This week in history: December 28-January 3

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25 years ago: Chinese Communist Party Central Committee meeting exposes crisis

The six-day meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party ended on December 30, 1990. The meeting issued a rambling communiqué that revealed the deep crisis and divisions wracking the Beijing Stalinist bureaucracy as it continued its policy of restoring capitalist property relations and reintegrating China into the imperialist-controlled world market.

The conference, attended by nearly 600 mostly elderly party officials, had been delayed for months because of bitter disputes over economic policy and a growing confrontation between the central government and regional authorities over control of investments, taxation and trade.

The communiqué was designed to present the outlines of the so-called Eighth Five-Year Plan, which was to guide economic policy through 1995. But it only underscored the fact that no agreement has been reached on such a plan and that none would be likely before mid-1991.

The document was filled with such platitudes as "Success or failure in our efforts in the 1990s … will have a direct bearing on the rise or fall of China's socialist system and the future and destiny of the Chinese nations," and calls for the economy to grow "in a sustained, stable and coordinated manner" without "big ups and downs."

It also vowed to continue a struggle against "bourgeois liberalization," the political label applied to all opposition, both of the left and of the right, to the parasitic bureaucracy's continued monopoly over political power in China.

Since the bloodbath the bureaucracy carried out against the rebellious students and workers in June 1989, the bureaucracy had continued the systematic repression of all challenges to this monopoly. On the eve of the Central Committee meeting, it was announced that about a dozen leading figures of the demonstrations that filled Tiananmen Square in May-June of 1989 were formally charged with "counterrevolutionary activity" and at least two had already been placed on trial, facing possible death sentences.

50 years ago: Transit strike in New York City

On January 1, 1966, all bus and subway service in New York City halted as 33,000 members of Transport Workers Union Local 100 walked off the job after rejecting the contract offer by the Transit Authority. Among the union's demands were a 30 percent pay increase and a 32-hour work week.

It was the beginning of the longest transit strike in New York City's history. The action by the TWU defied the anti-labor Condon-Waldin Act, which prohibited strikes by public employees. The wage offer rejected by TWU members was in line with the 3.2 percent annual wage increase formula proposed by President Johnson. As inflation mounted, Johnson continued to harangue leaders of the AFL-CIO on the need to hold back wage demands to prevent a "wage-price spiral."

Newly inaugurated Republican Mayor John Lindsay promised swift action against the union. On January 4 TWU President Michael J. Quill was jailed after defying a court order to end the strike. "The judge can drop dead in his black robes," stated Quill, who two hours later himself collapsed from a heart attack.

The strike created a split in the trade union bureaucracy between those who gave at least lip service to the workers and those who openly opposed the action. Among those forced to publicly mouth support for the strike were New York City Labor Council President Harry Van Arsdale and Raymond R. Corbett, president of the New York state AFL-CIO.

Mayor Lindsay issued a statement urging workers not involved in essential services to stay home rather than attempt to drive to work. Meanwhile employers rejected the mayor's appeal not to dock the pay of workers who were unable to report. One corporate leader called Lindsay's policy misguided, claiming that the mayor was asking business to "subsidize" the strike.

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75 years ago: Voorhis Act takes effect in US

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On January 1, 1941 the Voorhis Anti-Propaganda Act, passed by the US Congress in October 1940, went into effect. The act targeted all parties engaged in political or paramilitary activity, including those affiliated to international organizations, and all organizations "whose purpose or aim" was "the establishment, control, conduct, seizure, or overthrow of a government or subdivision thereof by the use of force, violence, military measures, or threats of any one of the foregoing."

The act was sponsored by liberal Democratic Congressman Jerry Voorhis of California and was the first legislation to emerge from the special investigative committee headed by Democrat Martin Dies, later renamed the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). It required all organizations falling under its definition to register with the attorney general and provide the names and addresses of all its members and financial contributors. The lists would then be published by the government, which would facilitate reprisals by employers and political opponents. The act provided punishment of up to five years imprisonment and a $10,000 fine for all those who failed to comply.

While the act was nominally directed against pro-Nazi organizations like the German-American Bund, like all measures of state repression against the ultra-right, its powers were primarily intended for use against the socialist left, in this case, the Socialist Workers Party, then the American section of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement. In December 1940, a special national convention of the SWP voted to comply with the Voorhis Act under protest. A motion passed by the convention stated:

"Whereas, such regulations could be of service only to the enemies of the workers ... the Socialist Workers Party hereby resolves: (1) To formally discontinue its affiliation to the Fourth International as of this date. (2) To continue its struggle for socialism as a completely autonomous party. (3) While complying with the provisions of the aforesaid legislation, we affirm our opposition to this and any similar measures designed to disrupt the international solidarity of the workers. We assure our co-thinkers in other lands that nothing in this decision of compliance with arbitrary discriminatory legislation alters in any way our ardent sympathy with their own struggles for socialism."

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100 years ago: Report shows American capitalism profiting from world war

Figures released by the US government on January 1, 1916 underscored that American capitalism was becoming the leading economic power in the world, under conditions in which the European powers were being decimated by the carnage of World War I.

The US was transformed from a debtor into a creditor nation for the first time in its history, registering a trade balance of over $1 billion. Imports for 1914 amounted to $138,080,520, while exports were $194,711,740. In 1915, exports had grown to $328,830,281, while imports grew modestly to $148,872,329.

Mills and factories throughout the country were operating at full capacity, providing materials for both sides in the world war. Imports from the belligerent nations in 1914 totaled $55,483,340 while exports stood at $109,371,497. In 1915, exports to the warring countries rose to $199,856,442, while exports from the same countries fell to $47,269,835.

US sea trade was also the largest in its history. American tonnage equaled that of any two other countries combined, with the exception of Great Britain. The increase for shipping tonnage under an American flag was 475,000 tons.

The US was being transformed into the banker of the world, an achievement, declared the *New York Times* "commensurate with her advances in industry, trade and commerce." Large shipments of British gold had been received during 1915, and the US had provided a $500 million loan to the Anglo-French war effort.

In addition to that loan, other forms of credit had been extended to the French government (banking, exports and commercial credit, one-year treasury bonds), to Canada (municipal and government loans), Italy (one-year notes), Germany (short-term notes), as well as to Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Argentina, Panama, Bolivia and Costa Rica, amounting to another $426 million.

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