

This week in history: September 26-October 2

26 September 2016

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25 years ago: Military coup in Haiti

The Haitian military carried out a bloody military coup on September 30, 1991. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was seized from his home after soldiers rampaged through the capital city, Port-au-Prince. Hundreds, if not thousands, were shot down by the military. Heavily armed patrols fired indiscriminately into working class neighborhoods like Cité Soleil, while the assassins of the new military junta systematically hunted down suspected opponents of the army.

Moreover, indications grew that the US would seize upon the coup as the pretext for mounting a military intervention in Haiti. US Marines were positioned in the Caribbean with the supposed mission of “protecting American lives.”

The *Washington Post* in its October 2 editorial spelled out the thinking of the US ruling class: “A peacekeeping force is going to be required. That is the first item that the OAS needs to consider. Many OAS countries have military forces to do the job ... Haiti needs a period of stability in which its desperate and frightened people can learn something about the government they have adopted ... Without an effective force in the country to preserve order, Haiti’s democracy will be lost.”

In the days since the coup, mass demonstrations by Haitian immigrants in several North American cities gave powerful expression to the determination of the masses of Haiti not to be thrust back to the type of savage dictatorship which ruled during the 30-year Duvalier dynasty.

After taking office, Aristide combined demagogic rhetoric about rooting out the Tonton Macoutes with an economic policy dictated by the International Monetary Fund and the US Embassy. The working class and rural poor faced deepening poverty in the eight months of his regime, while the IMF, the multinationals and US Ambassador Alvin Adams praised him for his “moderation.”

At the same time, the Aristide regime worked deliberately to disarm the masses. Gen. Raoul Cedras, the leader of the September coup, was himself appointed by Aristide as the head of the supposedly “democratized” army. All of Aristide’s talk about a “national reconciliation” between the classes and of a

“marriage” between the army and the people served only to open the door to lull the masses to sleep as the military prepared its counterrevolutionary violence.

It was reported later that CIA agents were with Cedras at army headquarters during the coup.

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50 year ago: Klansman acquitted of murder of Viola Liuzzo

On September 27, 1966, a state court in Alabama acquitted Eugene Thomas, one of four Ku Klux Klan members who murdered Detroit civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo on March 25, 1965, after just one day of trial. Liuzzo was shot dead by four Klansmen as she drove a car carrying civil rights activists to the Montgomery airport after the famed Selma to Montgomery marches that fought for equal voting rights for blacks in Alabama.

The jury, which included eight black members and four whites, was not allowed to hear testimony from a paid FBI informant who participated in the murder. State Attorney General Richmond Flowers, who handled the prosecution, determined that the testimony of the informant, Gary Thomas Rowe, would “hurt the state’s case more than help it,” according to one media account. The defense, meanwhile, produced witnesses who falsely claimed Thomas had been with them at a bar at the time of the killing.

Collie Leroy Wilkins, the shooter, had already been acquitted. A third assailant, William Orville Eaton, died of a heart attack before going to trial. Rowe, the FBI informant, was placed in the Witness Relocation Program. Wilkins and Thomas were in the process of appealing a conviction on federal conspiracy charges for which they would ultimately serve 10-year sentences. But no one was ever convicted for the actual murder of Liuzzo.

The FBI protected its informant, Rowe, who later admitted to participating in Liuzzo’s murder and other violent provocations, including the notorious 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four young African-American girls. At the same time, on the instructions of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, the bureau conducted a smear campaign against Liuzzo, wife of a Teamsters union official, alleging that she had been on drugs

and had engaged in extramarital sex shortly before her killing, and that her husband Jim was involved in organized crime.

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75 years ago: Stalin appeals for American and British aid

On September 28, 1941 representatives of American and British imperialism began three days of meetings in the Kremlin with Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin to discuss the establishment of avenues for military aid to the USSR in its desperate battle to halt Hitler's advancing armies.

The Red Army had suffered major defeats at the hands of the German *b litzkrieg*. Leningrad was encircled, Ukraine was occupied and German armies had made breakthroughs against Soviet units in their drive to capture Moscow. In the fighting, the Red Army had lost 22,000 guns, 18,000 tanks and 14,000 aircraft, and suffered 2.5 million casualties, along with massive civilian and infrastructure losses.

Stalin dropped the anti-imperialist rhetoric against Britain, France and the United States employed during the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact and announced a popular front alliance with "democratic" imperialism:

"Our war for the freedom of our Motherland will merge with the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for their independence, for their democratic liberties. It will be a united front of the peoples who stand for freedom and against enslavement and threats of enslavement by Hitler's Fascist armies."

Stalin instructed the communist parties outside of the Soviet Union, which had only recently been engaged in heated rhetoric against involvement in the war against Nazi Germany, to now subordinate their activities to the western imperialist powers. On September 26, Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky met in London with Charles de Gaulle and the Council for the Defense of the French Empire, and pledged the unification of the French CP-led resistance movement to Nazi occupation with de Gaulle's supporters. Maisky gave assurances that after the defeat of Germany, Stalin would guarantee French capitalism against any danger of revolution.

In Yugoslavia, where the guerrillas under the leadership of the Communist Party occupied two-thirds of the countryside after inflicting major defeats against German occupying forces, Stalin ordered Communist Party leader Tito to establish a wartime popular front between his partisans with the nationalist and anticommunist Cetniks. By November, the Cetniks would launch joint attacks with the Nazis against partisan positions.

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100 years ago: The Battle of Thiepval Ridge at the Somme

On September 26, 1916, British forces launched an attack on Thiepval Ridge as part of their new offensive in the final stages of the Battle of the Somme, one of the bloodiest engagements of World War I. The assault was the first large offensive conducted by the Reserve Army, an amalgam of divisions of tanks, artillery and infantry forces from Canada, Australia, and Britain. It was part of a sequential offensive that involved French and British forces.

At this stage in the Battle of the Somme, the British forces were experimenting with new techniques in gas warfare, machine gun bombardment, and tank-infantry cooperation. During the preliminary bombardment on Thiepval Ridge, British forces fired 60,000 field artillery and 45,000 heavy artillery rounds and 500 gas shells into German defensive positions.

Airplanes were also being used extensively in reconnaissance and offensive roles. As well as observing German positions and movements from the air, the British air squadrons supporting the offensive on Thiepval Ridge bombed strategic German targets and attacked the airfield that was being used to launch German planes.

A lack of reserves and reinforcements forced the German troops to retreat. British forces shifted their attack from Thiepval Ridge, pushing forward and forcing German troops to retreat to Ancre Heights.

It is not certain how many casualties occurred at Thiepval Ridge. However, September was the month during the Battle of the Somme in which Germany suffered its largest number of casualties, with approximately 135,000 injured or dead. The 1st Canadian Division, part of the Reserve Army and participants in the Battle of Thiepval, reported 6,234 casualties during September. The 11th Division suffered 3,615 casualties, including over 1,000 dead or missing, between the September 26 and 30.

By the end of the five-month Battle of the Somme, which changed nothing strategically, over 1 million men were lost dead, wounded, or captured: Allied forces had suffered over 600,000 casualties, while Germany lost as many as 500,000.

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