

# This week in history: November 7-13

7 November 2016

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## 25 years ago: Santa Cruz Cemetery massacre in East Timor

On November 12, 1991, 271 protesters were killed and 278 wounded when Indonesian army units opened fire on an unarmed funeral procession in Dili, the capital of East Timor, some 400 miles northwest of the Australian port city of Darwin.

With the 1975 collapse of the Caetano dictatorship in Portugal, the country gave up its colony on the eastern half of the island of Timor, after ruling it for three centuries. The military dictatorship in Jakarta, armed and with the backing of the US, annexed East Timor in 1976, brutally suppressing the Timorese people, killing as many as 230,000. Since then, the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor, known by its Portuguese acronym Fretilin, waged an armed struggle against the Suharto government, despite heavy odds.

According to Jose Ramos Horta, a spokesman for Fretilin, the Timorese had formed a religious procession from a church to the Santa Cruz Cemetery early in the morning of November 12, in honor of Sebastiao Gomes, who was killed by Indonesian security forces on October 28.

Two US journalists on assignment, Allan Nairn for *New Yorker* magazine and Amy Goodman of Pacifica-WBAI Radio New York, were severely beaten in the army attack. The two were hospitalized in Guam, reporting that the funeral procession had swelled to up to 5,000 people and had been tense but peaceful before troops began breaking it up by beating and shooting.

Nairn graphically described the shooting: “The soldiers marched straight up to us. They never broke their stride. We were enveloped by the troops, and when they got a few yards past us, within a dozen yards of the Timorese, they raised their rifles to their shoulders all at once, and they opened fire. The Timorese, in an instant, were down, just torn apart by the bullets. The street was covered with bodies,

covered with blood ... The soldiers did not stop. They just kept on shooting until no one was left standing.”

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## 50 year ago: CPSU condemns Mao’s “Cultural Revolution”

On November 7, 1966, at celebrations commemorating the 49th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a sharp statement condemning the “cultural revolution” being led by Mao Zedong in China. The denunciation by the Moscow Stalinists sparked a walkout by the Chinese representatives.

“What is going on now in China under the name of the so-called ‘cultural revolution’ has nothing to do with the revolution or with culture, with Marxism or with the policies of socialism,” the statement declared. “The Chinese leadership is promoting a political struggle against our country and the other socialist countries, intensifying its activities in the international Communist movement.”

The feud between the Soviet and Chinese Stalinist communist parties—which was based not on political doctrine but on the rival national interests of two competing bureaucracies—was the central topic of the report issued by the Soviet Politburo on the eve of the anniversary. During the same speech, given by Arvid Y. Pelshe, a participant in the Russian Revolution and one of the few survivors of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, the Soviet bureaucracy called for closer ties to the imperialist powers, citing favorably the recent development of improved relations with the regime of Charles de Gaulle in France. Pelshe called for the development of similar collaboration with Japan, Italy and Canada.

The bureaucracy gave only a perfunctory acknowledgment of the ongoing US imperialist aggression in Vietnam in its political attack, cynically accusing China of undermining the unity of “socialist countries supporting the Vietnamese people.”

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## 75 years ago: Stalin ends his public absence since Nazi invasion

On November 7, 1941, Stalin took the occasion of the anniversary of the October Revolution to end his months-long public absence from Soviet life, taking the military salute at Lenin's now-empty mausoleum in Moscow. Massed ranks of Red Army reinforcements marched through snowy Red Square and straight off to the front line of Moscow's defenses. Stalin ensured that the event was filmed for domestic and foreign newsreels.

Directly responsible for the initial sweeping defeats and the catastrophic losses of men and machinery suffered by the Red Army, for which the Stalin-Hitler pact had paved the way, Stalin largely abdicated his political responsibilities and hid himself away from late June till early November, only resurfacing when the Nazi advance upon Moscow slowed due to the onset of the Russian winter. After Stalin's death the Soviet journalist Ilya Ehrenberg noted, "I have looked through the files of old newspapers from July to November 1941, Stalin's name was hardly ever mentioned."

The following day, during the late afternoon of November 8, Hitler gave his traditional speech to the Nazi old guard at the Munich Löwenbräukeller on the anniversary of the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. Describing the very substantial losses of the Red Army Hitler declared "no army in the world, including the Russian, recovers from those." Hitler continued in this triumphant vein: "Never before has a giant empire been smashed and struck down in a shorter time than Soviet Russia."

Neither Hitler nor his general staff had a clear understanding of the immense powers of resistance of the Red Army and the Soviet population, or of the productive capacity of Soviet socialized military production, despite the suffocating distortions of Stalinist rule. These were soon to be reflected in the stubborn defense of Moscow, the capital of the first workers state, under conditions where temperatures in the countryside surrounding the city soon fell to as low as minus 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

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## 100 years ago: Leon Trotsky arrested in Spain

On November 9, 1916, exiled Russian revolutionary leader

Leon Trotsky was arrested in Madrid, Spain, apparently as a result of information provided by the French police. Weeks earlier, he had been deported from France.

After his arrest, the Madrid police chief informed Trotsky, in the latter's words, "that I was invited to leave Spain at once, and until I left my freedom would be subjected to 'certain limitations.'"

"Your ideas are too advanced for Spain," he told me candidly," Trotsky wrote. Three days later, Trotsky was sent by train to Cadiz and ordered to board a ship to Havana. He organized a protest, and Spanish authorities were compelled to allow him to remain until a boat for New York City arrived. A month later, Trotsky boarded a ship bound for the United States.

Trotsky was living in Vienna at the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, when Austrian socialists advised him to leave the country since Russia and Austria-Hungary were now belligerents. He moved to Zurich, but, stifled by the political atmosphere in Switzerland, he accepted an offer to serve as the war correspondent for a Russian paper and departed for France.

In France, Trotsky edited the Russian-language daily newspapers *Golos*, and, later, *Nashe Slovo*. He carried out consistent political work, establishing relations with many of the future leaders of the French Communist Party. On September 15, 1916, following pressure from the autocratic Tsarist regime in Russia, Trotsky was ordered to leave France.

This odyssey epitomized the fate of the revolutionary leaders who had opposed the betrayal of socialist internationalism by the Second International, the majority of whose sections backed the predatory war efforts of their "own" government. As Trotsky was under arrest in Spain, German revolutionaries, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were held in German prisons for their opposition to the war, while Lenin was waging a political battle within the left wing of the Swiss social democracy in Zurich.

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