

This week in history: November 16-22

15 November 2020

25 years ago: Peres succeeds Rabin as Israeli prime minister

On November 22, 1995, Shimon Peres officially succeeded Yitzhak Rabin as Israeli prime minister, 18 days after Rabin was assassinated by a religious Zionist fanatic. Peres's major political moves upon taking office—an appeal for new peace talks with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and the appointment of several new cabinet ministers—demonstrated an acute awareness of the depth and explosive potential of the social and political crisis of the Zionist state.

Peres stressed the need for a rapid conclusion of a deal between Israel and Syria, presenting it as a crucial component in the plans for opening up trade and investment throughout the Middle East. In his November 22 speech to the Israeli parliament, the new prime minister said, “The negotiations with Syria can acquire the character of a comprehensive regional peace, and in every sphere—political, strategic, and economic.”

The Israeli capitalist class had a huge investment—economically and politically—in what was called the peace process, as did the Arab bourgeois regimes and the banks and transnational corporations of Europe, Japan, and the United States. But the murder of Rabin brought to light the possibility of a breakdown of the fragile political stability that existed in the Middle East.

There was a general consensus among the Israeli leadership, the Arab leaders of Egypt, Jordan and the gulf states, and the imperialist powers, that an agreement had to be made with Syria before divisions in Israel, as well as the territories coming under the administration of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), had a chance to explode.

The cabinet appointments announced by Peres were similarly a calculated response to the sharp divisions within Israeli society and within the state apparatus itself. Opposition was rife in the military to the so-called peace process and to Peres personally. In naming himself as minister of defense, Peres was, at least in part, asserting his authority over the military.

At the same time he appointed Ehud Barak as foreign minister, a move calculated to please the military establishment. Barak, the interior minister under Rabin, was a former army chief of staff. Haim Ramon, former health minister, was named interior minister in a move to help suppress resistance from Israeli workers to attacks on jobs and

living standards. Rabbi Yehuda Amital was appointed to the post of minister without portfolio in an attempt to appease the anti-government rage of the right-wing pro-settler element.

50 years ago: Soviets land first remote-controlled rover on the Moon

On November 17, 1970, the Soviet Lunokhod 1 landed on the Moon to begin a near year-long mission studying the surface of the lunar surface. The Lunokhod rover was the first wheeled vehicle to land on the Moon or any other extra-terrestrial location.

The Lunokhod vehicle was over two meters long. It carried a compartment filled with scientific equipment on top of eight wheels that were powered by a solar cell specially designed to work on the surface of the Moon. The craft included four television cameras, a special extendable device to test lunar soil density, an X-ray spectrometer, an X-ray telescope, cosmic ray detectors, and a laser device.

The craft that carried the rover to the moon, Luna 17, was launched from Earth on November 10 and maneuvered through space until it reached the Moon's orbit, finally touching down seven days later. Lunokhod landed in the Sea of Rains area, where it began its travel on the Moon's surface.

Lunokhod was designed to run during the lunar day periods, which last about one month, to maximize sunlight to power the craft. During the lunar night it would enter into a hibernation state where it would heat itself using a radioactive source until the next sunrise, when it could be reactivated.

In the first few days of the mission, the rover transmitted 14 close-up images of the Moon's surface and 12 panoramic views. Using its specially designed tools Lunokhod collected soil samples that it was able to analyze from the surface of the Moon and transmit the resulting data back to the scientists operating the craft on Earth. This method eliminated the need to retrieve the craft or make a return journey.

Lunokhod continued to function well beyond its estimated lifespan of three lunar days. It traveled a total of 10.54 kilometers over the course of 321 Earth days. By the time the rover made its last contact with Earth on September 14, 1971 it had provided more than 20,000 images, 206 high-resolution

panorama pictures, and readings of the moon's surface at 500 different locations.

After communications were ended with Lunokhod, the exact location of the craft was unknown for many years. It was found only in 2010 when a team from the Apache Point Observatory Lunar Laser-ranging Operation (APOLLO) of the University of California at San Diego was able to use new imaging technology to pinpoint the craft. It was also discovered that Lunokhod's reflector was able to return more light than many more recent reflectors on the moon, making it still useful for new research. APOLLO researcher Tom Murphy said, "We got about 2,000 photons from Lunokhod 1 on our first try. After almost 40 years of silence, this rover still has a lot to say."

75 years ago: Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals begin

On November 20, 1945, the International Military Tribunal began hearings in war crimes cases against senior leaders of the German Nazi regime and its military apparatus. The proceedings were held in the city of Nuremberg, which had been the scene of the Nazi's annual rallies, and they became known as the Nuremberg trials.

The tribunal had been established in the wake of Germany's defeat to the Allied powers in May. The US, Britain, and the Soviet Union were represented by the chief prosecutors at the trials, which were also presided over by judges from the Allied nations.

The 24 defendants included top officials of the Nazi party, the Reich Cabinet, the Schutzstaffel (SS), Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the Gestapo, the Sturmabteilung (SA) and the General Staff and High Command. They were indicted for "Participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace; Planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression and other crimes against peace; Participating in war crimes, and Crimes against humanity."

In his opening address on November 21, US prosecutor Robert H. Jackson stated that the defendants were "symbols of fierce nationalisms and of militarism, of intrigue and war-making which have embroiled Europe generation after generation, crushing its manhood, destroying its homes, and impoverishing its life."

He warned, "Civilization can afford no compromise with the social forces which would gain renewed strength if we deal ambiguously or indecisively with the men in whom those forces now precariously survive."

The trial would hear extensive evidence of the Nazi regime's preparations for wars of aggression and their prosecution, and the genocide of six million European Jews, as well as Roma, political dissidents and the disabled.

Notwithstanding the trials, the Allied powers would leave

thousands of former Nazi officials in places of prominence, as they sought to stave off the prospect of socialist revolution and ensure the stabilization of capitalism in Germany and throughout Europe.

100 years: Black-and-Tans massacre Irish civilians on "Bloody Sunday"

On November 21, 1920, counterinsurgency units of the Royal Irish Constabulary, including the infamous Black-and Tans, opened fire on spectators at a soccer game in Croke Stadium in Dublin, killing 16 people. It was one of the bloodiest events of the Irish War of Independence.

One Irish newspaper described the assault: "The spectators were startled by a volley of shots fired from inside the turnstile entrances. Armed and uniformed men were seen entering the field, and immediately after the firing broke out scenes of the wildest confusion took place. The spectators made a rush for the far side of Croke Park and shots were fired over their heads and into the crowd."

Seven people shot at the stadium died there and five more died of gunshot wounds later. Two were trampled to death in the stampede. One woman killed was a bride-to-be. Two boys, aged 10 and 11, died.

The action was coordinated with units of the British army, ostensibly to search every man in the crowd of 5,000 for weapons. The massacre was in fact conducted in revenge for the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) assassination that morning, under the command of Michael Collins, of 16 British intelligence officers known as the "Cairo Gang." In the evening of what has come to be called "Bloody Sunday," two IRA leaders who planned the action on the British agents were arrested by the British, tortured and killed.



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