

This week in history: December 28-January 3

28 December 2020

25 years ago: AT&T announces massive cuts, leading corporate assault on jobs after mass strike

On January 2, 1996, AT&T announced it would slash over 40,000 jobs, bringing the new year in the same way the previous one ended, with major corporations posting record profits while destroying jobs on a massive scale.

The AT&T announcement followed a growing wave of layoffs by major corporations at the end of 1995. US firms announced over 55,000 job cuts in December, twice as many in the same month as in 1994. From 1993 to 1995, 1.5 million American workers lost their jobs through permanent workforce reductions. The wide-ranging job destruction took place at a time when US corporations were raking in record profits. AT&T's revenue in 1995 was \$75 billion, or \$404,000 per employee. The company's stock rose by 29 percent in 1995, further enriching its directors and stockholders.

The telecommunications giant said it would slash its workforce by 13 percent, laying off 30,000 and forcing 6,500 into early retirement. Another 3,500 employees worked for companies that AT&T planned to sell.

The purge of workers by the company was bound up with a far-reaching reorganization scheme announced in 1995, splitting the firm into three independent operations by the end of 1996: communications services, telecommunications equipment, and computers. Twenty-three thousand jobs were eliminated from the equipment division and 17,000 from the communications division.

AT&T share prices jumped 2.6 points in response to the announcement of cutting jobs, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average surged 60 points in the first trading session of the year.

One of the principal reasons for AT&T's reorganization was to enter the local service market and battle with the "Baby Bells," the successor firms created by the antitrust settlement of 1982, *United States v. AT&T*. AT&T planned to invest tens of billions of dollars for the construction of competing local service networks. This was a complete duplication of time, effort and technology, and not socially or rationally useful. But AT&T slashed the jobs to offset the new investment.

50 years ago: Franco commutes Basque death sentences

Long-time Spanish dictator Francisco Franco moved to head off a mass workers' rebellion throughout Spain, issuing a decree December 30, 1970 commuting the death sentences imposed on six Basque nationalists by a fascist court. Sixteen nationalist militants went on trial December 3 before a military court in the city of Burgos, accused of responsibility for the killing of two policemen in 1968 in clashes with the guerrilla group ETA. None had been directly involved in the killings themselves, they were tried for being leaders in the ETA.

The week-long defense case clearly established that the "confessions" made by several of the defendants had been extracted by brutal torture. But the presiding judge, General Ordovas, declared the trial over after an appeal by the defense to present more testimony and to cross-examine prosecution witnesses.

The trial provoked a wave of strikes and protests by hundreds of thousands of workers, not only in the Basque provinces, but in Toledo, Barcelona, Madrid, Cordoba, Valencia and in smaller cities and towns. Cultural figures joined the protest, with the abstract painter Joan Miro and others staged a sit-in at a monastery near San Sebastian, in the Basque region, to protest the trial and the murder of a Spanish student by Franco's police.

Franco was compelled to extend the Special Detention Decrees, which had applied largely to the Basque provinces, to the entire country. Under their provisions, the military and police could arrest without warrants and break up any demonstrations and protests. Full-scale censorship was in effect in Madrid.

There were protests throughout western Europe, including a mass demonstration and boycott of Spanish goods by Naples dockworkers, joined by students and workers throughout Italy. Some 25,000 metalworkers struck in Sweden, while mass marches took place in Paris and London.

On December 28, the military court handed down sentences: six prisoners to be executed, nine sentenced to prison terms ranging from 12 years to 62 years, and one discharged. Two days later, as strikes escalated throughout the country, Franco intervened to commute all the death sentences to 30 years in prison. The trial was one of the last cases in which the fascist regime attempted to impose death sentences for political

offenses and the retreat was a sign of Franco's weakening grip in the face of mass radicalization in the working class.

75 years ago: British Nazi propagandist William Joyce executed

On January 3, 1946, William Joyce, a decades-long fascist activist, was executed in London's Wadsworth Prison after his appeals against a conviction for high treason failed. Joyce was the last in a series of British citizens dubbed Lord Haw-Haw for their pro-Nazi radio broadcasts from Germany during World War II.

Joyce had been born in the US to Anglo-Irish parents. After the family returned to Ireland following the outbreak of World War I, Joyce would become a courier and informant for the British military in its murderous campaign against Irish Republican forces. He was also identified with the Black and Tans, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary notorious for extrajudicial killings and torture targeting opponents of the British occupation.

In 1932, Joyce, aged 26, joined the British Union of Fascists. The organization had been formed that year by Sir Oswald Mosley, formerly a Conservative and then Labour member of parliament. Its denunciations of Bolshevism and the Soviet Union, framed in deranged anti-Semitic terms, attacks on socialists, and menacing activities in Jewish and working-class neighborhoods, were supported by a significant proportion of the British ruling elite.

This went hand in hand with substantial backing from the British political establishment for a policy of appeasement towards Hitler's Germany, which was viewed as a bulwark against communism.

Only in 1939, with the outbreak of World War II and open hostilities between Britain and Germany, was Mosley's organization proscribed and its leading members interned. Joyce had formed his own party, the National Socialist League, in 1937, after a falling out with Mosley.

Joyce fled to Germany, after a tip-off from within the British state apparatus that he faced detention. In 1940, he became the chief presenter for the Nazis' English-language radio program, broadcast through much of occupied Europe and illegally into Britain. Joyce promoted the lie that the Nazis were waging a defensive war against communism and promoted the rabid anti-Semitism of the fascist regime. He would also deliver lectures to SS soldiers in the lead-up to the Holocaust.

After the victory of Britain and the allied powers, Joyce was captured in late May 1945, near the German border with Denmark. He was transported back to Britain and was tried and convicted of high treason. The hasty character of the judicial proceedings served to prevent any discussion of the British

ruling elite's overtures to fascism in the 1930s.

100 years: Yugoslav government bans Communist Party

On December 30, 1920, the Peoples Radical Party government of Yugoslavia (then called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) banned the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). The government declared (as translated in the American press) that it would "forbid communistic propaganda, suspend all communistic organizations, close communist meeting halls, and suppress newspaper and other publications advocating revolution or violence. Any order for a general strike will be destroyed and those responsible for them will be imprisoned ..."

Early in the month, the CPY had led strikes of miners in Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. These were suppressed by the Royal Army. The Peoples Radical Party and the opposition Democratic Party had been advocating the suppression of the CPY since its gains in local elections in March. In the capital of Belgrade, for example, the CPY received 3,600 votes as opposed to 3,200 for the Radicals and 2,800 for the Democrats. In the November elections to the Constituent Assembly, the CPY had received 58 of 418 seats, mostly from the large cities, although in the more rural provinces of Macedonia and Montenegro, the CPY won 38 percent of votes cast.

The Communist movement had been founded in Belgrade as the Socialist Workers Party (Communist) of Yugoslavia in 1919, uniting formerly social-democratic parties in the various component parts of the future Yugoslavia, then provinces of the Austro-Hungarian empire—Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Slavonia—but at its second congress in Vukovar in June 1920, it aligned itself with the Communist International.

Under its earliest leaders, Filip Filipovi?, who was elected mayor of Belgrade in August 1920 but immediately removed from office by the monarchy, and mathematics professor Sima Markovi?, the KPJ quickly grew to about 50,000 members. Both Filipovi? and Markovi? were murdered in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist purges of 1937-39.



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