

This week in history: July 6-12

6 July 2015

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

25 years ago: US-backed Nicaraguan regime calls out military against strikers

On July 9, 1990, President Violeta Chamorro called out the army to restore order during a strike in Managua, the capital city. The strike of both public and private sector workers was the second major challenge to the US-backed government since taking office 11 weeks earlier.

Some 90,000 workers participated in the strike, which shut water and electrical service to the city of one million and closed the airport, mail service and operator-assisted phone service. The pro-Sandinista strikers demanded that the Chamorro regime rehire government workers fired as part of its cost-cutting measures and to drop plans to return land expropriated by the Sandinista government to their previous owners.

The Sandinista Front remained the largest political force in the country and continued to have support among the majority of workers and peasants even after the defeat of Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega in the election of February 25, 1990.

Thousands of angry strikers set up barricades, built bonfires in the streets and occupied public buildings in the capital. State-owned radio stations were taken over by strikers and their supporters to broadcast calls for support of the strike and prevent the government from issuing its threats of repression.

Chamorro held a press conference on July 11 with army commander General Humberto Ortega, the brother of the defeated president, calling on workers to end violence and offered to negotiate over their demands. General Ortega announced that the military

“will never carry out a coup against any government here, much less the government of Doña Violeta. But neither will the army and police fire on the people.”

On Thursday, July 12, the strike was ended with at least six people killed and some 100 injured.

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50 years ago: Vietnam “will get worse before it gets better,” Johnson warns

US President Lyndon Johnson, speaking from the White House on July 9, 1965, warned that US involvement in Vietnam would increase beyond the officially stated goal of 75,000 soldiers. “We committed our power and our national honor,” Johnson said, “and that has been reaffirmed by three presidents.”

On August 12, the arrival of 1,000 combat infantrymen at Camranh Bay brought to 65,000 the official total of US soldiers in Vietnam. A US bombing campaign the same day was said to have killed 580 “Vietcong”—a derogatory term for National Liberation Front rebels—but there was no explanation of how this “body count” was determined. Other media reports boasted of the destruction of infrastructure in North Vietnam.

The Pentagon revealed on July 8 that in the preceding week 23 more US soldiers had been killed in Vietnam, bringing the number of American dead since January 1, 1961, to 469. The number of wounded rose past 2,000.

On July 9, New Zealand Prime Minister Keith Holyoake announced the deployment of an artillery battery and 120 soldiers, joining the US and Australia in the “police action” in South Vietnam.

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75 years ago: Stalin orders crackdown in Lithuania

On July 7, 1940, the Lithuanian security department, under direction from Stalin, ordered the liquidation of all bourgeois parties, one week before elections for a new government in the occupied country. In the next few days, 2,000 political leaders, government officials, newspaper editors and the clergy were arrested. This paved the way for the Lithuanian CP to run unchallenged in the elections and enabled Stalin to ultimately annex Lithuania to the USSR.

At the beginning of World War II, Stalin forced the Baltic countries to allow the Red Army to establish military bases within their borders. While Germany turned westward and attacked France, Stalin did not interfere with Lithuania's internal affairs. But when the French army collapsed in less than six weeks under the Nazi blitzkrieg, Stalin moved rapidly to bring the Baltic countries under his control and fortify his military positions there.

In May, the Lithuanian government was accused of abducting and murdering Red Army soldiers. In June, Molotov accused Lithuania of entering into a military alliance with Latvia and Estonia against the USSR. He demanded the formation of a new government acceptable to the USSR and provided a list of ministers to comprise a coalition government of CP and left-wing elements.

Columns of Soviet tanks rumbled into Kaunas on June 15 and surrounded government buildings. Many workers and left-wing intellectuals greeted the Red Army as liberators, delivering them from the 13-year rule of the dictator Antanas Smetona, who fled the country. Lithuanian CP members freed from jail went into action calling mass rallies. Unions were formed; unemployed workers were given jobs; rents were reduced; greater accessibility to medical care was provided; the estates were apportioned among the small landholders and landless peasants.

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100 years ago: Austria-Hungary defeats Italy in first battle of the Isonzo

On July 7, 1915, Italian troops suffered a defeat to Austro-Hungarian forces in the first of a series of 12 battles over 30 months in the vicinity of the Isonzo River, just inside the border between the two belligerents, on the territory of Austria-Hungary.

The area in which the battles were fought, much of which is in present day Slovenia, was of geo-strategic importance as a gateway for Italian plans for an eventual assault on Vienna. While not as well known as Verdun or the Somme, the Isonzo became a killing field of the same order of magnitude, with more than 300,000 soldiers on both sides losing their lives.

The launching of the Italian offensive around the Isonzo, on June 23, followed that country's official declaration of war against Austria-Hungary on May 23. Italy had been in a military alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, for almost three decades.

With the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, the Allied powers, including Britain and France, made concerted attempts to win Italy to their side in the conflict, offering substantial territorial incentives. On April 26, 1915, Italian prime minister Antonio Salandra signed the secret London Pact, effectively allying Italy with the Allies, on the condition that it receive large swathes of Austria-Hungary in the event of victory.

The Italian offensive beginning on June 23 was aimed at destroying defensive Austro-Hungarian positions around the Isonzo River, and in the surrounding mountains, and establishing a foothold in the area. The heavy Italian artillery barrages initially showed signs of success, and the Italian troops substantially outnumbered their opponents. However, the Austro-Hungarians were well entrenched in defensive positions, and eventually succeeded in repelling the Italian offensive.

Italian troops only gained insignificant stretches at a heavy loss, with some 15,000 casualties, compared to some 10,000 on the Austro-Hungarian side. Italy would launch another offensive on July 18.

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