

This week in history: August 27-September 2

27 August 2018

25 years ago: Israeli cabinet approves Oslo Accord

On August 30, 1993, the Israeli cabinet gave its approval to a tentative agreement reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in secret negotiations held in Oslo, Norway. The agreement marked the end of a protracted struggle by the PLO against imperialist oppression and colonial domination, and its transformation into armed guards of the Zionist state and defenders of foreign capital.

The agreement laid the basis for the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which took control of local policing in the Gaza Strip and those portions of the West Bank not under the direct rule of the Israeli military or ultra-right Zionist settlers. The Israeli regime was in dire need of such assistance, as the agreement came in the sixth year of the *intifada*, the spontaneous uprising of Palestinian youth and workers against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

An additional factor in Israeli calculations was the social crisis produced by an influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, under conditions of a global economic recession. Unemployment in Israel climbed to 11 percent, and the threat of upheavals within the Jewish working class was mounting.

The public celebrations of the Oslo Accord were hypocritical in the extreme. PLO leader Yasser Arafat, demonized as a terrorist in ruling-class propaganda, was suddenly praised as “the face of peace.” Another “peacemaker” was Prime Minister Rabin, an Israeli military officer for decades, who as defense minister organized the bombing of PLO headquarters in Tunis, the assassination of Arafat’s deputy Abu Jihad, and the countless massacres of school children and other innocent civilians in the occupied territories.

An editorial statement in the *International Workers Bulletin*, the US predecessor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, condemned the deal: “Nothing could more clearly expose the blind alley reached by bourgeois nationalism at the close of the twentieth century. It demonstrates the impossibility of the oppressed peoples of the world achieving genuine liberation through the establishment of new national states or under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie.”

The statement warned that far from leading to peace, the stage was being set for new and bloodier conflicts in which Jewish and Arab workers would have to confront both the Israeli and Palestinian bourgeoisies.

50 years ago: Half a million join student protest in Mexico City

On August 27, 1968, an estimated 500,000 students and supporters gathered in Mexico City to protest the administration of President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz. The Diaz Ordaz presidency was marked by authoritarian rule used to suppress working class opposition and basic rights.

Protests were organized by the National Strike Council (Consejo Nacional de Huelga, CNH) a delegation of students elected by their peers from 70 universities in Mexico. The CNH directly challenged the anti-democratic repression of Diaz Ordaz and previous Mexican administrations. The students demanded:

- The repeal of Article 145 of the penal code which allowed the imprisonment of anyone attending meetings of three or more people.
- The abolition of the *granaderos*, the militarized police.
- The release of all political prisoners.
- The chief of police and his deputy be removed.
- The identification of officials responsible for government crimes and repressions.

The summer of 1968 saw some of the largest and most violent clashes between protesters and the Mexican government. This was partly due to Mexico City being the host city for the 1968 Olympic Games. The Diaz Ordaz administration wanted to present an image of Mexico as an advanced country worthy of credit and capital investment. The students wanted to use the opportunity of a world stage to expose the Mexican government for its oppressive policies. One popular slogan was, “We don’t want Olympics, we want revolution!”

Trying to avoid international embarrassment, Diaz Ordaz ordered heavy crackdowns on the peaceful demonstrations, including police occupation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico in September. The August 27 protest followed a number of demonstrations that had been organized throughout the summer. But this demonstration was the largest in Mexico’s history up to that point and revealed revolutionary sentiments among both students and workers. Protests continued to be organized by the CNH until October 2 when the police opened fire on unarmed demonstrators in Tlatelolco, an area of Mexico City.

75 years ago: Italian workers form factory committees

The revolutionary tide in Italy continued to rise, this week in 1943, as the government of Marshal Badoglio was forced to grant workers the right to elect factory committees by secret ballot. The agreement stated that management staff was excluded from voting, making a clear break with the fascist principle that the interests of workers and management were identical.

Workers either transformed the fascist unions into independent organizations or established new unions outright. Also won was a reduction in work hours from a seven-day week and a twelve-hour day to a six-day week and an eight-hour day, with no reduction in wages.

The retreat by the fascist Badoglio forced Roosevelt and Churchill's Allied Military Government (AMG) in recently-occupied Sicily to make a tardy verbal concession more than a week after Badoglio's, stating: "The AMG abolishes today all fascist labor and corporative organizations ... and is substituting a free labor movement."

Badoglio, however, remained silent about the workers' chief demand: an end to the war. General strikes and mass demonstrations demanded "Peace" and "Down with the war." Thousands of desertions afflicted the army, and in Turin Italian soldiers joined armed workers in a gun battle against German soldiers.

Combined with concessions, Badoglio unleashed savage repression in an attempt to intimidate the working class from taking revolutionary action. Government tribunals were set up to try 1,500 antifascists on charges of "conspiring to overthrow the government."

What really held back the working class was the influence of the Socialist Party and especially the Stalinists of the Communist Party, who spread illusions in the imperialist Allies and emphasized putting pressure on the government instead of preparing the working class to overthrow it and establish a workers' government.

100 years ago: Anti-Soviet assassins kill Uritsky, wound Lenin

On the morning of August 30, 1918, outside the offices of the Cheka in Petrograd, Leonid Kannegisser shot and killed Moisei Solomonovich Uritsky, a leading member of the Cheka and member of the Bolshevik Central Committee. Uritsky had a long career in the socialist movement and had joined the Bolshevik Party in July 1917 along with other members of Trotsky's *Mezhraiontsy* (Inter-District) group. Kannegisser was a former military cadet and supporter of Kerensky's Popular Socialists, an anti-Bolshevik bourgeois party. Kannegisser shot Uritsky twice, fatally wounding him with a bullet to the head.

Then, in the evening of August 30, Lenin was shot by Fanny Kaplan, a former anarchist, and now member of the Social Revolutionary Combat Group, which had stalked both Lenin and Trotsky for weeks. Lenin was leaving a meeting at an arms factory when Kaplan fired three shots at him. Lenin was wounded in the neck and the shoulder. He was driven back to the Kremlin to

receive medical attention where he collapsed. For several hours rumors circulated that he was dying.

When news of the assassination attempt and the murder of Uritsky spread around Russia in the next few days, millions were outraged, and the working class redoubled its struggle to defend the revolution. As Trotsky noted years later, when he was called back to Moscow from the front after the attempt on Lenin's life, "The mood of the party circles in Moscow was sullen and dismal, but they were absolutely unshakable." Lenin made a remarkable recovery and was on his feet in ten days, but the attack had long-term consequences for his health.

Petrograd and Moscow were hotbeds of conspiracies by counterrevolutionary groups, often with funding or the active assistance of agents of British and French imperialism. The Bolshevik leader and editor of the popular *Red Gazette*, V. Volodarsky, had been assassinated in Petrograd in June by a member of the Social Revolutionary Combat Group.

Modern research, however, shows that, while Kannegisser had connections to counterrevolutionary groups after the October Revolution, he was likely acting alone when he assassinated Uritsky, possibly in revenge for the shooting of a close friend by the Cheka on August 21.

In August 1918, the socialist revolution was fighting for its life. Kazan had fallen to the forces of the anti-Soviet *Komuch* government which was backed by the Czech Legion. The newly formed Red Army was now, under Trotsky's leadership, establishing itself as a disciplined force, and would retake Kazan on September 10, but the situation was dire: the country had been invaded by British troops in Archangelsk in the northwest and Japanese troops in Vladivostok on the Pacific, the terminus of the critical Trans-Siberian Railway. German imperialist armies occupied Ukraine as a part of the desperate peace of Brest-Litovsk, and a hostile Menshevik regime was in power in Georgia.

The Soviet-controlled cities were starved of grain. The Soviet republic was forced to adopt the practices known as the Red Terror, including mass arrests of known counterrevolutionaries and summary executions, directed, above all, at the former landowners and wealthy capitalists.



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