

## This week in history: July 24-30

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago.

**23 July 2023**

**25 years ago: UAW ends Flint strike on GM's terms**

On July 29, 1998, after 54 days of a local strike at two Flint, Michigan plants that shut down most GM production in North America, the United Auto Workers (UAW) leadership signed an agreement accepting all of the company's major demands, pulling the plug on the rank-and-file's fight against corporate downsizing. It was the longest shutdown of GM since the 1970 national strike.

The central issue in the strike was the fight to defend jobs. Workers walked out to oppose the relentless downsizing and movement of jobs to low-wage regions, which had already led to the loss of nearly 50,000 jobs in the Flint area since the 1970s.

In taking a stand against GM's attack on jobs and its pursuit of cheap labor, workers were thrust into a confrontation against the entire auto industry and its major Wall Street investors. Downsizing had been used for the previous two decades to undermine job security, build up a reserve of unemployed workers and undercut the efforts of employed workers to maintain their wage levels and working conditions. This was at the heart of the profit boom of the Big Three auto companies and corporate America as a whole, and the spectacular rise of share values on the stock exchange.

The flashpoint of the strike was the Flint Metal Center, where GM demanded substantial changes in work rules and productivity levels. The agreement signed by the UAW established new labor-management structures to enforce a 15 percent increase in productivity.

The job cuts, plus the loss of overtime pay, reduced labor costs by \$45 million, precisely the savings GM was seeking. In its summary of the contract handed out to workers, the UAW stated that "both parties recognize the need to aggressively address the current state of Cradle Operations and adapt to the competitive challenges of the future."

The UAW bureaucracy was concerned over growing signs of unrest and militancy among rank-and-file workers. When workers in Ohio threatened to walk out rather than use dies that had been transferred from the strikebound Flint plant, the UAW International quickly ordered them to continue working. When GM reopened some of its idled plants, UAW workers in Michigan and Kentucky refused to handle parts produced by outside suppliers. Then came a series of votes, including the Saturn plant in Tennessee, requesting strike authorization.

From the outset the UAW bureaucracy sought to use the strike at GM not to defend the rank-and-file, but rather to shore up its own position in relation to the company. With GM determined to press ahead and destroy more jobs, the UAW bureaucracy was seeking to protect its own privileges, above all by proving its worth to the company in suppressing opposition in the workforce to management demands.

**50 years ago: Dallas police murder twelve-year-old Santos Rodriguez**

On July 24, 1973, Darrel Lee Cain and Roy R. Arnold, officers of the Dallas Police Department, arrested and then shot and killed Santos Rodriguez, a 12-year-old boy. Rodriguez was shot in the head while handcuffed inside a police car.

After receiving a report in the early morning hours that a gas station vending machine had been broken into and robbed of eight dollars, Cain and Arnold drove to the home of 84-year-old Carlos Minez. Minez was the caretaker of Santos and his brother David Rodriguez, who was 13.

Police were familiar with the Rodriguez boys as their mother was arrested on a murder charge in 1971. Five in total, the Rodriguez siblings were split up by the court with the three youngest being placed into foster care. Minez was a family friend who offered to take in the two older boys.

The young Santos was undoubtedly dealing with immense difficulties and previously had run-ins with police involving minor offenses like shoplifting and skipping school. Yet his teachers described him as gentle and told reporters that he had begun developing a love for classical music.

Acting purely on prejudice and without any evidence connecting the youths to the burglary, Cain and Arnold went to Minez's home and pulled the boys out of bed and threw them into their police car without allowing them to dress themselves or put on shoes. There was no warrant for the arrest. The officers claimed that Minez gave them permission to enter the home, but the elderly man spoke little English, and the officers did not speak Spanish.

After handcuffing the boys, the police drove them to an empty lot near the gas station where the burglary occurred and began an interrogation in an attempt to intimidate them into a confession. The two boys insisted that they did not commit the burglary and had no knowledge of it.

Not satisfied, Cain put the handcuffed Santos in the passenger seat of the car and Arnold moved into the rear with David. Cain began torturing Santos with a game of "Russian Roulette" demanding that he confess to the vending machine burglary.

With one round in his revolver, he pointed the gun at Santos' head and demanded that he confess to the crime. When Santos insisted on his innocence, Cain pulled the trigger once landing on an empty chamber. Then he repeated the process again landing on the loaded chamber, shooting Santos in the head killing him.

After news of the murder spread, large protests were organized in Dallas by Mexican-Americans living in the Little Mexico neighborhood, where the Rodriguezes lived. Over 600 people attended Santos' funeral to

demand justice for the killing of the defenseless boy.

Due to the egregious nature of the killing, the Dallas Police Department was forced to bring murder charges against Cain. In November 1973 he went on trial and was found guilty. However, the judge ordered the lightest sentence possible—five years jail time.

Cain was released on parole after serving only two and a half years. Arnold, who sat and watched as Cain tortured and then killed Santos, was never charged with a crime.

### **75 years ago: Progressive Party nominates Henry Wallace as US presidential candidate**

On July 24, 1948, the national convention of the recently formed Progressive Party nominated Henry Wallace, a former vice president and agribusiness executive, as its candidate for that year's US presidential election. Glen H. Taylor, a Democratic Party senator and also a businessman, was selected his running mate.

The Progressive Party had emerged over the previous months as a consequence of Wallace's effective ouster from the Democratic Party. The longstanding Iowa politician had served as the Democratic Party's vice-president under Franklin Roosevelt, from 1941 until early 1945, most of the period of US involvement in World War II. He had been a key conduit for the de facto alliance between American imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

Wallace's left-sounding patriotic rhetoric had also served as a mechanism for the subordination of the working class to the war, including through strike bans enforced throughout the conflict by the trade union bureaucracy and the Stalinist Communist Party USA.

Wallace's ouster as vice presidential candidate in the 1944 elections, in favor of the anticommunist Sen. Harry S. Truman of Missouri, had been an initial indicator of a developing shift in US foreign policy. Wallace had taken the position of Secretary of Commerce until September, 1946, when he was involved in a major blow-up with Truman, who had become president after Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945. Wallace had delivered a speech in which he declared: "[W]e should recognize that we have no more business in the political affairs of Eastern Europe than Russia has in the political affairs of Latin America, Western Europe and the United States."

That line, applicable to US imperialist foreign policy during the war and the alliance with the Stalinist bureaucracy, cut across the Truman administration's plans to launch a Cold War against the Soviet Union aimed at establishing the untrammelled global hegemony of American capitalism.

In the months and years that followed Wallace's ouster from the administration, he continued political activity, effectively calling for a return to the old course of collaboration with the Soviet bureaucracy, as well as limited domestic social concessions. His eventual political vehicle, the Progressive Party, would win support from various Stalinist and former Stalinist forces, as well as more tepid support from minor sections of the trade union bureaucracy. The Progressive Party opposed the Cold War and the development of the atomic bomb and called for "peaceful coexistence" with the Soviet Union.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), then the American Trotskyist organization, pointed to the political significance of the support Wallace received, which included large audiences in most places he spoke. This represented opposition in the population to anticommunism and imperialism. But the SWP emphasized the essentially fraudulent character of Wallace's claims to be challenging the two-party system. His campaign was a warning to the ruling elite of the dangers of social upheaval and a

plaintive appeal for a limited form of milk-toast reformism.

The day after the Progressive Party's convention, Truman announced an executive order against racial discrimination in the armed forces. A day after that, he gave a speech to a special session of the Congress calling for expedited measures to address other civil rights issues and to curb cost of living difficulties confronting working people. Together with refurbishing the image of the armed forces and the administration amid a drumbeat of aggression against the Soviet Union, the measures indicated a degree of fear over the Wallace campaign.

In the very same month, the Truman administration indicted leaders of the Communist Party USA on Smith Act charges of preparing the violent overthrow of the government. The Stalinist leaders had been allies of the Democratic Party only a few years earlier.

### **100 years ago: Imperialist powers sign treaty with Turkey**

On July 24, 1923, the imperialist powers of Britain, France, Italy and Japan signed the Treaty of Lausanne in Switzerland with the newly Turkish state based on Ankara, the final treaty that emerged from the First World War. Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania were also signatories.

The imperialist powers agreed to withdraw their troops from the Turkish capital Constantinople (Istanbul) and recognized the sovereignty of the newly founded Turkish state led by Kemal Ataturk, over the Anatolian peninsula, and the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits which allow passage between the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. The imperialist powers reserved the right to send ships through the straits.

East Thrace, the only European part of Turkey, abutting the Bosphorus strait which divides Istanbul, was designated as part of Turkey, with a demilitarized zone facing Bulgaria. These were essentially the outlines of the contemporary Turkish nation-state.

The Treaty of Lausanne effectively repudiated most of the provisions of the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres which had given large parts of Turkish-speaking Anatolia to the administration of France, Italy and Greece. Under that treaty, the Dardanelles were to be internationalized, Kurds in Anatolia were to vote on the question of their homeland and the Armenian regions of Turkey were to be "free and independent." The League of Nations had already created mandates for French and British imperialism in the Arab-populated regions of the Ottoman Empire.

The Treaty of Lausanne gave amnesty from war crimes prosecution for the perpetrators of the 1915 Armenian genocide and shelved the Armenian and Kurdish national demands. Britain and France continued to occupy and control Iraq, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon.



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