

This week in history: September 10-16

10 September 2018

25 years ago: Clinton begins campaign for NAFTA ratification

On September 14, 1993, the US administration of President Bill Clinton began its efforts to win ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement with a ceremony at the White House where Clinton signed side agreements to NAFTA on labor and environmental issues.

The side agreements were devised as sops to the trade unions and environmental groups which were the base of the official “left” opposition to NAFTA. The AFL-CIO and UAW joined with Democrats like Jesse Jackson and House Majority Whip Richard Gephardt, billionaire and former independent presidential candidate Ross Perot, and ultra-right figures like Patrick Buchanan against the trade deal between the US, Canada and Mexico.

White House officials admitted that NAFTA could be defeated in the House of Representatives, where most Democrats were opposed to it, while majority support appeared more likely in the Senate.

The conflict over NAFTA was fundamentally a dispute within the US ruling elite, between banks and other financial institutions, as well as the most powerful industrial companies, and the more economically beleaguered sections of business, such as textile manufacturing, which regarded the establishment of a “common market” across North America as a death sentence.

NAFTA was initiated by the Reagan and Bush administrations and brought to fruition under Clinton, a clear demonstration that both capitalist parties embraced its strategic goal, which was to integrate Mexico, and subsequently other Latin American countries, more directly into the sphere of American imperialism, and blunt the inroads being made into the western hemisphere by Japanese, German and other European capitalists.

In the course of the 1980s, all the bourgeois governments of Latin America were compelled to scrap their longstanding policy of building up national industries serving a protected home market and open up their national economies to foreign capital investment on a qualitatively new level. The result was an explosive growth of capital investment in Latin America, with Mexico the largest recipient.

NAFTA was opposed by Japanese and European capital as a

trade war measure by the United States, directed against them. When it was first negotiated, the Japanese government threatened to file legal charges against NAFTA under the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, citing it as an example of American protectionism.

The perspective of Perot and others in the anti-NAFTA camp was reactionary in the full sense of the word, suggesting that was possible to turn back the clock of history, and reverse the development of the productive forces that has created a globally integrated world economy. But from 1980 to 1993, the share of international trade in the US Gross Domestic Product rose from 10 percent to 25 percent.

50 years ago: 300,000 participate in silent march in Mexico City

On September 13, 1968, the student-led National Strike Council (CNH) organized a silent march through Mexico City, which mobilized some 300,000 protesters. The march was a response to the campaign of slander by the Mexican government and media, which portrayed as criminals and rioters the youth who had engaged in months of protests against inequality, state violence, and the anti-democratic regime of President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz.

The students wanted to prove that the reporting by the media was a lie and show that violence between police and protesters had been instigated by the police. Beginning at 3:00pm, demonstrators marched from the Museum of Anthropology to Zocalo square. Participants chanted no slogans but instead marched in absolute silence for over two hours.

The students maintained a heavy focus on acting non-violently. In one call to action the CNH explained, “Our silence is evidence of one part, the degree to which we have attained organization and unity, and for the other part, our silence must be interpreted as unanimous repudiation of the injustice and violence unleashed by the government against the Mexican people.” The students continued, “March alongside us as a symbol of protest because they have trampled your rights.”

Even still, participants worried about backlash from the police. Eduardo Valle, a member of the CNH recalled that, “The silent march was surrounded by warning that the

government was going to massacre us.”

Students had every right fear police crackdown. For one, they had already experienced it firsthand during the violent suppression of previous protests. But the Silent March was particularly tense as it came after a September 1 speech by President Diaz Ordaz where he promised the continued use of the military to stop demonstrations.

Diaz Ordaz would keep his filthy promise on October 2 when the police murdered hundreds of unarmed protesters in Tlatelolco Plaza just before the opening of the 1968 Olympic Games.

75 years ago: German troops expand occupation of Italy

On September 10, 1943, German troops invaded Naples, Rome and other Italian cities. The move was a response to the September 8 surrender by the newly-installed government of General Giuseppe Castellano to British and Canadian allied forces which had launched a full-scale invasion of the country the week before.

Castellano had been appointed to the prime ministership by King Victor Emmanuel III after a meeting of the fascist Grand Council had passed a vote of no confidence in Benito Mussolini and had ordered the arrest of the fascist dictator. Castellano had immediately signaled that he would offer no resistance to Allied forces, who were already initiating moves to invade Italy when he was installed.

Castellano and the king were forced to flee Nazi forces, and were taken to Allied-controlled Brindisi where the government formed a new headquarters.

On September 11, German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring declared all of Italy to be under German control and issued orders for the execution of Italian troops collaborating with the Allies. The following day, the German SS launched a raid on Campo Imperiale Hotel in Gran Sasso, where Mussolini was being detained. The former dictator was spirited out of Italy to Nazi Germany, where he met with Hitler and declared himself leader of Italy from the Nazi regime’s headquarters in Rastenburg. Over the ensuing weeks, brutal fighting would take place between German troops and the Italian resistance.

The German seizure of control in Italy was a desperate attempt to prevent the loss of a key base of fascist operations throughout southern Europe. The same week they launched the invasion, the Nazis initiated massacres of over 500 civilians and resistance fighters on the Greek island of Crete, and began an occupation of Albania after it had declared its independence from the fascist powers.

100 years ago: Trotsky appeals to Czechoslovak troops

On September 13, 1918, in an appeal written days after the capture of Kazan by the Red Army, Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik People’s Commissar of War, issued a special appeal to the Czechoslovak forces (the Czech Legion) fighting on the side of the counterrevolution.

He wrote: “Czechoslovak soldiers, workers and peasants! You were promised help from Britain, France, America and Japan, but they deceived you. The British and Japanese bourgeois need your blood to subjugate the working people of Russia and squeeze gold out of them. The Russian White Guard officers hide behind your back and force you to die for the cause of the bourgeoisie.

“You have seen how strong the Red Army is. We have taken Kazan and Simbirsk, and tomorrow we shall take Yekaterinburg, Samara and all the other towns that the bourgeoisie has temporarily seized with the aid of your blood.”

The taking of Kazan by the Red forces had an incomparable significance for the first workers’ state, under siege from all sides. On August 30, Left Social Revolutionary members had assassinated Moisei Uritsky, head of the Petrograd Cheka, and attempted to murder Lenin in Moscow.

In a comment about the Kazan victory, Trotsky remarked: “We are now forging on the anvil of war an army of first-class quality. It can be said that if the Czechoslovaks had not existed, they would have had to be invented, for under peacetime conditions we should never have succeeded in forming, within a short time, a close-knit, disciplined, heroic army. But now this army is being formed under our eyes.”

Trotsky promised the Czech soldiers that all who voluntarily laid down their arms would be pardoned and given the opportunity to live in Russia on an equal footing with all the working citizens of the Soviet Republic.

The appeal concluded: “Czechoslovak soldiers! Remember that you yourselves are mostly workers and peasants. Arrest your counterrevolutionary officers, unite with the workers and peasants of Soviet Russia—in this lies your salvation!”



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