

This week in history: August 31-September 6

31 August 2015

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

25 years ago: Scorched earth plan for Soviet economy

The so-called 500-days plan drafted by the top economic advisers to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was published in the September 4, 1990 issue of *Izvestia*. The program was essentially a declaration of war on the Soviet working class, representing the culmination not merely of perestroika, but of six decades of Stalinism's betrayal of the October 1917 revolution.

The protracted process of bureaucratic degeneration began in the 1920s with the suppression of inner-party democracy and the repudiation of the program of world socialist revolution in favor of "socialism in one country," and was followed by the complete destruction of the Bolshevik Party, the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of the finest representatives of Marxism within the working class and the intelligentsia and the establishment of a totalitarian regime. Under Gorbachev, it finally resolved itself into an explicit program to destroy whatever remained of the heritage of 1917 and restore capitalism.

The 500-days plan was elaborated by an economic commission headed by Stanislav Shatalin, one of Gorbachev's principal economic advisers. The Shatalin program was aimed at destroying whatever still remained of the infrastructure of the Soviet planned economy and the nationalized productive forces established on the basis of the 1917 revolution.

According to the mad petty-bourgeois professors who conceived this program, a thriving capitalist economy would emerge within less than two years out of the deliberate and wholesale wreckage of Soviet industry and agriculture. The plan's preamble declared that its principal aim was the creation of a "new model" of Soviet society, "the basis of which is the entrepreneur and the enterprise multiplying their property." In other words, it called for the organization of production for the purpose of creating profit for a capitalist ruling class.

The program garnered the immediate support of Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian republic, the largest single component of the USSR. Gorbachev himself then endorsed the plan.

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50 years ago: Pakistan and India expand war

After several days of border clashes, Pakistan launched a large-scale invasion of the Indian-held Kashmir on September 1, 1965, driving 17 miles into the disputed Himalayan region toward Akhnoor, before bogging down against entrenched Indian artillery.

On September 6, Indian troops invaded Pakistan in the Punjab region, in a movement directed against Lahore, one of Pakistan's most important cities. The counterattack included air sorties aimed at Pakistani infrastructure and military supply. Within days the campaign brought Indian forces to the outskirts of Lahore.

On September 4, the United Nations Security Council, convened by US representative Arthur Goldberg, passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire and a return to the borders established after the 1949 truce. This was in line with a 1957 UN resolution calling for withdrawal of military forces from Kashmir in preparation for a plebiscite in the disputed region. New Delhi held to the position that Kashmir's fate had been decided and a plebiscite was no longer necessary. A UN investigation, meanwhile, concluded that the latest hostilities began with the infiltration of armed men entering Kashmir from Pakistan, while Islamabad insisted that the fighting was a popular uprising.

The immediate cause of Pakistan's move against India over Kashmir was an Indian law, put in place in December of 1964, subjecting the region to rule by presidential edict. Of greater concern in Islamabad, however, was a rapid build-up of Indian military capabilities after New Delhi's humbling by China in the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. India had begun to purchase military hardware, including fighter jets, from the United Kingdom, France, the US, and the Soviet Union. Pakistan sought to strike before India's advantage became too great.

Pakistan attacked India with US-supplied heavy weaponry supposedly intended to counter the threat of Communist China, including Patton and Sherman tanks and F-86 and F-104 jets, and both Pakistan and China sent signals that China might join the fighting against India.

By the week's end at least 100,000 people had been made refugees on the Indian side of the original ceasefire line, and hundreds of soldiers were dead on both sides.

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75 years ago: US exchanges warships for British bases

On September 3, 1940 US President Franklin Roosevelt informed Congress and the public that he had completed an arrangement that would give Britain 50 destroyers in return for

land and sea bases in the Western Hemisphere, providing the most direct US participation so far in the opening stages of World War II.

The deal, carried out behind closed doors, ceded continental and island locations along a 4,500-mile stretch, from Newfoundland in Canada to British Guiana in the northern part of South

America. The agreement also included other bases on the islands of Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Antigua. The arrangement was accompanied by a pledge from Britain not to surrender the British Fleet to Nazi Germany under any conditions.

The deal had far-reaching implications. First, the onesidedness of the tradeoff represented a shift in the balance of power between British and American imperialism. The British bourgeoisie, preoccupied by the threat of a blitzkrieg on the British Isles, had to surrender a portion of its empire to American capitalism in order to secure what was essentially an unofficial alliance between the two countries against Germany and Japan.

The deal ensured that Germany could not use its ongoing war with Britain as the pretext for seizing footholds in the Western Hemisphere, or inherit these territories in the event of a successful invasion and conquest of the British Isles, which was a serious possibility as the Nazi regime was consolidating its grip over the bulk of the European continent.

The arrangement also exploded American pretensions of democracy, as Roosevelt negotiated the deal without ever consulting Congress. This was necessary in order to avoid any public debate under conditions of widespread opposition to US participation in the war raging in Europe and the Far East. While Roosevelt presented the swap in terms of providing bases to defend the US against foreign attack, the real purpose was to secure unchallenged domination for US imperialism of the markets, resources and cheap labor of Latin America, the Caribbean, as well as control of Atlantic routes of access to the Panama Canal.

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100 years ago: Zimmerwald conference of socialist opponents of World War I

On September 5, 1915, 38 delegates representing socialist tendencies throughout Europe assembled in the Swiss town of Zimmerwald to discuss an antiwar program in opposition to the carnage of World War I, which had broken out in August 1914.

The Zimmerwald conference, which lasted three days, was carried out in the wake of the betrayal of socialist internationalism by the Second International, and its largest section, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which responded to the outbreak of war by supporting the predatory actions of their “own” governments.

The official manifesto adopted by the Zimmerwald conference declared, “The war which has produced this chaos is the outcome of imperialism, of the attempt on the part of the capitalist classes

of each nation, to foster their greed for profit by the exploitation of human labor and of the natural treasures of the entire globe.”

However it made no reference to those, such as Kaul Kautsky, the theoretical leader of the SPD, who had played a central role in the betrayal of the Second International, but who continued to posture as socialist opponents of the most crude proponents of militarism within the social-democratic parties. Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Russian Bolsheviks, insisted that the war, which represented a breakdown of capitalism, could only be fought through an implacable struggle against all those who carried out, or apologized for, the Second International’s betrayal.

An alternative resolution of the “left wing” of the conference, headed by Lenin, was voted down. It declared, “The working class cannot achieve its historic aims without waging a most resolute struggle against both forthright opportunism and social-chauvinism ... and the so-called Centre, which has surrendered the Marxist stand to the chauvinists.”

It noted that the war was radicalizing the working class, and stated, “In utilizing that temper for their revolutionary agitation, and not shying away in that agitation from considerations of the defeat of their ‘own’ country, the socialists will not deceive the people with the hope that, without the revolutionary overthrow of the present-day governments, a possibility exists of a speedy democratic peace, which will be durable in some degree and will preclude any oppression of nations, a possibility of disarmament, etc. Only the social revolution of the proletariat opens the way towards peace and freedom for the nations.”

Lenin, and the other left-wing delegates voted for the compromise manifesto, while recording their objections to its limited treatment of opportunism. Lenin added, however, “In practice, the manifesto signifies a step towards an ideological and practical break with opportunism and social-chauvinism.” The conference created an International Socialist Committee, which organized further antiwar initiatives.

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