

This week in history: March 5-11

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25 years ago: Yeltsin survives impeachment vote

On March 10, 1993, Russian President Boris Yeltsin survived an impeachment vote in the Congress of People's Deputies. The vote in favor of impeachment was 418 in favor to 341 against. However, this was short by 99 votes of the absolute majority required in the 1,033-member congress.

The threat of Yeltsin imposing a military dictatorship hung over the vote. A week earlier, on March 3, he had held a well-publicized meeting with top military officers from the Russian Army, Navy, and Air Force, which Congress Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov blasted as “a direct attempt to involve the army, the Interior Ministry, the security forces into the political processes.” Yeltsin emerged from those talks with bluster about taking the “final option” if his opponents in the legislature continued to challenge his control of state institutions like the central bank.

There was no principled difference between the Russian Congress and Yeltsin. Both were committed to continuing the policy of capitalist restoration which had unleashed an economic holocaust in Russia in 1992, cutting industrial production by 20 percent and living standards by 50 percent in a single year. Yeltsin, however, spoke most directly for the nascent capitalist class, comprised of sections of the former bureaucracy, outright mafia elements, and layers of the petty bourgeoisie, who were profiting from wholesale looting of the planned economy.

Yeltsin also sought to represent the mercenary interests of the imperialist powers in Russia, especially the United States. In Yeltsin's dispute with the legislature, he was strongly backed by President Bill Clinton, who, according to *New York Times* writer Thomas Friedman was

preparing “innovative” forms of direct aid to prop up the corrupt Russian president.

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50 years ago: Anti-Stalinist protests begin in Poland

This week in 1968 a growing wave of protests by students and working class youth rocked the Stalinist regime of the Polish People's Republic.

On March 8, a demonstration by Polish students that had been organized by the left-wing group Komandosi at Warsaw University, in opposition to Stalinist censorship of art, was violently suppressed by the paramilitary ORM and ZOMO riot squads. The next day, a similar protest by students of the Warsaw University of Technology ended in violent clashes with the police.

Despite the violent crackdown, protests took place in virtually every major Polish city in the following days, including Cracow, Bia?ystok, Katowice, Kielce, Opole, Wroc?aw and Gdansk. The protests, which were partly inspired by growing demonstrations in neighboring Czechoslovakia, spread to involve high school students and, above all, working class youth.

The Stalinist regime of W?adys?aw Gomu?ka feared that the movement might spread to broader sections of the working class. It responded with a violent crackdown and anti-Semitism. Between March 7 and 6 April, some 2,750 people were arrested. On March 11, the regime launched a vicious anti-Semitic campaign, using chauvinistic and anti-Jewish stereotypes to slander the leaders of the student movement. Many of them would eventually either leave the country or play a leading role in the Solidarity movement of the late 1970s and 1980s.

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75 years ago: US government censors Trotskyist newspaper

On March 7, 1943, the Postmaster General of the United States revoked the second class mailing rights of the *Militant*, then the newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party, the American section of the world Trotskyist movement. The American Civil Liberties Union labelled the move “the gravest threat to freedom of the press that has thus far arisen” in the course of US intervention in World War II.

An attorney for the Post Office submitted to a government-appointed board a total of 99 “objectional” excerpts from the *Militant* that criticized the policies of the administration of Franklin Roosevelt. He cited the paper’s advocacy of a workers’ and farmers’ government as the only solution to the problems of war, fascism, unemployment and racial discrimination.

The Post Office’s attorney charged, “The *Militant* ... regards the war as a struggle in the interest of the capitalistic classes of the world and not as a war for democracy. It declares that this war is benefiting the capitalists and businessmen It continuously attacks the government and accuses them of operating in the interests of the businessmen. .. We are not concerned here with questions of truth or falsity. It does not make any difference if everything the *Militant* said is true Look at the horrible picture which the *Militant* paints of the war and the army.”

Post Office interference with the *Militant* began in November 1942 at the time of the US invasion of North Africa. Issues of the *Militant* were held while the government examined their contents. Three November issues and one December issue of the paper were ordered to be destroyed.

The attack on the *Militant* represented a continuation of the government assault that began with the 1941 Smith Act trial that convicted 18 members of the Socialist Workers Party for their revolutionary opposition to World War II.

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100 years ago: British force begins imperialist occupation of Soviet Russia

On March 6, British Royal Marines landed in Murmansk, in the far north of Soviet Russia, marking the beginning of the imperialist intervention in the Russian Civil War, a bloody intervention that would draw in all of the major imperialist powers in an unsuccessful bid to crush the Russian Revolution, including France, the United States, and Japan.

Ironically, the British apparently landed at the invitation of the local Murmansk Soviet, which feared that White (counter-revolutionary) soldiers in nearby Finland might attack. Finland, whose independence had been recognized by the young Bolshevik government, was in the midst of a civil war in which Whites were slaughtering Red Guards and militant workers, while being backed by Germany, which was itself preparing an invasion.

Simultaneously, from March 6-8, the 7th Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was convened in extraordinary session in Petrograd’s Tauride Palace. It was the last national party meeting in Petrograd. Threatened by the various imperialist powers, the Bolsheviks were preparing to move the Soviet government to Moscow.

The Congress ratified the brutal Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, forced on the Soviet government and reluctantly backed by Lenin, over the objections of an ultra-left wing led by Nikolai Bukharin, who demanded that the war against Germany be recommenced.

It also voted to change the name of the RSDLP to the “Communist Party,” in order to distinguish it from the treacherous Social Democratic parties of the Second International, which had almost all supported “their” respective nations in World War I. The Congress elected a 15-member Central Committee, with Lenin and Trotsky receiving the most votes.

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