

## This week in history: August 4-10

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

**3 August 2025**

**25 years ago: 87,000 US telecommunication workers launch strike against newly formed Verizon**

In the early morning of August 6, 2000, about 87,000 workers went on strike at Verizon Communications, a new company founded in June from the merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE. Rank-and-file phone workers were fighting for job security, better pay and benefits and against Verizon's growing use of outsourcing labor to non-union workers and the company's demand for extra hours on top of mandatory overtime.

Verizon was the largest wireless provider across 12 states along the east coast. Two major unions, the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), represented workers.

WSWS reporters spoke with telecommunication workers on the picket line.

"Job security and keeping jobs is the most important thing for me," said Anita Sommers, a technician in Pittsburgh with 26 years service. "We have to stop the electronic transfer of our work. All our work comes in electronically and they can send it anywhere with a flick of a switch. Right now our work has been transferred out of state and they can do that any time they are ready."

Andres Caban, field technician, with five years at the company, said: "I am upset that the Teamsters are allowing their members to cross our picket line and deliver packages, especially when our union supported their strike. We refused to give United Parcel Service any technical telephone support when their workers walked out. The two major issues in this strike are contracting out, and our need to organize the Verizon wireless workers. By making it hard for us to unionize these workers, they are showing that they want to bust the union."

The strike was noted for the militancy of the workers and solidarity from the public. It ended less than a month after it had begun, despite the fighting spirit of the rank-and-file. The CWA and the IBEW bureaucracy, shaking hands with management, split the strike in two before scuttling it. A sellout agreement was reached covering 50,000 workers in New York and New England. Three days later, an identical contract was inked for the rest of the workforce. The contracts allowed Verizon to continue exploitative work practices and outsourcing.

**50 years ago: Banqiao Dam Disaster in China**

In the early hours of August 8, 1975, after days of unprecedented rainfall from Typhoon Nina, the Banqiao Dam, along with 62 other dams in China's Henan province, collapsed. A wall of water, up to 10 meters high, swept through vast areas, inundating cities and villages. An estimated 26,000 people drowned in the initial flash floods alone.

The devastation did not end there. The floods destroyed crops, infrastructure, and homes, leaving approximately 11 million people homeless. In the subsequent months, widespread famine and epidemics claimed an additional 145,000 lives, bringing the total death toll to at least 171,000.

Surviving refugees struggled to find food, shelter, and medical care, often with minimal assistance from the state as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sought to downplay the catastrophe and cover up its own culpability.

This disaster was a direct result of the anti-scientific and politically driven policies of the Stalinist regime in China.

The Banqiao Dam, like many others built during the "Great Leap Forward" era (1958-1962), was a product of this approach. Mao Zedong's regime pushed for rapid industrialization and agricultural collectivization, often prioritizing quantity and rapid construction over sound engineering principles. Dams were built hastily, with inadequate geological surveys, design flaws, and insufficient spillway capacity.

Warnings from engineers were systematically ignored and suppressed. Chen Xing, a highly respected expert in dam construction and flood control, repeatedly warned about the inherent dangers of the ambitious dam-building projects and the critical need for adequate spillways. For the Banqiao Dam, Chen advocated for the inclusion of at least 12 sluice gates to ensure adequate flood discharge. However, his recommendations were overruled by Party officials who deemed them "too conservative" and "unrevolutionary," ultimately reducing the number of gates to just five. For his principled criticisms, Chen was denounced as a "rightist" and "anti-Party element," and removed from his position by the CCP.

For decades, the CCP maintained a strict silence about the Banqiao disaster. Information was suppressed, records were sealed, and any public discussion was forbidden. This deliberate cover-up was a desperate attempt by the bureaucracy to conceal its culpability and maintain its facade of infallible leadership. The regime's priority was

not the welfare of the affected population, but the preservation of its own power and bureaucratic privilege.

It was not until the early 2000s that the CCP would declassify documents about the Banqiao Dam. While making limited admissions of the “lessons learned” in dam construction, the CCP reports emphasize unprecedented and extreme rainfall from Typhoon Nina as the cause of the disaster. The CCP bureaucrats who ignored repeated warnings from scientists and went to great lengths to silence them, were never held accountable for the tens of thousands of deaths and millions of people turned into refugees as the result of their criminal decisions.

**75 years ago: American singer Paul Robeson’s passport cancelled**

On August 4, 1950, African American singer and activist Paul Robeson had his passport cancelled by the State Department in response to his critical comments on American involvement in the Korean War, as well as his Communist Party affiliations.

The passport was cancelled after Robeson refused to hand it in as demanded by the State Department. Immigration authorities and the FBI were ordered to prevent Robeson from leaving the country, because any trip Robeson made abroad would “not be in the interest of the United States.”

The cancelling of Robeson’s passport was a turning point in a years-long campaign of silencing the artist, who had long held sympathies for communist ideas, albeit with a great deal of political distortion resulting from the influence of Stalinism.

Robeson and his lawyer sought an explanation from Secretary of State Dean Acheson for why his passport had been cancelled. The immediate reason given by the State Department was that Robeson had refused to sign an affidavit and pledge, under the antidemocratic Smith Act, that he was not a communist. Robeson later noted, citing the blacklisting and conviction for contempt of the Hollywood Ten earlier that year, that his motivation in refusing to do so was his resolve to never “comply with any demand of legislative committees or department officials that infringes upon the Constitutional rights of all Americans.”

Other political calculations on the part of the Truman administration were no doubt in play, including that Robeson, an outspoken critic of the Korean War and the US involvement in it, should be silenced to discourage the growth of anti-war sentiment. Three weeks earlier, Robeson had spoken at a well-attended “hands off Korea” public rally in Harlem, New York. A year prior he spoke at the World Peace Conference in Paris, where he made statements that discouraged support for war against the USSR. “It is unthinkable that American Negroes will go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations ... against a country which in one generation has raised our people to the full dignity of mankind,” Robeson said.

The decision of the Truman Administration to cancel Robeson’s passport in 1950 reflected the combining of McCarthyite repression of those associated with communism and the suppression of anti-war opposition at the outbreak of the Cold War, driven primarily by the US effort to establish and solidify its global hegemony, above all against the Soviet Union. Robeson would be drawn into a lengthy legal battle for years afterwards until his passport was finally restored in 1958.

**100 years: Ku Klux Klan stages mass march in Washington, DC**

On August 8, 1925, an estimated 50,000 members of the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), staged a march down Pennsylvania Avenue in the American capital. The Klansmen (and Klanswomen) marched unmasked as a part of an effort to promote themselves as a legitimate patriotic association.

As the *New York Times*, whose tone was anything but hostile, reported: “American flags were in great number marchers. Banners borne by Klansman proclaimed they were ‘100 per cent Americans.’ Klan drill teams gave exhibitions of their skill in doing intricate marching formations as they passed along the broad expanse of Pennsylvania Avenue.” The *Times* noted that many marchers gave fascist salutes.

The native fascist organization was then at the height of its membership of between 2.5 and 4 million members, not only in the South, which was governed by Jim Crow racial segregation laws, but in the Midwest, Northeast, and West as well.

This “second Klan” had been founded in 1915 in imitation of the original Klan that sought to suppress the political activity of freed blacks and sympathetic whites in the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. The second Klan, however, emerged, in a period of the upswing of working-class struggle and emergence of socialist sentiment in large numbers of workers. It was the beneficiary of American imperialism which was assuming the role of a world power.

According to the FBI, by 1925 the KKK was responsible for “hangings, floggings, mutilations, tarring and featherings, kidnappings, brandings by acid, along with a new intimidation tactic, cross-burnings.” While the majority of the victims were African American in the south, many others included socialists, militant workers, Jews, Catholics and immigrant workers. The South saw thousands of racist lynchings in this period, often with the open or covert help of the KKK.

Events after the rally were cancelled because of heavy rain, but on the next night over 75,000 people assembled in Arlington National Cemetery to witness the burning of an 80-foot cross.



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