

This week in history: October 26-November 1

25 October 2020

25 years ago: US orchestrates carve-up of Bosnia in Dayton talks

On October 31, 1995, talks on the future of Bosnia with the Clinton administration and the presidents of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina began at the Wright-Patterson Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio. The purpose of the negotiations was to assert American imperialist domination in the Balkans at the expense of its European competitors.

The US policy called for the partition of Bosnia into two equally unviable statelets, one Muslim-Croatian and the other Serbian-dominated. It would be policed by a massive influx of imperialist troops exercising supreme military command.

In the week before the talks opened, US officials told congressional hearings that the Pentagon would supply the largest contingent in an occupation force in the region and that its mission would involve achieving an “equilibrium of forces” in Bosnia—or, building up the military power of the Bosnian Muslim government until it balanced that of the Bosnian Serbs, a policy opposed by both Britain and France.

While described in the US press as the “leaders of the three Balkan nations,” Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, and Alija Izetbegovic did not represent the workers and peasants of the former Yugoslavia. They were representatives of the right-wing nationalist cliques which came to power as the Stalinist regimes collapsed throughout Eastern Europe.

Milosevic was a longtime Stalinist apparatchik who jumped on the bandwagon of Serbian chauvinism in 1987, directed first against the Albanian and Hungarian minorities within Serbia itself, and then against the neighboring republics within Yugoslavia. Tudjman, who had been a general in Marshal Tito’s army, had become a notorious apologist for the crimes of the Croatian allies of Nazi Germany. On the eve of the Dayton negotiations, he repeated a claim to the *New York Times* that the figure of 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust was “exaggerated.”

The American media focused on the crimes of the Serbian forces in the fratricidal warfare in the Balkans as this narrative was most useful in the break-up of Yugoslavia. However, “ethnic cleansing” was also directed against the Serbs. Fighting in northwest Bosnia over the summer had brought with it the flight of tens of thousands of Serb civilians, many driven out by advancing Bosnian government troops. The Muslim regime

stood accused of staging attacks on its own people to provide a pretext for NATO action in Bosnia.

50 years ago: Muhammad Ali returns to boxing

Three years after being stripped of his heavyweight champion title and banned from professional boxing for refusing to be drafted into the US military to fight in the Vietnam War, Muhammad Ali returned to the ring to resume his athletic career.

Ali had been convicted in 1967 for declaring himself a conscientious objector and refusing to be drafted into the US Armed Forces to fight in the Vietnam War. He was sentenced to five years in prison. While technically on bail while his appeal worked its way through the courts, Ali was granted a license to box by the city of Atlanta and defeated Jerry Quarry there on October 26, 1970.

Amid mass protests and opposition to the Vietnam War, Ali had become a popular figure associated with anti-war and anti-imperialist politics. A member of the Nation of Islam, Ali attributed his opposition to the war to his religious beliefs, as well as to racism and social inequality in the United States. Ali was born Cassius Clay, converted to Islam in 1961, and in 1964 changed his name.

“My conscience won’t let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America,” Ali said of his attitude to the war. “And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father ... Shoot them for what? ... How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail!”

The American ruling class responded with characteristic vindictiveness, attempting to make an example of Ali by destroying his career. Every state boxing association revoked Ali’s boxing license. Sports journalists wrote fierce right-wing denunciations of the 25-year-old fighter. Red Smith claimed that Ali’s protest had made him “as sorry a spectacle as those unwashed punks who picket and demonstrate against the war.” Another sports writer, Jim Murray of the *Los Angeles Times*, called Ali a “black Benedict Arnold.”

Before being granted his license to box again in Atlanta, Ali remained a committed and outspoken opponent of the war. He toured many colleges and universities where he gave speeches to thousands of students explaining his refusal to be drafted.

Ali's conviction was ultimately overturned by a unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Clay v. United States*, decided June 28, 1971.

75 years ago: Indonesian independence forces fight British troops in the Battle of Surabaya

On October 30, 1945, bloody fighting broke out in the Indonesian city of Surabaya between republican forces seeking to establish the country's independence and British troops attempting to reestablish some form of colonial rule.

With the defeat of Japan in the Pacific in August, nationalist leaders Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta had declared independence, in a bid to preempt recolonization by the Dutch, who had ruled Indonesia prior to Japanese occupation, or the British.

In September and early October, British troops had brought a small Dutch military contingent to Surabaya, declaring it to be the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration. The move was directed against the more radical independence forces, who were seizing Japanese weapons stockpiles and launching attacks on wealthy European and Eurasian residents.

In late October, mass Muslim organizations declared the struggle against colonization to be a "holy war." Fighting broke out between Indonesian militias and thousands of British troops, many of them conscripts from India. Sukarno and Hatta, whose perspective had always been to reach an agreement with one or other of the major powers as the means of gaining nominal independence for the Indonesian bourgeoisie, were flown by the British to Surabaya at the end of October to quell the situation and establish a ceasefire.

An agreement was reached, under British Brigadier A.W.S. Mallaby and the conservative nationalist leaders, under which the Indonesian militias would not be fully disarmed, and the British would retain a troop presence. The British had previously dropped thousands of leaflets demanding the surrender of all arms.

The ceasefire was short lived. On October 30, Mallaby and British colleagues traveled into Surabaya to investigate a firefight between Dutch soldiers and Indonesian militants seeking control of the city's International Bank. In the ensuing skirmish, Mallaby was shot dead, and his British colleagues, who were supposed to be carrying only light arms, reportedly threw a grenade at Indonesian fighters.

The British reprisals were brutal. Militia positions were bombed from the air and the sea and British troops went from

house to house to clear the city of suspected radicals. Estimates of the Indonesian death toll range from 6,300 to 15,000. British Indian casualties numbered some 295. While the two-week battle was a rout for the independence forces, it fortified opposition to the colonial powers, and continues to be commemorated to this day.

100 years ago: Communist Party of Australia founded

On October 30, 1920, the Communist Party of Australia was founded in Sydney by socialists and trade unionists who had been drawn to the program of Bolshevism in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917. These included trade union leader and former Australian Labor Party (ALP) politician Jock Garden.

Others came from the Victorian Socialist Party and the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World, or both, as with William Paisley Earsman, the party's first general secretary, who had been active in opposition to the First World War. A third element of the founding membership was drawn from the Australian Socialist Party. The party began publishing the weekly *The Australian Communist* in December.

Garden sought to lead the party in capturing the New South Wales trade unions and to enter the ALP. One faction of the party opposed the attempt to join the ALP. The Third Congress of the Communist International in 1922 supported Garden's position.

The founding of the Communist Party of Australia was an enormous step forward in uniting the working class internationally. But, as the Historical and International Foundations of the SEP (Australia) notes, "it was only a beginning. The pressures of the national milieu continued to exert themselves, reflected in the syndicalist and organizational conceptions that predominated. In conditions of the upsurge of the working class of 1916–1920, the building of the party was conceived in terms of capturing the leadership of the existing trade unions and the Labor Party, rather than developing socialist consciousness in the working class through a fight against the prevailing forms of national opportunism and politically exposing the ALP and Laborism."



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