

This week in history: May 11-17

11 May 2015

[25 Years Ago](#) | [50 Years Ago](#) | [75 Years Ago](#) | [100 Years Ago](#)

25 years ago: US-backed Nicaraguan regime rocked by strike

Just three weeks after taking office, the US-backed government of Violeta de Chamorro confronted a working class upsurge, quickly exploding the myth peddled by both the capitalist media and the Sandinista leadership that “democracy” was being restored in Nicaragua. Eighty thousand government workers went on strike Thursday, May 10, 1990, rocking the country with violent class conflict.

Chamorro and Labor Minister Francisco Rosales declared the strikes illegal, threatened to fire the strikers en masse, and to deploy the police and army against them. But the strike movement only gained strength.

On May 15, burning tires and chanting crowds choked the streets and sidewalks outside most government offices in Managua. Shouts of “Violeta, start packing your bags” and “The people own the government, not the bourgeoisie,” flew through the capital as workers staged dozens of demonstrations.

A crowd drove off Foreign Minister Enrique Dreyfus and a group of ambassadors newly appointed by Chamorro when they tried to enter the Foreign Ministry with the help of riot police. “Go back to Miami,” cried the strikers and their supporters.

Police fired tear gas to drive out workers who had been occupying three government buildings for a week. Later, however, the workers returned unhindered. All flights by the national airline, Aeronica, were canceled. All telecommunications were cut off. Telcor, the national postal and telecommunications company, was one of the centers of the strike.

Banks and schools were also closed by the strike, and the electrical and water ministries occupied. The strikers threatened to cut off the capital’s water and electricity if the government tried to make good on any of its draconian threats.

The government workers demanded a 200 percent wage increase—the price of most consumer goods had doubled in the three weeks since Chamorro took office—and the reinstatement of the Civil Service Law. The suspension of this law earlier in the month was seen as a first step in implementing the

government’s much discussed plans for mass layoffs in the public sector, because one of its principal provisions gave job security to all government workers.

Following the contras’ announcement that they would not adhere to the demobilization accord, the strikers added the demand that demobilization of the contras proceed.

[\[top\]](#)

50 years ago: OAS forces join Dominican occupation

On May 14, 1965, token contingents of “peacekeeping forces” sent by the Organization of American States arrived in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic, joining over 20,000 US troops sent to suppress a nationalist uprising in the impoverished Caribbean country.

Those Latin American governments committing troops to aid in the suppression of the rebels included the Somoza regime of Nicaragua, as well as the governments of Honduras and Costa Rica. The OAS troops were placed under the command of General Penasco Alvim of the blood-drenched Brazilian military dictatorship.

The previous day, warplanes of the US-backed military junta destroyed the rebel radio station in an attack that killed several civilians. The killings brought angry crowds into the streets to denounce the American imperialist intervention. Over 2,000 civilians were killed in the first weeks of fighting.

The bourgeois nationalist opponents of the imperialist-backed junta were much more frightened of the workers who had flocked to the banner of the constitutionalist uprising than they were of the right-wing generals they were supposedly fighting. Despite the open support of the United States and its OAS puppets for the military junta, Colonel Francisco Caamano Deno,

leader of the rebel military forces, conceded that he supported American intervention. “We are more anxious for the Americans to stay than the Americans themselves are,” he admitted.

Rebel leaders were particularly concerned about recovering the 20,000 weapons that had been distributed to workers and students in the initial days of the revolt. The key issue in the OAS-sponsored truce negotiations between the rebels and the

military junta was a method for the disarming of civilians.

[top]

75 years ago: French Army in rapid retreat before Nazi invasion

On May 13, 1940, just three days after Nazi Germany attacked Western Europe, the armed forces of French imperialism fell into ignominious retreat in the face of the rapid advances of the German military deep into French territory. German forces commanded by Erwin Rommel crossed the Meuse River, making initially only a slight penetration, but two false reports were filed by French commanders, claiming German panzer units had broken through, when not a single German tank had even crossed the river.

A chain reaction collapse of the French Army ensued. Commanders removed their posts to the rear and soldiers fell into a retreat. An atmosphere of *saue qui peut* (every man for himself) took hold among soldiers and ammunition stockpiles hoarded for a protracted battle fell to the enemy without a fight. A French general described the scene: “A wave of terrified fugitives, gunners, and infantry, in transport, on foot, many without arms. ... Some firing their rifles like madmen ... officers among the deserters ... mixed together, terror-stricken and in the grip of mass hysteria ... commanders at all levels pretended having received orders to withdraw, but were quite unable to show them.”

In analyzing the French debacle, Trotsky cited as one major factor the counterrevolutionary influence of Stalinism on the international working class. Stalin’s campaign of 1934-39 for an “alliance of democracies” and “peoples fronts” to contain Hitler, followed by his sudden shift in August 1939 to a direct alliance with Hitler, profoundly disoriented the masses of workers. Trotsky wrote, “With its propaganda of ‘peoples fronts,’ the Kremlin hindered the masses from conducting the fight against the imperialist war. With his shift to Hitler’s side Stalin ... paralyzed the military power of the democracies. In spite of all the machines of destruction, the moral factor retains decisive importance in the war. By demoralizing the popular masses in Europe, Stalin played the role of an agent provocateur in the service of Hitler. The capitulation of France is one of the results of such politics.”

[top]

100 years ago: Britain announces internment of “enemy aliens”

On May 13, 1915, Herbert Asquith, prime minister of Great Britain, announced a new internment policy for “persons of hostile origins.” At the beginning of World War I, Britain began to place all Germans and Austrians who were considered dangerous, including reservists of military age, into internment camps. By September 1914 there were 13,600 held in camps, including about 10,500 civilians. During the early months of the war there were demands in parliament and the press to lock up all enemy nationals, but the policy of wholesale internment was complicated by growing public opposition and logistical difficulties.

In the wake of the sinking of the British cruise liner RMS Lusitania by German torpedoes, there were new calls for the internment of all civilians of German and Austrian descent. Anti-German xenophobia was being whipped up by the press and business leaders were demanding the “disabling of” Germans in London. In particular there were calls by the press to intern wealthy naturalized citizens of German and Austrian origin. The British government decided to implement wholesale internment of all non-naturalized “aliens.” Men of military age were to be interned and older men, women and children to be repatriated where possible.

By the end of July about 1,000 men of military age were being placed in internment camps each week, and older men and women and children faced the threat of deportation unless they voluntarily left Britain. By November 1915 there were 32,440 men aged between 18 and 55 held in internment camps in Britain. This number included both civilians living in Britain at the outbreak of the war and those seized during various military operations. Those women and children who were not forcibly repatriated were subject to significant restrictions, including curfews and rules on where they might travel within Britain.

The number of captives and detainees held by Britain during the war peaked at 115,950. After the war had ended many of those German civilians who had been living in Britain at the outbreak of the war and had either been interned or remained in the community were expelled from Britain. In 1914 the overall German-national population in Britain had been about 57,500; by 1919 it was down to 22,000.

[top]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact