

This week in history: November 9-15

9 November 2015

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

25 years ago: First detailed proposal for World Wide Web

On November 12, 1990, at the CERN laboratories near Geneva, Switzerland, Tim Berners-Lee submitted a paper to his colleagues which detailed the technical basis for the World Wide Web. In the paper, titled, “WorldWideWeb: Proposal for a HyperText Project,” Lee and his collaborator, Robert Cailliau, followed up on a March 1989 proposal on information management at CERN laboratories that was deemed “vague but exciting” by Lee’s superior at the time.

The detailed follow-up proposal was drafted after Lee wrote the three basic technologies that remain the foundation of the web today: (1) HTML—HyperText Markup Language—the formatting language for creating “links”; (2) URI—Uniform Resource Identifier—a unique address for each resource in the network; (3) HTTP—HyperText Transfer Protocol—allowing for the retrieval of link resources across the network.

Also included in the proposal were the conceptual building blocks of the system: the server, which would manage the web of nodes accessible from that machine; and the browser, the client-side piece that would negotiate with the server-supplied content and yet keep its own cache on the local computer.

The Internet was already in existence, with technologies and protocols such as email and newsgroups, but the significance of the technology being developed by Lee, by making the Internet potentially available to billions, laid the groundwork for what is sometimes called “the information revolution.”

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50 years ago: White Rhodesian regime declares

independence

On November 11, 1965, the racist white minority government of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) unilaterally declared independence from Great Britain, setting off a chorus of hypocritical handwringing by the leaders of world imperialism. The action came after the white minority government, headed by Ian Smith, rejected pressure from London for cosmetic political reforms.

In contrast to the brutal military force used to crush independence movements in Asia and the Middle East, British Labour Party Prime Minister Harold Wilson reacted to the break by announcing a series of paper measures that, along with toothless United Nations sanctions, had absolutely no effect.

Opposition to the racist government by the African majority led to the detention of nationalist leaders Joshua Nkomo and Ndabaningi Sithole, along with hundreds of their followers in the months leading up to the break with Britain. On hearing the declaration, Sithole announced the formation of a “government of the people.” Meanwhile, strikes and demonstrations by black workers and students erupted in several Rhodesian cities. In nearby Tanzania and the Congo, students attacked the British embassies.

The settler regime in Rhodesia, where 220,000 whites ruled over four million blacks, was a creation of British imperialism, which imposed colonial rule in the mineral-rich territory by military force, brutally crushing native uprisings in 1894 and 1897. Until 1923 Rhodesia, named after British capitalist Cecil Rhodes, existed as nothing more than an extension of the British South Africa Company. Stringent racial segregation had been reinforced in 1941. With the blessings of British imperialism, the white settler regime re-imposed the Land Apportionment Act, originally enacted in 1931, confining the black majority to special reserves.

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75 years ago: Molotov meets with Hitler

On November 12, 1940 the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov arrived in Germany for two days of meetings with Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler in an effort to lessen growing tensions that threatened to rupture the Stalin-Hitler pact.

Hitler pretended to seek association by the Soviet Union with the Tripartite pact signed by Germany, Italy and Japan, although his real plan was the invasion and destruction of the USSR.

Anticipating the defeat of Britain, Hitler tried to entice Stalin into establishing a sphere of influence in the British colonies of the Middle East and India in an effort to distract him from Germany's imperialist interests in Eastern Europe. But Molotov made clear that Stalin maintained an interest in the Balkans and a naval and shipping outlet through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean Sea.

Stalin had attempted to make use of the treaty, as well as further concessions to Hitler, to forestall war with Germany, a reactionary maneuver which sacrificed the interests of the international working class and undermined the defense of the USSR. Ultimately, the division of Eastern Europe between the USSR and Germany only brought the two countries face to face. From Finland through Poland to Romania, German Wehrmacht and Soviet Red Army troops faced each other.

The pact called for the USSR to supply Germany with large amounts of raw materials and grain. Hitler paid for these with military armaments. The Nazi war economy was less and less able to fulfill export obligations and deliveries began to lag. In September, the Soviet government warned that if a balancing of accounts was not achieved soon, Soviet shipments to Germany would be suspended.

For Hitler, who relied on these materials to sustain the German economy, the situation was intolerable. He regarded as a grave threat the close proximity of Red Army troops to Romanian oil fields that fueled the Nazi military machine.

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100 years ago: Serbian army in crisis during Battle of Kosovo

On November 10, 1915, bitter fighting broke out in and around the Serbian province of Kosovo, as the Serbian army launched a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to stave off Bulgarian troops and sections of the German army, which had swept across the country in the previous weeks. The conflict, which became known as the Battle of Kosovo, culminated in the routing of the Serbian army, and a massive

retreat towards the Adriatic coast, one of the bloodiest events of World War One.

Throughout 1915, Germany and Austria-Hungary, the lead Central Powers, had considered a renewed offensive against Serbia. If they were successful, it would remove Britain, France and Germany's main ally in the Balkans, and open new supply lines to the embattled Ottoman Empire.

In September, Bulgaria, which had previously remained neutral, signed a deal for entry into the world war on the side of the Central Powers. Its decision was motivated by a desire to seize large sections of Serbia. The Bulgarian army rapidly mobilized, and on October launched an invasion of Serbia from the north and south. Days later, Austro-Hungarian and German forces invaded Serbia, capturing its capital Belgrade.

The Serbian army, which had not recovered from the first invasion of Central powers shortly after the outbreak of war in August 1914, sought unsuccessfully to halt the invasion. On November 10, Bulgarian troops crossed the South Moravia River and struck the Serbian army, which held the area around Prokuplje during two days of bitter fighting, before being forced to retreat. The Serbian army attempted a handful of desperate rearguard actions, including around Kumanovo and Vranje. By the end of November, the whole Bulgarian army was advancing through Serbia, and on December 4, they captured Debar, marking the end of serious fighting.

Serbia had suffered as many as 94,000 casualties, while over 150,000 were imprisoned. Bulgaria suffered up to 67,000 losses. Over the following weeks, the Serbian government, army, and large sections of the civilian population embarked upon a mass retreat, leaving large swathes of Serbia to the invading forces. Some 400,000 troops and civilians embarked upon the winter retreat, through Albania, and faced widespread starvation, disease, and death from the elements. Eventually 130,000 Serbian troops would be transported by Allied ships to various Greek islands.

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