

This week in history: February 8-14

8 February 2016

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25 years ago: Australian journalists strike over Hawke's pro-war witch-hunt

Some 800 journalists at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) carried out a nationwide strike February 13, 1991 against ABC management's decision to launch a state witch-hunt over the network's coverage of the Gulf War.

An internal inquiry into the ABC coverage was announced in the wake of a jingoistic attack by Prime Minister Bob Hawke on ABC's reporting and commentary, which he denounced as "disgraceful" and pro-Iraq. Defense Minister Robert Ray joined in the attack, threatening that the Labour government would cut funding to the ABC, whose budget was about to be reviewed.

In particular, Hawke condemned an interview with Robert Springborg, an academic from Macquarie University who opposed the deployment of Australian warships in the Persian Gulf. Hawke demanded that ABC "label" the personal views of its commentators. ABC current affairs announcers Geraldine Doogue and Andrew Ollie were also condemned for "bias" and "aggressive demeanor."

The ABC inquiry amounted to a crude witch-hunt aimed at stamping out even the tamest criticism of the imperialist war in the Persian Gulf and at ensuring that ABC functioned as nothing more than a propaganda agency controlled by US and Australian military censors.

The journalists angrily voted to "reject the prime minister's non-specific and unsubstantiated criticism of the ABC" and to "condemn the ABC management's ad hoc inquiry into coverage of the Gulf hostilities."

Toeing the government's line, ABC management began censoring its coverage of antiwar demonstrations. A report on ABC radio February 9 on an upcoming antiwar rally in Sydney was cut from the morning news after New South Wales news editor Lloyd Tonkin intervened.

Immediately after Hawke's attack on the ABC, the director of radio, Malcolm Long, issued an internal memo to all staff which was leaked to the major media. It read in part: "Care

must be taken so that items about planned marches or demonstrations will not be construed as an invitation for listeners to support or attend these events."

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50 years ago: South Korean soldiers massacre Vietnamese

Beginning on February 12 and ending on March 17, 1966, South Korean soldiers supporting the US war against Vietnam carried out a series of brutal massacres of unarmed civilians in the Binh An villages (today Tay Vinh village) in the Tay Son District of Binh D?nh Province in South Vietnam. The South Korean "Capital Division" murdered some 1,200 villagers in the region in just over a month.

The anti-communist US puppet regime of General Park Chung-hee (father of the current president of South Korea) deployed in Vietnam an average of 30,000 soldiers a year during the ten years 1964-1973, the most of any government in the American coalition apart from the US itself. They were also, next to the US, responsible for some of the war's most heinous crimes, which frequently included the rape and dismemberment of young women.

The following is a partial list of South Korean atrocities in Vietnam: On October 9, 1966, members of the South Korean military slaughtered 448 villagers in Dien Nien Temple and Phuoc Binh hamlet. The same day in Binh Tai of Quang Ngai province, they killed 168. From December 3 through December 6, 1966, South Koreans butchered 502 unarmed civilians in Binh Hoa. On February 12, 1968, South Korean soldiers killed some 70 villagers in Phong Nh? and Phong Nhat, in Quang Nam Province. On October 19, 1966, Korean troops, together with American operatives, killed 112 civilians in Dien Nien hamlet. From November 9-12, 1966, Koreans killed 68 at Phuoc Bin, almost all of them women and children. On March 22, 1967, Koreans and two Americans rounded up the 88 villagers of Nhon Hoa. Only two survived. Among the dead were 45 children, 30 women, and 11 elderly men.

Historian Nick Turse described one such massacre: "On February 26, 1968, Korean troops entered Ha My... and herded residents into several locations. Some of the villagers were expecting food and candies to be handed out, but what came

next was a slaughter that went on for two hours, leaving 135 people dead—almost all of them women, teenage girls, elderly men, toddlers, and infants. Only three of those slain were military-aged men. Later in the day, [US] bulldozers arrived to scrape the entire area flat.”

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75 years ago: GPU murders defector Walter Krivitsky

On February 10, 1941 Walter Krivitsky, the former Red Army chief of intelligence for Western Europe who defected in 1937, was murdered in a Washington, DC hotel by Stalinist GPU agents. He was found with the left side of his head blown out by a .38 caliber bullet.

The killers arranged the scene of the crime to portray the incident as a suicide. Three “suicide” letters forged by the GPU, the Soviet secret police, were found in the room.

Washington police closed the case by declaring it a suicide. In translating the letter to Krivitsky’s wife, police purposely omitted a vital section which linked his assassination to Stalin and the GPU. For the police to continue the investigation would have cut across efforts by the Roosevelt administration to move Stalin away from his pact with Germany and Japan and into collaboration with the Allies.

Mrs. Krivitsky reported that the same GPU agent who murdered the defector Ignace Reiss had been seen in New York and was assigned to eliminate Krivitsky. Reiss, a former associate of Krivitsky, was machine-gunned by the GPU in Switzerland in 1937 in retaliation for having broken with Stalin and declaring his support for Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International.

Krivitsky had been a loyal Stalinist. But the Moscow Trials, and then the GPU assassination of Reiss, led him to fear that he himself might be liquidated. He defected to France in 1937 and came to the United States in 1939.

His memoirs, published in the *Saturday Evening Post* and detailing the inner workings of the GPU, caused a crisis in the Communist Party and among its supporters.

Krivitsky had told the press that Stalinist agent Ramon Mercader carried out the assassination of Leon Trotsky in August 1940 and that he himself was “next on the list.”

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100 years ago: Conflicts in Wilson administration over World War I

On February 10, 1916, Lindley Garrison, Secretary of War in

the United States, resigned from office in protest over President Woodrow Wilson not moving more rapidly toward entry into World War I.

In 1915 the Preparedness Movement had been created by leading Republicans and Democrats to argue that the US should hasten to increase both its land and naval military capabilities. Led by prominent bankers, industrialists, military figures, and politicians including Theodore Roosevelt, the Preparedness Movement proposed that each year 600,000 18 year-olds should be conscripted into six months of training and compulsory membership of a reserve army thereafter. It fostered the development of training camps through which 40,000 young men, mostly from the upper middle class and ruling class, were trained over the period of two years. Many of these young men were to become the officers of the armed forces that were eventually sent to Europe.

In his role as Secretary of War, Garrison adopted many of the proposals of the Preparedness Movement, including its push for a larger army. He put forward a proposal for a “Continental Army” which would include a standing army of 140,000 and a national reserve force of 400,000. Garrison’s plan unleashed a fierce battle within the ruling elite between those who argued that Garrison’s plan went too far and others who argued that it did not go far enough.

President Wilson initially gave tepid support for Garrison’s plans, but under mounting popular opposition to war, and facing a reelection battle in November 1916, Wilson was convinced to shelve Garrison’s plan, effectively postponing any US entry into the world war until the next year. He instead backed an alternative plan that called for an increased role for the National Guard, a largely state-based and operated force. Garrison submitted his resignation and Wilson appointed as secretary of war Newton Baker, an outspoken opponent of preparedness.

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