

This week in history: July 28-August 3

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

27 July 2025

25 years ago: Republican National Convention opens in Philadelphia, financed by big business

From July 31 through August 3, 2000, the Republican National Convention convened at the Comcast-Spectacor First Union Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Aside from nominating George Bush for the Republican Presidential candidate and Dick Cheney as the running mate, the convention revealed the grotesque power of money in politics used to buy the favor of both capitalist parties, Republican and Democrat.

While federal funds paid out a total of \$27 million to the Republican and Democratic conventions, the major players providing the financial backing for both conventions and individual political campaigns were corporate sponsors and the filthy rich. The staggering amounts of money acted as a down payment to influence and acquire the political backing for future bills and policy. Corporate CEOs expected a return on their investment: gutting of safety and environmental regulations, huge tax breaks, anti-worker legislation, and limits on class action lawsuits.

Money poured in from companies to be crowned as an official sponsor and donor. The largest tobacco company in the US, Phillip Morris, handed over \$618,000 to the Republicans. US Airways became the official airline for the Republicans and GM the official automobile business. Banks and energy corporations donated massive sums: Citigroup, Coastal Corp., Enron Corp., El Paso Energy and Reliant Energy.

The Republicans were expected to reward 10 companies at the platinum level for donating \$1 million.

Some corporations handed over cash into the coffers of both big-business parties: Motorola, AT&T, General Motors, Microsoft, SBC, and UPS. The defense contractor Lockheed Martin, which benefited immensely from government contractors to sustain American imperialism's weaponry abroad, contributed a lump sum of \$100,000 to both conventions. A public announcement stated that the dual donations were "part of good government—we support the democratic process."

According to a report released during the Republican convention, some \$90 million of the \$137 million in "soft money" donations to the Republican Party came from only 739 contributors, including 139 who gave over \$250,000. More than half of the 139 concealed their identities from the Federal Election Commission by breaking up their contributions into smaller amounts or routing the donations through third parties.

The GOP's unpopular far-right political program based on Christian fundamentalism, attacks on the separation of church and state and public education, did not dissuade the financial oligarchy from buying political influence. It was part of a fundamental assault on bedrock programs and policy that corporate America hoped to cash in on. The *Wall Street Journal* paid tribute to this shameful display of the corporate oligarchy's

power over the electoral system with the headline: "Bus's Donors Have a Long Wish-List and Expect Results."

50 years ago: US and Soviet Union sign Helsinki Accords

On August 1, 1975, the Helsinki Accords, formally known as the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), were signed. The accords, named for their host city, the capital of Finland, brought together leaders from 35 states. These included the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union, and nearly every European country.

The Helsinki Accords are often presented by historians and the media as a milestone of "East-West détente" and a triumph of peace and human rights. But in reality, the Accords were only a temporary truce by rival imperialist and Stalinist bureaucratic powers. This agreement served to stabilize their rule, suppress revolutionary movements, and to codify the post-World War II division of the world during a period of global crisis.

US President Gerald Ford and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev both made speeches upon signing the accords. "Participation in the work of détente and participation in the benefits of détente must be everybody's business—in Europe and elsewhere," Ford said. "The success of détente... depends on new behavior patterns that give life to all our solemn declarations. The goals we are stating today are the yardstick by which our performance will be measured."

Brezhnev framed the signing as in line with the Stalinist policy of "peaceful co-existence" with imperialism: "The results of the Conference are not a victory for some and a defeat for others. This is a triumph of reason, a triumph for détente, a triumph for peace and security on the European continent."

The agreement comprised three main "baskets." These included the inviolability of post-war borders; economic and technological cooperation between the signers; and commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. While not legally binding, the Accords held political significance. They entrenched the post-World War II borders in Europe, including the division of Germany, the Soviet Union's domination of Eastern Europe, and US influence over the Western European states.

By the mid-1970s, both the imperialist and Stalinist blocs confronted deepening internal crises. The US and its Western European allies were reeling from the defeat in Vietnam, widespread economic stagnation, and escalating mass working-class militancy. Simultaneously, the Stalinist bureaucracies of the USSR and Eastern Europe were increasingly sclerotic, facing growing opposition from the socialist-minded working

masses.

The Helsinki process was, in this context, a desperate attempt by both sides to stabilize their respective orders. The imperialists sought to ideologically undermine the Soviet bloc and more importantly, to open new avenues for economic penetration into the eastern bloc. The Stalinist regimes, for their part, aimed to legitimize their postwar territorial gains and secure Western financial investment to temporarily cover up their own economic problems. A policy that would prove disastrous in decades to come and played no small role in the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union.

75 years ago: General strike in Belgium forces abdication of King Leopold III

On August 1, 1950, Belgian King Leopold III announced his intention to abdicate the throne following a protracted political crisis surrounding the “Royal Question” that culminated in a general strike of the Belgian working class against the monarch. Ten days prior, Leopold returned to Belgium for the first time since 1944 after his exile in Switzerland, a refuge necessitated by his widespread unpopularity as a result of his unconditional surrender to the Nazi German invasion of the country in 1940 and his shaking the hand of Adolf Hitler.

In March 1950, the Belgian government of Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens collapsed following a national referendum over whether Leopold could return to the country, which was opposed by large sections of the working class. The referendum nonetheless passed with support from the rural areas and the middle-class. At the time, the promised return of Leopold resulted in a wave of strike actions involving over 10,000 workers to “Stop Leopold.”

The crisis reached a turning point when Leopold arrived in Belgium on July 22. His arrival prompted a major general strike concentrated in the French-speaking working-class region of Wallonia. By July 27, more than 300,000 striking workers were involved, bringing major industrial centres in Belgium’s south to a halt. Army units were put on a war footing and a state of emergency was declared in the key industrial city of Liège. The Belgian government prohibited all public gatherings on July 29 in Brussels, Liège and Verviers. On July 30, police opened fire on a crowd of protesters in Grâce-Berleur near Liège, killing four people.

The strength of the general strike combined with the government crackdown against the protesters threatened a potential insurrection against the government as a whole. Belgium’s Prime Minister Jean Duveusart, seeking to keep the working-class struggle from spiralling further out of the government’s control, pressured Leopold on the night of July 31 to abdicate, which the latter accepted. The following day, he announced his abdication in favour of his 20-year-old son Baudouin, who was crowned almost one year later. Duveusart also resigned after only two months in office, a further expression of the government’s instability at the time.

The anti-Leopold strike movement of 1950 was a significant demonstration of the power of Belgium’s working class. That power would be demonstrated even more starkly once again a decade later, when 700,000 workers participated in what is referred to as the “Strike of the Century” in opposition to the re-elected Eyskens’s government’s austerity measures.

100 years: British government forestalls miners’ strike

On July 31, 1925, the British government of Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin agreed to provide government subsidies to the coal industry in order to prevent a strike by over 1 million coal miners. The day, which came to be known as “Red Friday,” was presented as a victory for the labor movement in distinction to “Black Friday” of April 15, 1921, when the bureaucracy of the railway workers union refused to support the coal miners after they were locked out by the coal owners.

In 1925, coal profits declined steeply when Britain switched to the gold standard from sterling, damaging export industries. The British coal industry shut down hundreds of mines and was losing as much as 1 million pounds a month, partly because of increased German coal on the world market. The coal operators announced that wages would be slashed to 1921 levels and hours extended.

This provoked enormous anger among miners and forced the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain into negotiations with the government and the colliery owners. Baldwin had said only two days before, “all the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet.”

However, when it became apparent that the railway workers union had agreed not to handle coal in the event of a strike or lockout, and major national industrial action would be the result, Baldwin agreed to a temporary 23-million-pound subsidy to keep the coal industry afloat while a royal commission studied the problem.

The capitalist pressed howled with outrage at the Red Friday agreement, claiming that Baldwin had capitulated to blackmail from the miners. Baldwin himself told his biographer, a number of years later, “We were not ready” for a confrontation with the working class.

The result was that the government and employers began to prepare for a mass strike when the subsidy ran out. The colliery owners stockpiled coal, and the government developed a plan for the general strike which was to break out in nine months.



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