This week in history: December 21-27

21 December 2015

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

25 years ago: First world wide web server goes online

On December 25, 1990, Tim Berners-Lee completed the initial implementation of his proposal for a world wide web, building and bringing online the first workstation dedicated to serving the files necessary for a working web. The web pages were served on the open Internet, but at that early stage, only people within CERN laboratories, where Berners-Lee worked, were included in the new web community. And although the computer served pages on the open Internet, initially the software would only run on other NeXt computers.

The Internet, the global linking of computers and computer networks, had existed effectively for over a decade and the first commercial Internet Service Providers (ISPs) had been in existence since 1979. ISPs had been providing access to the Internet, providing file interchange capabilities for email, chat boards, text-based newsgroups and gaming. As the use of personal computers became more widespread, commercial ISPs emerged, such as CompuServe, Prodigy, Delphi, MSN and America Online. Users purchased telephone dial-up modems to access email and the somewhat arcane services that became available.

The software developed by Berners-Lee, which would revolutionize the Internet by creating the three integrated components that made possible the web browser: HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) and URI—to provide a unique address for every page published on the Internet.

Berners-Lee's server was built on a NeXT Computer (the company founded in late 1988 by Steve Jobs after being removed as Apple's CEO) at his CERN office near Geneva, Switzerland. From the beginning, Berners-Lee understood the vast implications that the world wide web project would have in unifying and expanding Internet usage.

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50 years ago: Four million immigrant workers in northern Europe

A report published in the *New York Times* on December 23, 1965, estimated that there were roughly four million immigrant workers then living in the northern European countries of West Germany, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg.

The immigrants came from southern Italy, Spain, North Africa, Greece, Portugal, Turkey and Yugoslavia, drawn north by the much higher wages and booming economies of Europe's industrial core.

It was estimated that 372,000 Italian workers lived in West Germany in 1965, up from 6,500 in 1954. This figure was surpassed only by Switzerland, where approximately 450,000 Italian workers lived. In 1960, there was virtually no Turkish presence in West Germany, but by 1965, there were 120,000 Turks living in the *Bundesrepublik*, making them the fourth largest foreign presence after Italian, Spaniards, and Greeks. The Turkish population was followed in fifth place by Yugoslavs, who numbered 64,000 in West Germany by the end of 1965.

France had even more foreign workers—1.8 million in total. Among these were 600,000 North Africans, who brought with them a further 1 million wives, children, and other dependents. France's immigration policy—based on the conception of birthright citizenship or *jus soli*—was considerably more liberal than West Germany's concept of blood right, *jus sanguinis*. West Germany's policy was more tightly organized, with the Bonn government conducting negotiations with the emigrant country governments, including Josef Tito's Yugoslavia, and

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establishing recruiting and transport offices on foreign soil.

Most immigrants sent remittances back to their homes in southern Europe, a substantial factor in their home economies. To Spain, at least $250 million was sent back per year, in Portugal $100 million, Yugoslavia $60 million, and Turkey $50 million.

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75 years ago: Churchill attacks Mussolini as threat to colonies

On December 23, 1940 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill broadcast a radio address to be aired to "the Italian people." Singling out Mussolini, Churchill blamed "one man only" for leading the Italian people into a war with Great Britain. British forces had recently made rapid gains against the Italian army in North Africa in the struggle for control of Libya and Egypt. This, coupled with the failure of the Italian invasion of Greece, had created an immense crisis in the fascist regime.

Churchill and the British ruling class placed vital importance on the Mediterranean—far more than on the "liberation" of France—as the vital link to the exploitation of the prized colonial possession, India. But the situation remained uncertain. Italy also threatened access to India and southern Africa through its own colonial possessions in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia and Somalia. In addition, the fascist regime in Rome held designs upon the British territories of Malta, strategically located in the Mediterranean Sea between Libya and Italy, and Gibraltar, part of the Spanish coast, at the Atlantic mouth of the Mediterranean. Franco's Spain, not at war with Britain but in the Axis orbit, held Morocco, and Vichy France continued to control Algeria and Tunisia.

Churchill was a belated critic of Mussolini, turning against Italian fascism only when Rome's alliance with Berlin threatened British colonial territories. During the 1920s and 1930s, even as late as 1937, Churchill repeatedly proclaimed admiration for Mussolini's crushing of the Italian labor movement, and explicitly as a bulwark against Bolshevism.

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100 years ago: Lloyd George demands working class "sacrifices"

On December 16, 1915, British Minister of Munitions David Lloyd George addressed a meeting of several thousand trade union officials and shop stewards in Glasgow on the issue of suspending existing trade union rules in the interests of the "war effort." The speech was part of an ongoing campaign of the British government to transform industrial relations following the outbreak of World War I.

In comments that were a response to the growth of anti-war sentiment in the British working class, George declared that he did not think British workers were less patriotic than the French, whose "devotion and self-sacrifice" had sustained two years of the bloodiest warfare in history.

Underscoring the support of the union bureaucracy for the government, and the imperialist war, the Minister's plan to amend trade union regulations had been proposed by a committee which included several trade union leaders.

At the meeting, several workers shouted, "We don't trust the trade union leaders," to which George replied, "Who do you trust?" A number of workers replied, "nobody." George explained that new guns and munitions factories were being established throughout the United Kingdom and that 80,000 skilled workers would be required to staff them. A worker reportedly heckled, "You won't get them."

The Minister threateningly declared, "I cannot return to Parliament and report through the House of Commons to the British Army that skilled workmen won't suspend their rules to save their fellow countrymen's lives on the battlefield."

George's remarks came a day after Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith had demanded a million additional men for the imperialist slaughter, a 25 percent increase in the size of the British Army, amid ongoing discussions about conscription.

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