This week in history: March 4-10

4 March 2019

25 years ago: Clinton on the defensive over Whitewater

On March 7, 1994, US President Bill Clinton was forced to open a press conference with the declaration that his wife, Hillary Clinton, was "not a criminal," following a widening investigation, begun in January, into allegations about the Whitewater real estate investment in which the Clintons had lost money.

The same week, ten top aides in the Clinton administration were subpoenaed. White House counsel Bernard Nussbaum, who submitted the original request for a special prosecutor in the Whitewater case to Attorney General Janet Reno, resigned. Nussbaum was replaced by Lloyd Cutler—a millionaire corporate lawyer and former White House counsel under Jimmy Carter—shortly after. "Within hours after Nussbaum stepped down, White House officials had begun to use the phrase 'a Lloyd Cutler model' to describe the ideal successor. But it became evident only late today that the description was intended as more than a metaphor," the *New York Times* noted on March 8, 1994.

The media speculated openly on whether or not the Whitewater scandal would lead to the impeachment of a sitting president, with the US evidently facing a political crisis not seen since Watergate.

The campaign against the Clintons was a byproduct of right-wing hostility over their proposed health care "reform," tepid and conservative as it was, emanating from the Republican Party but embraced by sections of the "liberal" media, particularly the *New York Times*. While Whitewater itself proved a dry well, the independent counsel investigation into the Clintons ultimately triggered a political firestorm over Bill Clinton's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, leading to his impeachment in December 1998.

The International Workers Bulletin, a US forerunner of the World Socialist Web Site, wrote at the time: "Whitewater is only the latest in two decades of political scandals which have been used to manipulate governments, dictate their policies or drive or force them from power. Each time the result is a further shift to the right in the whole framework of American politics …

"Whether Clinton survives or not, the policies of the administration will be reshaped along the lines of big business … In the course of this process, the democratic forms in America have more and more eroded."

50 years ago: Scientists organize antiwar protest at MIT

On March 4, 1969, faculty and students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who were working on military projects began a work stoppage to protest the misuse of science and technology. The event marked the foundation of the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

The group published a statement signed by 50 senior MIT faculty that outlined the objectives of the organization. They wrote: "Misuse of science and technical knowledge presents a major threat to the existence of mankind. Through its actions in Vietnam our government has shaken our confidence in its ability to make wise and humane decisions. There is also disquieting evidence of an intention to enlarge further our immense destructive capability."

The war in Vietnam was beginning to radicalize a new section of the population as it had already done for many American youth. Just a few days later, on March 6, the US Department of Defense would report that 33,376 American had been killed since the start of the war.

The UCS members pledged to "initiate a critical and continuing examination of government policy in areas where science and technology are of actual or potential significance," and to use research to find solutions to social and environmental problems as opposed to an emphasis on developing military technology.

The founding document of UCS called of all faculty and students at MIT and around the country to join the one-day strike and begin planning ways to carry out their goals. Another 28 universities participated in or had faculty that supported the protest. One of the largest actions was at the University of Washington in Seattle, where 200 staff members halted their work.

A central component of the UCS protest was to oppose the

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development of an Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) defense system. The scientists argued that the implementation of such a system was not only a massive waste of resources but would greatly increase the potential for nuclear destruction of the Earth. While an ABM system is supposed to target and shoot down incoming ballistic missiles, the simple counter to it is to increase the scale of a nuclear warheads, making war that much more destructive.

75 years ago: Greek Stalinists form anti-fascist government

On March 10, 1944, the National Liberation Front (EAM), dominated politically by the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece, formed a Political Committee of National Liberation (PEAA). The Body, dubbed "the mountain government," was conceived of as a rival to both the administration in Athens, which was collaborating with fascist German forces in World War II, and the royal government exiled in Cairo, Egypt, which was under British sponsorship.

Throughout 1943 the EAM had waged guerrilla warfare against the Athens regime and the occupying German forces. The organization played a major role in strikes and demonstrations in February and March 1943, aimed at preventing German plans to force Greek workers into labor camps. It also fought against Bulgarian and Italian troops which were allied with the Axis powers, and anti-communist nationalist organizations, including National and Social Liberation and the National Republican Greek League.

By early 1944 the EAM had succeeded in securing effective control over wide swathes of the Greek countryside. There was mass opposition to the crimes of the fascists and a growing militancy among workers and poor farmers. The Greek Stalinists responded by establishing the PEAA and declaring it a governing body.

The purpose was not to establish a revolutionary regime aimed at reorganizing society along socialist lines, but to leverage their own position as various bourgeois factions jockeyed for dominance amid the crisis of the German-backed regime. The PEAA included capitalist politicians, including some who had recently participated in right-wing groups. Its program was for "national liberation" and "for the consolidation of the independence and integrity of our country," not for socialism or workers' power.

This was in line with the nationalist policies of the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy, which advocated a "popular front" with "progressive" sections of the ruling elite against fascism. In May 1944, the PEAA would be integrated into an Allied-backed "government in exile¨ headed by Georgios Papandreou. Ultimately Stalin would assign Greece to the British sphere of influence and betray the anti-fascist fighters in the civil war that followed World War II.

100 years ago: Arrest of nationalist leader sparks revolution in Egypt

On March 8, 1919, the British colonial regime in Egypt, which had occupied the country since 1882, arrested Saad Zaghloul and two other leaders of the Wafd (Delegation) Party, which was soon to become the leading bourgeois-nationalist organization in the country, for continuing to demand that Egyptians be allowed to send a delegation to the imperialist Paris Peace Conference. The three were deported to Malta the next day.

Over the following week, the British action sparked student demonstrations, strikes by workers and actions by peasants throughout Egypt in protest. Lawyers refused to go to court and taxi drivers refused fares. British soldiers were assassinated, and protests united all layers of the population, including both Christians and Muslims, and, for the first time, Egyptian women entered political life. The uprising continued into the summer with 800 dead, mostly Egyptians.

By the end of March, the British placed the country under the military dictatorship of Field Marshal Edmund Allenby. Allenby released Zaghloul in April and permitted his delegation to go to Paris, where the imperialist powers reaffirmed the British protectorate over Egypt. But by 1921, the British understood that Egypt was ungovernable and in 1922 unilaterally declared the independence of Egypt under the rule of a constitutional monarchy. The British kept control of "the defense of Egypt against all foreign aggression or interference, direct or indirect," and "the protection of foreign interests in Egypt" as well as the region to the south of Egypt, known as the Sudan.

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