

This week in history: December 14-20

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

25 years ago: Aristide victorious in Haitian elections

The Haitian general elections, organized by the US and Canada, were held on December 16, 1990. Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest who espoused “liberation theology” and in the past described himself as a socialist, won a landslide victory. Hundreds of thousands of Haitian workers and peasants took to the streets to celebrate the victory.

Washington and Ottawa organized the Haitian elections, not to establish democracy, but to shore up Haiti’s decrepit bourgeois state so yet another IMF “recovery program” could be imposed on what was already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Although Washington conceded that Aristide won the election, important sections of Haiti’s ruling class—the supporters of the former Duvalier dictatorship and of his principal rival in the presidential race, Marc Bazin—continued to contest the results days later. Moreover, less than 24 hours after the voting, the army opened fire on a group of Aristide’s supporters, killing a pregnant woman.

After the polls had been closed for well over 48 hours, the Election Commission provided only fragmentary returns, showing how 96,540 of more than two million voters cast their ballots. The returns showed Aristide and his National Front for Democratic Convergence (the FNCD) had won 70 percent of the vote, and Bazin, a former cabinet minister under Duvalier and ex-World Bank official, just 12 percent. Nine other candidates divided the remaining 18 percent.

The overwhelming victory of Father Aristide, a 37-year-old Salesian minister who gained a mass following because of his opposition to the Duvalier dictatorship and his anti-imperialist rhetoric, came as a rude shock to the imperialists. They feared his victory would be interpreted by the masses as a signal to go on the offensive.

An article in the *Washington Post* reflected the thinking in imperialist circles. “A number of prominent American politicians and statesmen visiting Haiti, in some cases for the first time, as election observers, came away from meetings with

Aristide with the impression that he was hostile to Washington, and they privately questioned his commitment to democracy. Some Western diplomats have expressed concerns about his economic program, which they consider incoherent.”

However, the readiness of the US State Department to accept Aristide’s victory showed that the imperialists recognized that the coalition of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties he headed did not constitute a real challenge to their domination. Instead, the government of Father Aristide was to play the role of containing the mass movement, and subordinating it to bourgeois rule, while the imperialists sought to end the revolutionary crisis that rocked Haiti since Duvalier fled the country in 1986.

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50 years ago: Democrats back Vietnam War tax

House Democratic Whip Hale Boggs of Louisiana, returning from a trip to Vietnam, stated that a tax increase would probably be necessary to pay for the cost of the war. The cost of the US military intervention had risen well above the \$2 billion-a-year prediction made by the Johnson administration.

Republican leaders warned that the cost of the war would rise to an annual figure of \$5 billion. Stating that a policy of “guns and butter” was not economically wise, they urged cutbacks in Johnson’s “Great Society” programs to help offset the cost of the war and to prevent a mushrooming of the already substantial budget deficits.

Liberals such as Senator Robert Kennedy of New York, while giving full support to US imperialist aims in Southeast Asia, cautioned that taking money from domestic programs to pay for the war would undermine support for the government to such an extent that “no war would be worth fighting.” They warned that to cut back social spending would be dangerous now that so many expectations had been aroused in the working class.

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. pledged to lobby against any reductions in social spending, warning that black workers who benefited from the Great Society programs might be driven into the arms of the “peace movement” if these programs were cut to pay for the war.

Spokesman for the Johnson administration claimed that both

social spending cuts and a tax increase, which would cut the living standards of the working class and middle class, could be avoided through the increase in government revenues generated by the expansion of the economy. The government policy of expanding credit, however, only helped to fuel inflation which amounted to an indirect tax. This was resisted by the working class in the form of a steadily mounting strike wave for higher wages.

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75 years ago: Labor leaders support US war buildup

On December 16, 1940, American Federation of Labor President William Green gave a radio address in which he pledged to subordinate the AFL trade unions to US imperialism's war buildup in preparation for entry into World War II. Green unashamedly bragged how the AFL bureaucracy had sacrificed the interests of its workers to big business and pledged to defend the "democratic" imperialist powers against the fascist powers by giving up the working class's democratic right to strike.

"Our union leaders in the past few months have helped to settle many industrial disputes by peaceful means around the conference table," Green said. "We commit ourselves to avoid strikes, not only for trivial reasons, but for scarcely any cause. The right to strike is a fundamental and a sacred possession of free labor in free countries ... However, in a great emergency, it becomes our solemn duty to avoid strikes and to prevent interruption of work."

To facilitate the betrayal of the working class to the capitalist class, Green asked that the bureaucracy be appointed to governmental posts in order that they could more directly propagandize and tie the working class to imperialist war. "When the representatives of American workers are admitted into the councils of government and participate in its decisions with a full knowledge of the facts, how much more effectively can they persuade those they represent of the wisdom and necessity of translating defense policies into action," he said.

Philip Murray, president of the rival CIO labor federation, made his own proposal for the formation of corporatist industrial councils "of representatives of management and the labor union, together with one government representative ... to guarantee the production of armaments in needed quantities and on time by achieving the highest possible productive efficiency of American industry through the full and complete cooperation of industry, organized labor and government."

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100 years ago: Pancho Villa suffers major defeats in Mexico civil war

On December 18, 1915, General Francisco (Pancho) Villa, one of the leading figures in the Mexican Revolution that had begun in November 1910, all but conceded defeat, declaring his intention to leave Mexico and go into political exile.

After a war council of his followers in Chihuahua impressed upon him the hopelessness of a continued fight against the forces of General Venustiano Carranza, who was backed by the US government, Villa declared: "It is no use. For five years I have fought the enemies of our great republic, and I have lost. Now I am whipped ... That men surrounding me were self-seeking and traitors to the cause of Mexican liberty I cannot help..."

"Had it not been for the traitorous alliance with the United States, I would have vanquished Carranza, but the great country to the north, which professed friendship to me, is all powerful now that Europe is at war, and I can do nothing but bow my head to superior force."

Villa, who had been born to poor parents in the state of Durango, was known as the "Robin Hood of Chihuahua" for his attacks on wealthy landlords. He had become a leading general in the army of liberal-reformer Francisco Madero, who replaced longstanding dictator Porfirio Díaz in 1911. When Victoriano Huerta, a right-wing military general, overthrew and murdered Madero and installed himself as president, Villa led a revolt in Chihuahua in alliance with Carranza, another prominent figure in the revolution.

After the overthrow of Huerta in July 1914, Villa and Carranza had a falling out, with the former forming an alliance with the peasant leader Emiliano Zapata. Carranza was driven out of Mexico City, and Villa became the nominal leader of Mexico. However, Carranza, who had won the support of the most powerful bourgeois-landlord interests, and the United States, regrouped and inflicted a series of defeats on Villa in the months preceding December 1915. Villa would continue to lead guerrilla operations but his forces had been decisively weakened.

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