This week in history: November 23-29

23 November 2015

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

25 years ago: NYPD reveals strikebreaking plan by Democrats, *Daily News*

New York City police official Robert J. Johnston Jr., speaking on behalf of Mayor David Dinkins, revealed that the Democratic administration had organized a union-busting operation months ahead of the ongoing strike at the *New York Daily News*. At a November 26 legislative hearing, Johnston testified that the previous January, two months before the contracts expired at the *News* and nine months before the strike began, *News* officials met with high-ranking police officials to obtain "security assistance" for the forthcoming strike.

According to Johnston, the department immediately responded by establishing a liaison between its intelligence division and other units and the *News'* security staff. Shortly before this contact, the *News* had hired Richard J. Koehler, a former senior police official himself, as chief of security. When the strike came, hundreds of helmeted cops were deployed to protect the scab operation and suppress the strikers.

After a month on strike, *New York Daily News* workers continued to win enormous support in the working class. Industry sources estimated that by November 25, 1990—one month since the strike erupted—the circulation of the scab paper dropped below 300,000, little more than 25 percent of its pre-strike level. Nearly all of the paper's major advertisers pulled their ads from the paper in response to this circulation collapse.

The support came in spite of the policies pursued by the Allied Printing Trades Council unions and AFL-CIO bureaucracy, which were aimed at deliberately isolating the struggle against union busting at the *News* by refusing to call out the city workers and diverting the battle into protest actions such as consumer boycotts and leafleting of the News's advertisers, and appealing for support to Democratic Party politicians.

On November 18, Ed Winn, a New York City transit worker and leader of the Workers League (precursor to the Socialist Equality Party) was arrested on the picket line shortly after he began speaking to *News* strikers and distributing copies of a Workers League leaflet entitled, "Defeat Concessions and Union Busting! Unite Daily News and City Workers! Fight for a General Strike!"

[top]

50 years ago: Mobutu launches coup in Congo

On November 25, 1965, Congolese military strongman Joseph Mobutu ousted the government of President Joseph Kasavubu in a bloodless, CIA-backed coup. Mobutu declared himself president, announced that the constitution would be altered to make the coup legal, that all political parties would be outlawed for five years, and that elections scheduled for the spring would be cancelled.

The Congo was at the beginning of a brutal dictatorship that would last until 1997. A US proxy in the struggle against liberation movements in southern Africa, Mobutu ruled the former Belgian colony, which he renamed Zaire, on behalf of western mining concerns, which raped the region of its immense mineral wealth and left behind one of the poorest countries in the world. Mobutu personally looted between $4 billion and $15 billion from the Congolese economy.

Mobutu, 35 at the time of the coup, had been pegged early by the CIA and the US State Department as an ally. Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Congo when it gained independence from Belgium in 1960, appointed Mobutu as army chief of staff, unaware that the latter was a paid Belgian agent. Mobutu removed Lumumba from office in September 1960, and, in November, handed him over to secessionist forces under Moise Tshombe, who murdered the elected prime minister with the backing of the Eisenhower administration.

Mobutu, promoted in 1961 to major general by Kasavubu, fashioned himself as an anti-communist and received major support from the CIA and the US military as he fought against multiple rebellions and secessionist movements over the next four years.

See also: Fifty years since the murder of Patrice Lumumba

[top]

75 years ago: Roosevelt moves to bar defense industry

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strikes

On November 26, 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt declared that the federal government intended to bar strikes at plants under government contract to provide war materials for the US military and its allies.

The declaration came after Democrat Martin Dies, chairman of the red-baiting House Committee on Un-American Activities, issued a statement calling for immediate action to end “Communist-instigated strikes" and “to expel from national defense industries all Communists.”

On the same day, Roosevelt also stated that all public works expenditures, except those directly connected with munitions, would be “cut to the bone.” Some two million workers then working on Works Progress Administration jobs and another one million unemployed on WPA waiting lists would be affected.

The class implications of the two statements were clear. The mass of WPA workers, many having made economic gains in the nationwide WPA strike of one year before, were to be driven out of the unionized WPA sectors and reabsorbed into the low-wage nonunion conditions of military manufacturing, while the defense contractors raked in superprofits from government contracts paid in part through the destruction of WPA and other programs.

The House of Representatives followed up Roosevelt’s call by immediately introducing bills in Congress to counter strikes in defense, which provided for penalties of up to life imprisonment for workers convicted of “sabotage” in military industries.

One bill listed the campaign by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to organize Ford Motor Company under “subversive activities” and included a referen ce to the CIO-led 1937 sit-down strike at GM that won union recognition. Ford had just received a lucrative contract from the government to manufacture airplane engines.

[top]

100 years ago: Einstein presents Theory of General Relativity

On November 25, 1915, in a presentation before the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin, Albert Einstein published the finished equations of his theory of General (meaning universal) Relativity, marking the culmination of a period of eight years of intense intellectual effort and collaboration that began in 1907. One hundred years later, General Relativity remains the unchallenged theory of gravity over large distances.

Einstein’s theory provides a unified physical description of gravity as the warping of space and time, or space-time. His theory generalized, and subsumed within itself—as an approximation—the theory of gravity credited to Isaac Newton. Newton’s monumental scientific achievement identified gravity as a universal force experienced between two objects, and specified the magnitude of that force according to the mass of the objects and their distance of separation. However, the question of how mass generates a gravitational force was left unanswered.

Einstein’s equations relate the presence of matter, or energy (in 1905, Einstein had shown that mass and energy are equivalent and related through the now-famous formula, E = MC2), to the “curvature” of space-time. In essence, matter tells space-time how to curve, and the curving of space-time tells matter how to move. As an analogy, one can consider a two-dimensional “space-time” formed by the flat plane of a mattress. Placing a bowling ball on the mattress will cause it to compress inwards, and compel nearby objects toward it.

Einstein’s theory had immediate, experimentally verifiable implications. The same month that he presented his theory, Einstein used it to calculate and explain the problem of the perihelion shift in the orbital motion of Mercury, an anomaly which could not be explained on the basis of Newtonian gravity. General Relativity also contained strange physical implications which are critical for the functioning of modern technology. It predicts, for example, that clocks held by observers standing at different points in a gravitational field will tick at different rates. If this effect were not accounted for, modern GPS navigational systems would be unreliable.

The word “general” is used to differentiate Einstein’s 1915 theory from that which he developed ten years earlier in 1905, called the theory of Special Relativity. The latter provided a unified framework for explaining the physical laws experienced by observers moving in different, inertial reference frames—that is, with constant velocity. Einstein’s striving toward General Relativity was motivated by his desire to generalize these results to include all observers, including those which are accelerating.

[top]

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