

This week in history: February 6-12

6 February 2017

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

25 years ago: US send refugees back to death squads in Haiti

The US Supreme Court refused on February 10, 1992 to halt the forced return of Haitian refugees to their homeland, thus giving the green light to the Bush administration's brutal campaign. The court gave the government until Friday to respond to an emergency request, filed by lawyers for the refugees and aimed at halting all forced returns.

The forced repatriations were carried out in the face of incontrovertible evidence, including dozens of reports of beatings, imprisonment and murder, of systematic persecution directed against those who had been sent back. On Monday, February 10, 510 refugees were sent back from the Guantanamo Bay US naval base in Cuba. Another 500 were to be returned Wednesday, with further repatriations Thursday and Friday.

The State Department insists that the refugees are "economic," not "political," and therefore undeserving of asylum in the US. An immigration expert with the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Arthur C. Helton, told the press, "On the one hand, you have the INS receiving credible reports of death, torture and imprisonment, and on the other hand, you have the State Department spokeswoman claiming there has never been any evidence of mistreatment ..."

In Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, the violence and terror that had already claimed at least 1,500 lives continued. A mass celebrating the one-year anniversary of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's inauguration was disrupted by police gunfire February 7.

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50 years ago: Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping removed from power in China

On February 6, 1967, Japanese media reported that the President of the People's Republic of China, Liu Shaoqi, and the secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Deng Xiaoping, had been removed from their positions, as the crisis of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy deepened—and its rivalry with the Soviet bureaucracy escalated.

Targets of CCP Chairman Mao Zedong's "Cultural Revolution," Liu and Deng, and their faction of the bureaucracy, had been under political attacks for months as "capitalist roaders," while Mao and his allies consolidated their rule. Liu and Deng had been under effective house arrest since the summer. However, Japanese reports speculated that they still enjoyed considerable backing in the CCP and "their supporters retain control of wide areas of China," thus posing the threat of civil war.

A third faction of the bureaucracy, led by Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, solidarized itself with Mao's purges, but began this week to openly criticize the "excesses" of the 10 million-strong Red Guards, whose rampage through the country, in the name of the Mao cult, had led to public humiliations and beatings of prominent CCP officials and destruction of China's historic patrimony. Deepening the crisis, the peasantry, who had suffered millions of deaths during Mao's catastrophic "Great Leap Forward," began to hoard grain. Mao lieutenant Lin Biao strengthened his control over the military, purging Deng loyalists, asserting military control over Beijing and suspending all non-military domestic air traffic. On February 8, it was reported that Red Guards had been ordered to return to their homes.

Simultaneously, the rift between the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracies erupted to the surface. Red Guards continued a weeklong siege of the Soviet embassy in Beijing. In retaliation, protesters in Moscow on February 7 barged into the Chinese embassy. On February 10, speaking on BBC in London, Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin criticized Mao's "dictatorial regime" and expressed support for his bureaucratic rivals. On February 11, Beijing blocked Soviet advisers from traveling through China, en route to Vietnam, without visas. *Izvestia* accused China not only of obstructing the work of Russian diplomats, but of blocking the delivery of military support to North Vietnam, much of which was shipped via rail, or flown directly over Chinese airspace. Mao accused Moscow of mobilizing soldiers along the long Soviet border with Xinxiang province, claiming that "international imperialists and revisionists [are] preparing large-scaled anti-Chinese activities, taking advantage of our Cultural Revolution."

For all of Mao's revolutionary rhetoric, sections of the US ruling class began to realize that Beijing could be used against the Soviet Union and Vietnam, exploiting the nationalist rivalries among the competing bureaucracies. Speaking at a Public Policy Institute conference on China at the University of Chicago on February 8, Senator Robert Kennedy criticized the Johnson administration for its "wildly exaggerated" presentation of the supposed Chinese threat. "The record of Chinese efforts to export revolution is one of constant and dramatic failure," Kennedy said. He added that the

influence of socialism in Vietnam was “basically a native growth” and that the North Korean regime, in spite of China’s intervention in its civil war, “strongly declared their independence if not hostility” toward Beijing.

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75 years ago: Yugoslav Partisans retake Montenegro

On February 10, 1942, Partisan units led by the Yugoslav Communist Party succeeded in recapturing major parts of Montenegro from Italian occupying forces and their Montenegrin collaborators, among them, the bourgeois-nationalist Chetniks.

In the summer of 1941, the Chetniks had initially gone along with the uprising in Montenegro against Italian annexation. But the revolutionary implications of the explosion of the Montenegrin masses, under the leadership of the Yugoslavian Communist Party, led the Chetniks to break with the Partisans and join forces with the Italian occupation forces to suppress the uprising.

As the Partisans fought throughout December 1941 and January 1942 to retake their positions, a bloody civil war developed between them and the Chetniks. The Montenegrin CP ruthlessly dealt with the Chetniks and established regimes that they called “soviets,” declaring communist aims in the areas they controlled. Later in February, a conference of the Montenegrin section of the Communist Party and its adherents among the peasants and workers in the Partisan movement was held which proclaimed Montenegro a part of the Soviet Union.

But the actions of the Montenegrin Partisans came into conflict with the line laid down by Stalin to the Yugoslav Communist Party for a popular front with the Chetniks: “Remember that at present it is a question of liberation from Fascist domination and not a question of Socialist revolution.” Stalin only wanted to use the resistance of the Yugoslav masses to divert German military forces from the eastern front facing the USSR. But failure on his part to suppress the revolutionary strivings of the masses threatened to disrupt his alliance with British and US imperialism, which supported the Chetniks.

Josip Broz Tito, head of the Yugoslav CP, denounced the Montenegrin Partisans for their “harsh, sectarian and incorrect attitude” and dispatched one of his key lieutenants, Milovan

Djilas, to Montenegro to disband the “soviets.”

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100 years ago: Tsarist autocracy steps up repression in Russia

This week in February 1917, members of the Workers Group of the War Industries Committee of St. Petersburg were arrested by the Tsarist government of Russia. The move was part of a wave of repression by the autocratic regime, amid mass opposition to Russian participation in the war effort, and a wave of political

strikes and demonstrations, including one on January 22, attended by as many as 150,000 workers in St. Petersburg.

In 1915 Russia’s leading capitalists had formed the War Industries Committees to promote Russia’s intervention in World War I. “Workers groups” were formed within these committees in a bid to promote patriotism and increase productivity.

In order to give the workers groups legitimacy, meetings of factory delegates were called across the country. In October 1915, a meeting called to prepare the founding of the Petrograd workers group voted 95-81 in favor of a Bolshevik resolution calling for a boycott of election to the group and a revolutionary struggle against the war. The national-opportunist Mensheviks, led by Gvozdev, colluded with the capitalists who had founded the War Industries Committee, holding a meeting without Bolsheviks in attendance and securing control of the Petrograd workers group.

Lenin, who opposed giving any legitimacy to the Committee, nevertheless pointed to the significance of the political disputes that had emerged, writing, “The outstanding fact in the life of Russian Social-Democracy today is the elections of St. Petersburg workers to the war industries committees. For the first time during the war, these elections have drawn masses of the proletarians into a discussion and solution of basic problems of present-day politics; they have revealed the real picture of the state of affairs within Social Democracy as a mass party.

“What has been revealed is that there are two currents and only two: one is revolutionary and internationalist, genuinely proletarian, organized by our Party, and against defense of the fatherland; the other is the ‘defense’ or social-chauvinist current ... this bloc being backed by the entire bourgeois press and all the Black Hundreds in Russia, which proves the bourgeois and non-proletarian essence of the bloc’s policy.”

In January 1917, the Workers Groups launched a campaign for a new “government to save the country.” In a letter to workers they proposed to demand that the Duma eliminate the autocracy and create a provisional government supported by the people. They issued a call for a march on the day the Duma convened, “in complete order, not disturbing the peace of the inhabitants, not antagonizing anyone, not offending anyone, and not inciting the police to violence.” The Menshevik line coincided with concerns within the bourgeoisie that the Tsarist regime was on the verge of collapse amid an unprecedented crisis of the Russian war effort.

The Bolsheviks opposed the promotion of illusions in the bourgeoisie by the Mensheviks, and passed resolutions in a number of meetings warning that the proposal was weakening the independent initiative of the working class. The Menshevik appeal did not win mass support, but the Tsarist regime moved against its authors in a symptom of the intense fear of the regime toward any, even politically limited, opposition.

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