

# This week in history: February 25-March 3

25 February 2019

**25 years ago: Zionist terrorist kills 29 Palestinians in Hebron massacre**

On February 25, 1994, American-Israeli Baruch Goldstein opened fire inside the Ibrahim Mosque during Ramadan in West Bank, Gaza. The terrorist attack left 29 worshippers dead and another 125 wounded. Goldstein was apprehended and beaten to death by survivors immediately following the shooting.

The murders sparked multiple Palestinian protests throughout the West Bank, leading to dozens more dead and 120 further injuries in ensuing conflicts with the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). In response the government confiscated weapons from some individuals deemed to be potential far-right threats, as well as cracking down on Palestinians, enforcing bans on busy streets to contain widespread discontent, while allowing tourists and Jewish Israelis access.

The perpetrator Goldstein was a member of the far-right Jewish nationalist group Kach, which was banned from the Knesset in 1988 for racism. However, he maintained a close personal relationship with its leader Meir Kahane. When Kahane was murdered in New York in 1990 by an Arab terrorist, Goldstein vowed to avenge the killing.

In October 1993, Goldstein poured acid over the floors of the Ibrahim Mosque (also known as the Sanctuary of Abraham). Muslim authorities wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, requesting action to be taken to prevent further damage to the mosque “regarding the dangers” Goldstein represented. During his service as a physician in the IDF, he reportedly refused medical treatment to Arab Israelis. Despite the fact that he had been reported to Israeli intelligence forces, he did not make the list of individuals monitored by the government.

The *New York Times* published a letter from Goldstein in 1981 called “A History of Anti-Arab Feeling” in which he asserted, “The harsh reality is: if Israel is to avert facing the kinds of problems found in Northern Ireland today, it must act decisively to remove the Arab minority from within its borders.” He finished, “Israelis will soon have to decide between a Jewish state and a democratic one.”

The attack on Hebron shed much light on the emboldening of far-right fascistic elements in Zionism. Neither Israel nor the US acknowledged the role played by both governments in encouraging and strengthening such forces in the region through decades of repression of the native population.

**50 years ago: Soviet and Chinese soldiers face off in border conflict**

A two-hour battle took place on March 2, 1969 between Soviet and Chinese border guards over the disputed Zhenbao Island (Damansky in Russian). The island was one of several disputed territories on the Ussuri River, the eastern border between Russia and China.

Soviet guards reported seeing Chinese soldiers crossing the frozen Ussuri and occupying Zhenbao. Senior Lieutenant Ivan Strelnikov was ordered to investigate and demand the Chinese leave what they considered Soviet territory.

Unknown to Strelnikov was that 300 Chinese soldiers had been deployed onto the island the previous night and dug foxholes, preparing an ambush. When the Soviets approached the location of the Chinese soldiers they were fired upon. Strelnikov and six others were killed initially. A battle ensued killing a total of 31 Soviet border guards. The number of Chinese casualties remains unknown. The Soviets, after receiving reinforcements, were eventually able to force the Chinese to retreat from the island.

In the following days both the Soviet and Chinese governments would claim the other instigated the attack. Protests were held at both the Chinese embassy in Moscow and the Soviet Embassy in Beijing.

In a report from the US Pentagon’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency, it is suggested that in the wake of the Brezhnev doctrine and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, Mao feared Soviet intervention into China. According to the report, the goal of the attack on Zhenbao “was to deter future Soviet aggression or coercion against China.”

The border conflict took place after nearly a decade of the Sino-Soviet split. Relations between the two nations deteriorated as they began competing for influence among the Stalinist-ruled countries and the bourgeois nationalist movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Moscow responded to the incident by greatly bolstering its military forces at the border. Over the next several months, more battles at the border would be fought but with considerably more firepower. In addition, the Soviet bureaucracy began making threats of military action against China including making a “surgical” nuclear attack on China to force them to back down.

However, both the Soviet and the Chinese governments had little intention of engaging in a large-scale war. Eventually the two governments would agree to border negotiations, but they would drag on for several decades. Ownership over Zhenbao would continue to be claimed by both until 1991, when it was agreed that

the island belonged to China.

### **75 years ago: General strike erupts in north Italy**

On March 1, 1944, workers went out on strike in Lombardy, the most heavily industrialized region of Italy. Conditions had become intolerable for Italian workers as the war dragged on. Already suffering from food shortages and rampant inflation, they now had to contend with German occupation, which involved the ruthless plundering of the country and resources.

The breaking point came when Germany pressed for the conscription of Italian workers into the military and for their use as forced laborers. The strike action would rapidly spread throughout north Italy, involving up to 6 million workers.

The Nazis and their fascist stooges moved immediately to ruthlessly crush the strike. Assemblies of more than three people on the street were banned, while thousands of workers were killed or arrested and deported as slave laborers to Germany. Italian workers did not meekly submit to the terror of the German and Italian fascists but courageously fought back, seizing control of factories and engaging in pitched battles with Axis forces.

Workers in the south were no more content under Allied occupation. The Allies, despite their democratic pretenses, were as hostile to the emerging revolutionary struggles of the Italian masses as the fascists. Determined to suppress the working-class movement, they installed former fascist Marshal Pietro Badoglio as ruler in south, prohibited political gatherings of liberal and socialist parties, censored anti-monarchist opinions and protected former fascist officials from punishment.

However, strike action against the Allies and Badoglio regime was suppressed by the Stalinist Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Under Allied pressure, they called off a 10-minute general strike of southern workers that had been scheduled for 11 o'clock Saturday, March 4. The Stalinists and Socialists pledged that the workers would work an extra 15 minutes that day to make up for any disruption to production that may have occurred.

### **100 years ago: Founding congress of the Communist International assembles in Moscow**

On March 2, 1919, 51 delegates representing 35 Communist and left-wing parties from 22 countries in Europe, America, and Asia assembled in a small hall in the Kremlin known as the Courts of Justice. The Congress would meet over the next six days and found the Communist, or Third, International, "to create a common fighting body, a center of the Communist International, subordinating the interests of the movement in each country to the common interests of the revolution internationally," as the invitation to the Congress, issued on January 24, explained.

The Congress was opened by V. I. Lenin, in the name of the

Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. Delegates stood for a moment of silence in honor of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the murdered leaders of the German working class.

After this, Lenin told the Congress, "The bourgeois are terror-stricken at the growing workers' revolutionary movement. This is understandable if we take into account that the development of events since the imperialist war inevitably favors the workers' revolutionary movement, and that the world revolution is beginning and growing in intensity everywhere."

The congress was held in the most difficult conditions. Not only did an Allied imperialist blockade prevent many delegates from reaching Russia at all, but Soviet Russia was fighting for its life in a brutal civil war against the armies of former Tsarist generals, bourgeois democrats and leaders of "left" parties who sought the overthrow of the Soviet power and the reestablishment of capitalism.

Trotsky arrived at the opening session of the Congress straight from the front, in full uniform in his role as commissar of war. In his report to the Congress on the Red Army, he noted, "In this struggle we have lost hundreds of thousands of our best socialist workers. I believe that they have fallen not only for the Soviet Republic but for the Third International." He was the author of the manifesto of the Congress later ratified by the delegates.

While the call for the Congress was issued in January, its political preparation had begun in the aftermath of the nationalist betrayal of the parties of the Second International at the outset of World War I in 1914, when the official European socialist parties, notably the German Social Democracy, supported the war aims of the bourgeoisie of their own countries.

Soon after the outbreak of the February Revolution in 1917, Lenin, in his famous April Theses, which reoriented the Bolshevik Party toward the seizure of power by the working class in Russia, regarded it as necessary to found a new international: "We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the *social-chauvinists* and against the 'Center'."



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