

This week in history: November 1-7

31 October 2021

25 years ago: Clinton wins reelection as US president

On November 5, 1996, US President Bill Clinton won his reelection campaign against Republican contender Bob Dole and H. Ross Perot, who ran as a third-party Reform candidate. With the vote divided three ways, Clinton was able to win with 49 percent of the popular vote, with Dole taking 41 percent and the Texas billionaire Perot 8 percent.

Clinton won the electoral votes of 31 states, including 13 where he won a plurality rather than a majority of the vote: Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin. Dole won 6 states with an outright majority and 13 with a plurality, while Perot did not carry a single state.

The reelection campaign of the Democratic president was based on an open appeal to business and corporate support and the dropping of any appeal to the economic interests of working people, in keeping with the policy known as “triangulation,” devised in conjunction with his chief political adviser, Dick Morris.

Rather than position himself as the advocate of any type of Democratic Party liberalism, Clinton presented himself as balancing between the right-wing Republicans, who had taken control of Congress in 1994, and the Democratic minority. He aligned himself with the Republicans in abolishing welfare and adopting other austerity measures, and with the Democrats in opposing cuts to Medicare and Medicaid.

This in effect conceded continuing Republican control of Congress, although the congressional elections took place at the same time as Clinton’s reelection victory. The Democrats lost a handful of seats in the Senate and gained a few in the House, but the results left the Republicans in control of both legislative chambers.

The second Clinton administration promised to be even more right-wing and hostile to the working class than the first. It was prepared to reach agreement with the Republican congressional leadership on a plan to balance the budget, and immediately planned to begin talks with the Republican leadership in the hopes of reaching a consensus plan by the following February. In spite of the campaign rhetoric about preserving and protecting Medicare, the administration proposed initial cuts of \$124 billion, just after the destruction of welfare.

The ruling class celebrated the reelection of the right-wing Democratic president and right-wing Republican Congress with the biggest post-election rally in the stock market since Herbert Hoover was elected president in 1928, just a year before the Wall

Street crash that ushered in the Great Depression. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 518 points in the first three weeks of November, after passing the 6,000 mark in mid-October.

50 years ago: Josip Tito visits US and Canada

President of Yugoslavia Josip Tito visited the United States this week in 1971, traveling to Canada directly afterwards. While in the US Tito met with President Richard Nixon at the White House to discuss relations between the two countries and negotiate trade agreements.

Upon Tito’s arrival on October 28, Nixon arranged for a pomp-filled military display, including a 21-gun salute, military band, honor guard and a state dinner at the White House to welcome the Stalinist Yugoslav leader. When asked about his opinion of America, Tito responded that he liked “the business-like spirit of American businessmen.”

Tito by this time had become known as a leader of the so-called “non-aligned” countries that officially supported neither the United States nor the Soviet Union and hoped to balance between them to cut better deals for themselves. In great part, however, the non-aligned movement signified a shift of countries with former anti-imperialist pretenses toward the camp of American business interests. For Yugoslavia this meant liquidating the gains that Yugoslav workers made following World War II.

During the visit, Tito praised Nixon as “a statesman who has boldly undertaken major initiatives for important and necessary contracts, thus opening up new avenues for negotiations.” Nixon spoke similarly fondly of his guest, saying of Tito, “He has strong views, but he is able to talk to anyone in the world ... he is an excellent judge of people. We hit it off so well.”

The visit marked a critical step in the crisis of Stalinism and confirmed that “dissident” Stalinist leaders, such as Tito, following in the footsteps of Mao’s China, were making their peace with imperialism.

The *Bulletin*, the American predecessor to the *World Socialist Web Site*, wrote of the visit:

While pretending to deny the logic of the class struggle through talk about peaceful coexistence, the Stalinists are thrown into panic. Tito flatters Nixon, Kosygin walks arm-in-arm with Trudeau, Brezhnev pays homage to the bourgeois tri-color of France, and Mao enters the United

Nations all for the purpose of appeasing imperialism through conscious betrayals of the working class. The relationship of Tito and the Yugoslav bureaucracy to the World Bank expresses with the greatest clarity the real role of Stalinism. It is the bribed agent of the bourgeoisie within the working class. It must be exposed and destroyed through the struggle for the Fourth International.

75 years ago: American Trotskyists advance socialist program in elections

This week in November 1946, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), then the American section of the world Trotskyist movement, urged workers to vote for its candidates in a series of state and national elections that were underway.

In the November 2 issue of its newspaper, *The Militant*, the SWP described the campaign as the most ambitious electoral intervention in the history of American Trotskyism. It was standing candidates in New York, Washington, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio and California, some for statewide offices such as governor and others for the US Senate and Congress.

In all the states except Minnesota and Washington, the SWP candidates were excluded from the ballot, due to anti-democratic requirements, and could only be voted for by write-in. In New York, the SWP had solicited thousands of signatures to secure ballot position, but the state Democratic Party machine lodged a successful legal challenge on technical grounds.

The SWP linked its campaign to a groundswell of working-class struggles, expressed in the 1945-46 strike wave that was the largest to that point in American history, involving some 5 million workers. Its November 2 editorial, headlined "Vote labor by voting SWP" declared: "Vote SWP because it is the only way in this election to support genuine working-class representatives. It is your chance to say you're through with capitalist politics—you want the labor movement to build its own party."

In its campaign, the SWP rallied opposition to the ongoing promotion of racist politics by the Democrats and the Republicans. They noted that Democratic and Republican politicians had been implicated in a series of recent lynchings and their cover-ups, while the Democrats in particular were spearheading the fight against black voting rights in the South.

Amid the opening stages of the US-led Cold War, directed against the Soviet Union, the SWP made a powerful denunciation of militarism. Both of the capitalist parties, the SWP stated, also "vie in proclaiming their loyalty to American imperialism, its military preparations, its occupations of foreign lands and seizure of bases, its atomic-bomb diplomacy, its 'get-tough' policy on the Soviet Union. On this issue of issues—foreign policy—Wall Street does not permit even the suggestion of differences."

On November 4, 1921, the Japanese Prime Minister Takashi Hara was stabbed to death as he boarded a train by a right-wing railway switchman, Kon'ichi Nakaoka. Nakaoka despised Hara and his party, the Rikken Seiyūkai (Association of Friends of Constitutional Government), for its corruption, for toying with idea of universal suffrage, for its conduct in Soviet Siberia, which the right regarded as insufficiently aggressive, and for its connections to large capitalist corporations. Hara had been on his way to a meeting of his party in Kyoto.

Hara came into office in the aftermath of the Rice Riots of 1918, the first great uprising of the Japanese working class. While he did not grant suffrage to all male Japanese workers and peasants, he expanded the number of voters. He was what might be called a machine politician, who depended on parliamentary majorities to dispense patronage and funds to supporters and to manage corruption and the influence of large corporations.

Hara advocated diplomacy as the means to promote Japan's interests and in the division of the victors' spoils in the aftermath of World War I. He oversaw the Japanese entry into the League of Nations, that is, Japan's development from a regional Pacific power into world imperialist politics. He brokered an agreement that gave China nominal sovereignty over its Shandong Peninsula, which Japan had seized from Germany in 1914. Hara pursued a policy of "accommodation and conciliation" with the United States, in the words of the *New York Times*, and drew down Japanese forces occupying eastern Siberia.

In the aftermath of the development of a Korean nationalist movement (Japan had occupied Korea since 1895), and the brutal suppression of pro-independence protests in 1919, Hara permitted minor reforms in that country.



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100 years ago: Japanese prime minister assassinated