

This week in history: November 2-8

1 November 2020

25 years ago: Israeli prime minister assassinated

On November 4, 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing Jewish fanatic, revealing the depths of the social and political crisis of the Zionist state.

Rabin first came to national prominence as the commander of the Israeli army in the 1967 Six-Day War, when the greatest threat to US interests in the region was the growing radicalization of the Arab masses. Washington sanctioned the Israeli invasion of Egypt, Syria and Jordan in the war, a blatantly expansionist act of aggression which brought forward a new element within the Israeli leadership—one more nakedly imperialist and racist than the previous generation. Rabin was a leading representative of this new guard.

Rabin, the first Israeli prime minister to have been born in Palestine, was not yet 20 when he joined the elite Palmach unit of the Jewish underground Haganah. He was directly involved in forcing 50,000 Arab civilians to leave their homes at gunpoint during the 1948 Israeli war of independence.

Rabin led the Labor Party government of 1974-1977 and helped recruit Jews to establish armed enclaves amid the occupied Arab population. Tens of thousands were sent into the occupied territories. Many came from the US and the Soviet Union, encouraged by Zionist organizations abroad, with the support of successive American administrations. The most reactionary appeals to Jewish chauvinism were employed, and the occupation of the West Bank was justified as the prophesied return to the biblical lands of Samaria and Judea.

Yigal Amir, the assassin of Rabin, came from a middle class, Orthodox family in a suburb of Tel Aviv. He served in a military unit known as “the cruel ones.” While he was a university student he became a religious fanatic and viciously anti-Arab supporter of the settlers. He was well known to security and police forces.

Amir was sent to Riga, Latvia in 1992 to teach Hebrew to potential Jewish immigrants. He received training from the Shin Bet security service in connection with his duties in Riga and was apparently personally acquainted with some of the security people guarding Rabin at the time of the assassination—underscoring the degree to which the extreme religious right was entrenched in the Israeli state apparatus.

The rapprochement between the Zionist establishment and the Arab bourgeoisie, signaled by the 1993 peace accord between the Rabin Labor government and the PLO, was in essence an agreement between the capitalist classes in the region—all of which had been weakened by international economic and political developments and brought together by a common fear of the social

implications of the struggle of the Palestinian masses against Zionist occupation.

The March 1994 massacre of Palestinians in Hebron by the US-born fanatic Baruch Goldstein indicated the nature of the political Frankenstein which Rabin and his Labor Party cohorts had helped to create. A year and a half later Rabin himself became the target.

50 years ago: Nixon deepens US embrace of Iranian Shah

On November 7, 1970 US President Richard Nixon issued a new order to the National Security Council that would see a significant shift in support for Iran and its dictator, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The order, National Security Decision Memorandum 92, authored by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, declared that Nixon had “Approved a general strategy for the near term of promoting cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia as the desirable basis for maintaining stability in the Persian Gulf while recognizing the preponderance of Iranian power and developing a direct US relationship with the separate political entities in the area.”

The memorandum also ordered that the US would maintain a large naval presence in the Persian Gulf and that Saudi Arabia and Iran would receive an increase in military and other forms of assistance.

In essence, the order, which was declassified to the public in 2007, was an announcement to the military, intelligence agencies, and the State Department that the US would embrace the two most reactionary regimes in the Middle East, as well as Israel, as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and against the revolutionary strivings of the masses of the region.

Nixon’s memorandum doubled down on Iran as the key US strategic asset, in the event that Saudi Arabia was weakened by a wider war or would fall to an anti-imperialist revolution or coup. The Nixon administration also believed that Iran could serve as a block against increasing Soviet influence among the Arab states, whose various nationalist formations, foremost that of the recently deceased Nasser of Egypt, had attempted to triangulate between Washington and Moscow. In a letter to Nixon later in the month Kissinger wrote, “if a radical regime were to take over in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. would have little choice but to move closer to Iran—and there is no reason now not to go on preparing Iran for that contingency.”

The increased backing of Iran by the US deepened the

commitment of the Shah and the Iranian bourgeoisie to crush all political and social opposition, setting the stage for the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

75 years ago: Mass dockworkers strike ends in Britain

On November 4, 1945, a six-week strike by tens of thousands of British dock workers ended after the major employers agreed to the first marginal wage increase in years. The strike, carried out in defiance of the union officialdom, reflected a growing militancy in the working class in Britain and throughout Europe at the end of the Second World War.

Dock workers had been involved in several earlier stoppages in 1945. In late September, workers in Birkenhead, Liverpool, became involved in a dispute over piece-work rates. A stoppage rapidly expanded, involving some 13,000 of the region's 18,000 dock workers in little over a week.

Strikers fought for a charter that had been widely circulated on the docks over the previous months. It called for an increase in the minimum daily wage from 16 to 25 shillings, two weeks of paid annual leave, payments for statutory holidays, an effective eight-hour day, retirement allowances and the provision of medical care.

Significantly, the stoppage was waged in defiance of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) leadership, which was politically aligned with the newly elected Labour government. The strike, which at its height, involved as many as 45,000 workers per day at ports across the country, was coordinated by committees set up in opposition to the union leadership.

During the stoppage, the London committee issued a pamphlet, stating: "We have pleaded and begged for the union to fight for better conditions. The unions have pledged us that they are going forward, that the official machinery has been set in motion. It has been set in motion, going round and round, getting nowhere, nothing happening." A Manchester union official warned his colleagues that it appeared "in the minds of the members that the union did not mean to do anything except take their money."

The TGWU and its leader Arthur Deakin responded to the rebellion with red-baiting attacks in the capitalist media. Deakin declared that the stoppage was the result of "certain political organizations who have a ready-made machinery at their disposal for encouraging and maintaining strike action." When asked, he confirmed that he was referring to the Revolutionary Communist Party, the British Trotskyist organization, which fought for a socialist perspective in opposition to the Labour government.

The Labour government, with the support of the TGWU leadership, sought to crush the strike by mobilizing the army to work the ports. This was expanded in the latter stages of October. The state attacks, combined with an agreement for a daily wage increase from 15 to 19 shillings, contributed to the end of the strike.

100 years: Red Army ousts counterrevolutionary forces from Crimea

On November 7, 1920, the third anniversary of the October Revolution, the Red Army began to oust the counterrevolutionary White Army of Baron Piotr Wrangel from the Crimean Peninsula in the south of Ukraine in the Perekop-Chongar Operation.

The Red army, under the command of Mikhail Frunze, had 146,400 infantry and 40,200 cavalry of the 6th Army, and the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Armies. In the days before the offensive, the Red forces had been strengthened by 8,000 Communists and 2,500 Communist youth (Komsomol). Under the command of Frunze were also units of Nestor Makhno's Insurrectionary Anarchist Army (the Black Army).

In February, the Red Army had driven the Whites from the Caucasus and forced them to withdraw from Novorossiysk to Crimea. By October, Wrangel's army comprised about 41,000 infantry and 17,000, cavalry.

The Whites held the Chongar fortification system in the east and fortifications along the strategic Perekop Isthmus to the west, both entrances from the peninsula to the mainland. Because of adverse conditions in the Sea of Azov, which made it impossible to bring in naval support, Frunze decided to concentrate his forces on Perekop. Fighting in subzero weather, the Soviet forces finally broke through on November 12, forcing the Whites to retreat.

Frunze began a drive to Sevastopol, the White headquarters in the south of the peninsula, forcing Wrangel to evacuate his troops between November 13-16 to the Turkish capital of Constantinople, at that time under the control of British and French troops.



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