been ordered to place himself at the disposal of the German military authorities, an action that

was attributed to Liebknecht's outspoken opposition to the imperialist war, which had reached a high point in his refusal to vote for war credits.

Liebknecht was barred from appearing at political or public meetings of any kind. He was also ordered to cease writing newspaper and magazine articles criticizing German military measures and to consider himself under military surveillance.

In December 1914 Liebknecht was the only SPD deputy (parliamentary member) who voted against the war in the Reichstag, winning him enormous prestige among growing numbers of workers. Fearing his influence, the opportunist majority in the leadership of German Social Democracy publicly denounced this vote as a "breach of discipline."

Under the impact of the war, a far larger opposition began to emerge within the SPD, which was reflected by growing opposition among Reichstag deputies. In March 1915, 25 SPD deputies voted against further war credits.

In his Reichstag speech in December 1914, Liebknecht declared, "This war was not desired by any of the people affected, nor was it kindled to promote the welfare of the German or any other people. It is an imperialist war, a war for capitalist domination of the world markets and for political domination of the important countries in the interest of industrial and financial capitalism. ...It is also a bonapartist attempt to demoralize and destroy the growing labor movement."

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