

This week in history: April 9-15

9 April 2018

25 years ago: Riots erupt after ANC leader assassinated in South Africa

On April 10, 1993, Chris Hani, head of the Communist Party of South Africa and the Umkhonto we Sizwe militia arm of the African National Congress, was gunned down outside his home in the racially-mixed suburb of Boksburg.

Hani's assassin, Janusz Walu?, was a far-right Polish immigrant. Walu? was armed and directed by Clive Derby-Lewis, a former member of parliament and a leading figure in the virulently racist and anti-communist Conservative Party. In addition to the Hani assassination, Walu? and Derby-Lewis allegedly had planned to assassinate Nelson Mandela. They were both convicted and sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment when South African banned capital punishment in 1995.

At the time of the assassination, Mandela and the African National Congress were being promoted by sections of the South African ruling class, as well as the major imperialist powers, to protect the affairs of global capitalism in the strategically situated and mineral-rich country. The Hani killing provided an initial test of this role.

With riots and mass protests erupting in all of the major cities—and police opening fire on crowds of alleged “looters”—Mandela issued a statement appealing for calm. “Across the country,” the *New York Times* reported, “crowd control marshals deployed by the African National Congress struggled to hold angry youth in check, and often failed... [F]or the congress it was an embarrassing display of the gap between the moderate, compromise-minded leadership and the unruly, disaffected young men of the townships.”

At a mass meeting in Soweto, according to the *Times*, Mandela “labored to explain the need for discipline and non-violence” to an over-packed hall of young workers who taunted and jeered him. “He doesn’t want to fight,” an unemployed worker said of Mandela. “We want to fight.”

50 years ago: Student demonstrations, street fighting, in West Germany after failed assassination

On April 11, 1968, the near-killing of West German radical student youth leader Alfred Willi Rudolf “Rudi” Dutschke, shot in the head by an anti-communist gunman, Josef Bachmann, caused an eruption of demonstrations and fighting across West Germany as students took to the streets to block delivery of the newspapers of publisher Axel Springer, whose right-wing publications they held responsible for the attack.

Bachmann, who was captured after exchanging fire with police, told investigators that he was inspired by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in America. Bachmann kept a painting of Hitler in his room. It was West Germany’s first attempted political assassination since World War II.

Dutschke, whose radicalism was heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School, barely survived the shooting, which took place in broad daylight on Berlin’s busiest shopping street, the Kurfürstendamm. Many years later, in 1979, Dutschke died of complications from the injuries suffered from the three bullets that penetrated his head. Bachmann killed himself in prison in 1970.

In the aftermath of the shooting demonstrations and riots swept West Berlin and West Germany. Immediately a crowd estimated at about 2,000 descended on the Axel Springer publishing house in Berlin, smashing windows and setting cars on fire. They were dispersed by police water cannons. Attempts to use water cannon to break up a demonstration near the city hall took many hours. Battling police, students chanted “Ho Chi Minh” and “Rudi Dutschke.” Afterwards, the American radio station in Berlin, RIAS, was attacked.

In the following days, tens of thousands of students throughout Germany took to the streets in West Berlin, Hamburg, Essen, Munich, Stuttgart, Esslingen, Frankfurt, and elsewhere to block the distribution of Springer newspapers, which accounted for about 40 percent of the West German media market.

75 years ago: Nazis carry out mass murder of Jews in modern-day Ukraine

On April 9, 1943, Nazi officials at the Zborow concentration camp in Eastern Poland carried out a mass killing of Jewish workers, children and the elderly. An estimated 2,300 people were shot to death on the first day of the massacre, followed by further murders throughout the week. The victims of the Nazi massacres had been rounded up, and forced to dig their own graves.

Zborow, in the Tarnopol district, formed part of Eastern Poland prior to Nazi occupation in July 1941. It is in modern-day Ukraine. Mass killings began rapidly after German troops conquered the region from the Soviet Union.

A thousand Jewish men were killed in 1941. Over the following months, many others died of starvation and disease. Mass murders resumed in 1942, with the deportation of around 1,300 Jews to the concentration camp in Belzec, where they were killed.

On occupying Zborow, the Nazis had established two labor camps in the city. One was open, enabling a degree of movement throughout the city for the Jewish workers forced to work there. The other was an enclosed labor camp and ghetto, to which Jews throughout the region were deported.

The Nazi goal of exterminating European Jewry had been planned in detail by the leadership of the Third Reich at the Wannsee Conference held near Berlin in January 1942. The genocidal program was closely related to the Nazi attempts to conquer the Soviet Union and eradicate the socialist movement throughout Europe.

The genocide was escalated in the wake of the Nazi declaration of “total war” in February 1943. This policy, announced by Joseph Goebbels, Nazi minister of propaganda, followed a series of major German defeats at the hands of Soviet forces, most notably in the Battle of Stalingrad, in early February 1943.

The Holocaust would claim 90 percent of Jewish Poles by the end of World War Two, and at least two-thirds of all European Jewry. When Soviet troops liberated Zborow in June, 1944, just 25 Jewish survivors were found there.

distributed leaflets demanding the unilateral disarmament of “Russian” soldiers—the Finnish Red Guards were accused of being agents of the Bolshevik government—and asserting that their presence was a violation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The German commanders also demanded the surrender of remaining Russian naval vessels.

German soldiers advanced building by building through the working-class neighborhoods. By April 13, the center of the Finnish Revolution, Workers’ Hall, was bombarded and destroyed. By the afternoon, the last pockets of working-class resistance were extinguished. Some 7,000 Red Guards were captured and imprisoned. White Army supporters, who had been in hiding, came out under Germany protection. The German army organized a victory parade on April 14.

Finland was now effectively a Germany vassal state. Reports from Denmark and Sweden suggested that Kaiser Wilhelm had offered the Finnish White Army a “Greater Finland,” including the important Petrograd-Murmansk Railroad in Karelia. General Mannerheim, the leader of the Finnish Whites, had boasted that he would capture Petrograd by the summer.

The German intervention tipped the scales in the Finnish Civil War to the side of the White Army, preparing the way for the “White Terror”—a series of brutal reprisals and mass killings of Finland’s militant workers. The exact figure is unknown, but some 10,000 workers were believed executed by Mannerheim and the Whites, and perhaps another 20,000 died of starvation and disease in White Army concentration camps.



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100 years ago: Germany occupies Helsinki, crushes Finnish revolution

On April 12, 1918, thousands of German soldiers, moving from land and sea, attacked the Finnish capital of Helsinki—then commonly called by its Swedish name, Helsingfors—and moved to crush the Red Guards and militant workers that had, in the preceding months, led the Finnish Revolution.

In the days preceding their entry, German airplanes