

This week in history: September 28-October 4

28 September 2015

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

25 years ago: East and West Germany reunified

October 3, 1990 marked the official proclamation of a united Germany, based on the dissolution of the Stalinist-ruled German Democratic Republic into the Federal Republic of Germany. Just one year after masses of workers poured into the streets of Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and throughout East Germany, toppling the hated bureaucrats, Honecker and Krenz, the dictatorship of this Stalinist mafia was replaced with the dictatorship of the Deutsche Bank and German imperialism.

The reunification of Germany along capitalist lines represented a serious setback not only for the German workers, but for the international working class. The destruction of East Germany did not rescue world capitalism from its historic crisis, nor would it prevent the eruption of revolutionary struggles of the proletariat in both Eastern and Western Europe in the coming period. Nonetheless, because of the unprecedented betrayals of its leaderships, the proletariat proved unable to seize the initiative in the revolutionary crisis which emerged over the previous year.

The implications of this transfer of power had already become starkly apparent by October 3. Millions of workers were thrown into the streets, without jobs or any means of earning their livelihood, as factory after factory was closed. An entire generation of youth in East Germany previously guaranteed employment as a basic right—discovered that it was training for jobs that no longer existed. By some estimates, more than half of East Germany's workers would join the unemployment lines and seven out of 10 enterprises would be shut down.

Social programs upon which millions had depended were destroyed in order to create the optimum “climate” for unfettered capitalist exploitation on the ruins of the GDR. In short, all of the social gains won by the East German working class since 1945, in spite of and in struggle against

the parasitic and tyrannical Stalinist bureaucracy, were systematically wiped out.

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50 years ago: Military coup sets stage for Indonesia bloodbath

On October 1, 1965, military officers staged a coup attempt against President Sukarno of Indonesia. The officers, led by Colonel Untang and calling themselves the “September 30 Movement,” surrounded the presidential palace in the capital city of Jakarta, taking the president under “protective custody.”

Army chief of staff Lieutenant General Achmad Yanl and five other generals were kidnapped and assassinated during the initial stages of the revolt, which was given full public endorsement by the Maoist leadership of the 3 million-member Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

Untang announced that the action was taken to prevent a counterrevolutionary coup by right-wing generals. In reality, the coup played directly into the hands of the US Central Intelligence Agency and its favored generals, including Suharto, who escaped harm though he was in Jakarta at the time.

By evening right-wing military units led by Suharto freed Sukarno and scattered the insurgents. The rebel troops retreated from the capital to the central part of the island of Java, where resistance continued with the support of paramilitary detachments of the PKI.

The CIA handed over to Suharto meticulously prepared lists of names of workers and radicals for liquidation, and the Indonesian bourgeoisie seized on the PKI-inspired adventure to immediately begin a ferocious counterattack against the working class. Within days, the PKI's headquarters in Jakarta was burned to the ground and the party newspaper suppressed. The government commenced wholesale arrests of suspected communists, while Suharto's intelligence apparatus, military, and fascist gangs began a slaughter of PKI members that ultimately led to as many as 1

million murders and the destruction of the largest communist party outside of China and the Soviet Union.

The Stalinist PKI was chiefly responsible for the catastrophe of 1965. The year began with a revolutionary movement of peasants and workers occupying the major landed estates and US-owned rubber facilities. Sukarno brought the PKI into his cabinet in order to suppress the mass movement. While the PKI halted the takeovers, the military and the CIA prepared their bloodbath.

See: Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup [16 May 2009]
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75 years ago: Nazi decree establishes Warsaw Ghetto

On October 2, 1940, one year after the invasion and dismemberment of Poland by Hitler and Stalin, a decree signed by the German Governor General Hans Frank established a Jewish ghetto in the Nalewki quarter of the Polish capital, Warsaw.

Warsaw, prior to the outbreak of World War II, was among the most “Jewish” of world cities, with a rich working class intellectual and political culture. Nalewki had previously been a predominately Jewish district located in and around the historical medieval Jewish sector of the city. Warsaw’s Jews numbered some 400,000, approximately 30 percent of the prewar city population, but these enormous numbers would be coerced into an area representing just 2.4 percent of the city’s geographical footprint.

The construction of the ghetto had begun in April 1940, but it was not until the autumn that all Jews from Warsaw and surrounding districts were rounded up and herded by the occupying Nazi forces into the ethnic enclave. The Jewish Ghetto in the Polish capital was the largest of hundreds of ghettos subsequently imposed by the Nazis in occupied Europe.

With a three-meter-high wall snaking some 11 miles around the circumference of the ghetto, the geographical seclusion of the Jews was designed initially to isolate, and ultimately to provide the means by which their physical eradication could be conducted.

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100 years ago: Bulgaria enters World War I

On October 4, 1915, Bulgaria formally entered World War

I on the side of the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, declaring war on Serbia, having issued a decree for the mobilization of all men under 50 years old.

The entry of Bulgaria into the conflict had been long anticipated, given the geo-politically critical character of the Balkan region, and the antagonisms that had been fostered by the major powers over the previous decade. Bulgarian participation in the war was presaged by Italy’s formal entrance into the conflict in May 1915, after it reneged on a previous agreement with Germany and Austria-Hungary, joining the Allied Powers in exchange for territorial concessions.

Bulgaria’s entrance into the war intensified a long-standing political crisis in Greece, bound up with divisions over whether to explicitly enter the conflict. Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos responded to the Bulgarian declaration of war on Serbia by declaring that Greece would honor its existing treaty obligations, and come to the defense of the Serbian regime. He announced that his government would allow Allied troops to land on Salonika to prosecute the struggle. Within days, Venizelos was forced to resign, at the prompting of King Constantine, who was opposed to Greek entry into the conflict on the side of the Allies. Greece ultimately joined the war in the summer of 1917.

The major Allied powers responded swiftly to the mobilization of Bulgarian troops. Great Britain issued a thinly veiled threat, with the foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey declaring in the House of Commons, “If ... the Bulgarian mobilization were to result in Bulgaria assuming an aggressive attitude on the side of our enemies, we are prepared to give to our friends in the Balkans all the support in our power in the manner that would be most welcome to them, in concert with our Allies, without reserve and without qualification.”

The Balkans had been the center of major conflicts immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. The first Balkan war, which began in October 1912, involved an alliance of Balkan powers, implicitly backed by Britain, France and Russia, administering a crushing defeat on the ailing Ottoman Empire. Conflict had rapidly broken out between the victorious Balkan allies, pitting a number of them, including Bulgaria, against Serbia, which had won most of the spoils from the defeat of the Ottomans, in the second Balkan war.

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