

This week in history: December 24-30

24 December 2018

25 years ago: Chinese Communist Party celebrates Mao centenary

On December 27, 1993, the Chinese Communist Party marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong with a series of ceremonies which sought to present the pro-capitalist course of the leadership of the Stalinist party as the logical continuation of the Chinese Revolution of 1949, with which Mao's name was still popularly associated.

Speaking to 10,000 party members and guests at the Great Hall of the People on Tiananmen Square—where thousands of workers and youth had been shot down on government orders only four years before—President Jiang Zemin made a speech linking Mao and Deng Xiaoping, who initiated the turn to capitalist restoration in 1979-1980.

“Comrade Deng Xiaoping combined the basic principles of Marxism with the reality of China and inherited and developed Mao Zedong thought,” Jiang said. Deng, then 89 and in poor health, was not present at the ceremony. He had chosen Jiang as his successor, and would die in 1997.

While Western press reports questioned the claims of continuity between Mao and Deng, since Mao had purged his ultimate successor as a “capitalist roader,” there was a profound truth in Jiang Zemin's presentation. Both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping based themselves on the nationalist and anti-working-class perspective of Stalinism, seeking to defend the interests of the privileged CCP bureaucracy.

While Mao's methods involved occasional swings towards radicalism in domestic economic policy, like the disastrous “Great Leap Forward,” he pioneered the rapprochement between China and the United States, at the expense of the Soviet Union, cemented by the visits by Kissinger and Nixon to Beijing in 1971-72. This entailed the betrayal of the Vietnamese revolution, and the alignment of China with pro-imperialist elements in the oppressed former colonial countries, particularly Africa.

It was Deng Xiaoping who took the nationalist perspective of Maoism to its logical conclusion, openly promoting private capitalist development and transforming China into the workshop of world capitalism, with giant transnational corporations setting up shop to exploit cheap labor under the police-state rule of the CCP.

50 years ago: Massacre of striking farm laborers in India

On December 25, 1968, 44 people were burned alive in Tamil Nadu by a gang led by the local landlords. Of the victims, sixteen were women, five men, and twenty-three were children. The killings were carried out in response to a strike by workers in the area.

The Communist Party of India was growing in popularity among the poor agricultural workers. Leading up to the killing, workers had organized unions to fight for better conditions and higher wages. It had even become common to see red flags flying in peasant and working-class villages.

In response to the workers movement the landlords formed their own “union” and began firing workers who were open supporters of the communist party. The landlord union, the Paddy Producers Association (PPA), functioned as an organ to intimidate workers and suppress their struggle for better living conditions. But as the PPA continued to fire workers and hire poor migrants from other areas to drive wages down, the workers organizations continued to grow.

Eventually the workers called a strike and peasants withheld their harvest from the landlords. The landlords' solution was terrorism. On December 25, the landlords kidnaped and beat a shopkeeper who refused to endorse the PPA. Workers quickly rallied and marched in large numbers to force the release of the shopkeeper. In the conflict one landlord agent was killed.

Later that night, a gang of 200 entered into the peasant village of Kilvenmani and attacked workers and their families with guns, sickles and burned down their huts. Many of the attackers were in police uniforms according to eyewitnesses. As the attack began, the group of 44 attempted to take shelter in one hut where they thought the children would be safe. But the gang set the hut on fire and surrounded it to prevent anyone from leaving. At one point two children were thrown out of a window to get them away from the fire, but they were thrown back in by the attackers.

After the murders the gang fled immediately to the police where they received protection from the furious response of workers. Initially, a handful of landlords were arrested and convicted for their involvement in the massacre and sentenced to 10 years in prison. But later, all of the convictions were overturned by a higher court.

75 years ago: Roosevelt seizes railways to prevent strike

On December 27, 1943, US President Franklin Roosevelt issued an executive order for the federal government to take control of railways throughout the country. The move, which included the rapid deployment of federal troops, was one of a series of actions taken by the government to suppress mounting social and political opposition from the working class, in the midst of the Second World War.

The order was issued a week after workers voted overwhelmingly for strike action. Some 97 percent of 350,000 railway operational staff registered their support for a stoppage. They were backed by another 1.1 million non-operational workers.

The dispute was over the imposition of a wage freeze by the major corporations and the Roosevelt administration, as part of a broader array of measures aimed at subordinating every aspect of social life to the war effort. Over the preceding months, coal workers and other key sections of workers had taken industrial action to demand wage hikes, under conditions of a rapidly rising cost of living. The Roosevelt administration, with the support of the union bureaucracy, responded with increasingly repressive measures.

The Militant, the publication of the Socialist Workers Party, then the US section of the world Trotskyist movement, wrote on December 25: “Ever since the last war, the railroad workers have been tied to the red-tape of government arbitration through the Railway Labor Act. Their standards have fallen to among the lowest in American industry, they do not even get overtime pay on the basis of a 40-hour week, only after 48 hours.”

It warned: “The railroad labor bureaucrats have been forced to ‘talk tough’ in the recent period. While keeping in mind how far the pressure of the ranks has forced them to go, it is also well to remember that these peaceful tabbies, accustomed to licking at the feet of the administration and the bosses, have not grown real tiger stripes.” *The Militant* warned that the bureaucrats would seek to suppress any strike and force through a sell-out deal. This was vindicated in the railway dispute and a host of other industrial conflicts.

100 years ago: Sinn Féin wins Irish general election

On December 28, 1918, the radical Irish nationalist party, Sinn Féin (Gaelic for We Ourselves), won the Irish general election, held as part of the overall general election in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The party took 73 of the 105 seats allotted to Ireland, defeating the Irish Parliamentary Party, which had represented Ireland in the

parliament since the 1880s, in all areas of Ireland except in the northern counties, where the IPP and the Unionist Party won seats. This was the first election in which all men 21 years and older and all women 30 years and older could vote.

Sinn Féin was opposed to the program of limited home rule of the IPP and had grown in popularity since the brutal suppression by the British of the Easter Rising in 1916. It had campaigned successfully against conscription of Irish youth into the British army during the First Imperialist War.

In its electoral manifesto, Sinn Féin proclaimed that its representatives, if elected, would refuse to serve in parliament and would make “use of any and every means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland in subjection by military force or otherwise.”

True to their word, the nationalists refused to take their seats in January 21, 1919 and constituted themselves as the Dáil, an independent Irish parliament, in Dublin. The first Dáil, many of whose members were in prison, declared Ireland to be an independent state, ratifying the proclamation of the Easter Rising, and demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland.

Later that day members of the Irish Republican Army, affiliated with Sinn Féin but acting on their own initiative, attacked and killed members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, beginning the Irish War of Independence of 1919-21. In September 1919, the British government illegalized both the Dáil and Sinn Féin and began to prosecute the war with great brutality, employing the notorious Black-and-Tan paramilitaries.

The war ended with the rotten agreement of December 6, 1921, in which Ireland was partitioned into northern (primarily Protestant) and southern (primarily Catholic) polities, with the north remaining a part of the United Kingdom, creating the present nation-state system in the British Isles. The agreement sparked a split in Sinn Féin and led to the Irish Civil War of 1922-23.



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