

This week in history: August 25-31

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

24 August 2025

25 years ago: Scientists discover potential ocean on Jupiter's moon Europa

On August 25, 2000, NASA scientists reported in *Science* that Europa, one of Jupiter's four large moons, may have the conditions for indigenous life following their discovery of a salty ocean beneath its icy surface. Margaret Kivelson, a University of California at Los Angeles geophysicist, commented on the significant finding, saying that "water is the most probable medium on Europa" and that the finding "makes it likely that liquid water persists in the present epoch."

The exploration commenced at the beginning of the year when the space probe Galileo measured Europa's magnetic field using a magnetometer. When Galileo sailed by Europa, it detected changes in Europa's magnetic pole every 5.5 hours. Scientists determined this was likely caused by an electrically conductive layer—more than likely a salty liquid—lying beneath Europa's icy crust. In this scenario, saltwater interacted with Jupiter's strong magnetic field, creating a variable magnetic effect on Galileo's instrument.

Torrence Johnson of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory stated that "the magnetometer data is the only indication we have that there's an ocean there now, rather than in the geological past. The evidence is still indirect and requires several steps of inference to get to the conclusion that there really is a salty ocean."

Further evidence allowed scientists to bolster their theories on the extent and possibility of liquid water trapped under Europa's crust. Researchers estimated that Europa's subsurface ocean was at least 7 kilometers (4.34 miles) deep, with an overlying ice crust between 0.8 to 10 kilometers (.49 to 6.2 miles) thick. The substantial depth and pressure created a goldilocks zone of potentially stored, liquid water, despite Europa's extremely frigid surface temperatures (around -162°C or -259.6°F).

Galileo's powerful photographic images captured the moon's scarred surface covered in intersecting cracks and fissures. In one spot, the huge depth of these crevices appeared to permit water to ooze to the surface and instantly solidify into ice. With the consistent freezing of seeping water, images depicted evidence of ice blocks breaking off and floating away, similar to the movements of receding, thawing glaciers on Earth.

Notwithstanding Europa's harsh, bleak and inhospitable environment, there are similarities to Earth's extreme environments. Primitive life forms such as microbe colonies within polar regions and ecosystems near deep-sea volcanic vents manage to survive even without sunlight and using different methods for energy sources.

50 years ago: Portuguese Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves removed from office

On August 28, 1975, Portuguese Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves was forcibly removed from office by the right wing of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA). The order to dismiss Gonçalves came directly from President Francisco da Costa Gomes but was the culmination of a campaign orchestrated by a cabal of military officers known as the "Group of Nine," acting in concert with the Socialist Party (SP) and backed by international imperialism.

The Group of Nine, headed by figures like Major Ernesto Melo Antunes, had issued a manifesto in July that explicitly opposed the socialist aspirations of the Portuguese working class. They advocated instead for a "pluralistic" and "social-democratic" path—weasily phrases that meant preserving capitalist property relations and subordinating the working class to the bourgeois state. The Group of Nine represented the most reactionary section of the military hierarchy, who recognized that the growing power of workers' committees and land occupations posed a direct threat to Portuguese capitalism.

The sacking of Gonçalves was a major consolidation of the right-wing forces in the MFA government. Notwithstanding the muddled left-populism of Gonçalves himself, his removal marked the beginning of the counter-revolution to crush the mobilization of the Portuguese working class.

After the April 1974 Carnation Revolution, the working class and oppressed masses entered the political stage for the first time in half a century, after the collapse of the authoritarian regime founded by long-time dictator Antonio Salazar. A spontaneous movement of factory occupations and land seizures swept the country, with workers' councils and soldiers' committees emerging as embryonic forms of dual power. This genuine revolutionary movement, however, was met with a concerted counter-revolutionary offensive.

The months leading up to Gonçalves' removal were among the most intense periods of the Carnation Revolution. Known as the "Hot Summer," July and August 1975 saw open battles between the workers committees and right-wing vigilantes. Aligned with the Stalinist Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), Gonçalves sought to present himself as a supporter of the working class and in mid August announced a program of nationalizations in several industries.

These limited measures were intended to keep workers subordinated to the MFA government. The line of the PCP was that the workers committees should not develop into soviets and take power independently,

but that the military junta of the MFA, itself filled with former officers of the fascist Estado Novo government, was the revolutionary force to rely on.

Even still, to Portuguese and international capitalism Gonçalves' nationalization proposals were entirely unacceptable. The Socialist Party, led by Mário Soares and with open support from US imperialism, acted as the principal agent of this reaction. As documents from the US State Department and CIA have since revealed, Washington funneled millions of dollars to the SP and other right-wing forces to "encourage the ruling Armed Forces Movement to take action" against the working class.

Further underlying the counter-revolutionary role of the PCP was their acceptance of the coup against Gonçalves. No serious mobilization was organized to fight back against the Group of Nine consolidation of power in the MFA. In fact, the PCP began to distance themselves from Gonçalves immediately after his sacking as to not offend the new MFA leaders. Gonçalves too accepted his own removal and left office without a fight. Afterwards he would retreat nearly entirely from political life.

75 years ago: US President Truman places railroads under military control, blocking major strike

On August 25, 1950, United States President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order which placed America's railroads under the control of the US Army, in anticipation of a nationwide strike of railroad workers that threatened to disrupt the imperialist war in Korea. Using the executive powers granted under the Transportation Act of 1940, which allowed the federal government to take control of transportation systems during times of war, Truman declared in his executive order, "it has become necessary to take possession and assume control of the [railroad] transportation systems for purposes that are needful or desirable in connection with the present emergency."

The decision, which took effect the evening of August 27, primarily served to block the major strike of railroad workers that was due to begin on the morning of Monday, August 28. Truman's statement on the day he issued the order made clear that the federal seizure of railroads was implemented specifically to "take all steps necessary to assure the continued operation of the railroads" in light of the planned strike.

Within 30 minutes of Truman's executive order being issued, the nationwide strike, anticipated to involve 131 major railroads and around 1.7 million rail workers, was called off in a letter jointly signed by the leaders of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Order of Railway Conductors. It stated, "The men we represent will work for the Govt. gladly under Govt. operations of the railroads during this period of crises until this dispute may be settled on its merits through mediation. The strike instructions issued Aug. 23 are postponed indefinitely."

The disparity between the position of the unions and attitude of the rank-and-file workers was revealed when the workers overwhelmingly went on strike despite the federal takeover, with many staying off work for the duration of the Army's occupation. But the fact that the military was sent in to keep the railroads operating meant that the strike had little effect.

The federal seizure of the railroads lasted until May 23, 1952, after 21 months of continued operation by the US Army. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Order of Railway Conductors, together with another union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, accepted the terms of the Truman administration, which fell vastly short of the demands made by the workers.

The calculations of the Truman administration in blocking this

strike were bound up with the outbreak of the Korean War two months prior, and the deployment of US military forces shortly afterwards to reassert its influence in the region. Army Secretary Frank Pace Jr. was particularly clear on the reasons for the railroad takeover, declaring: "We must not permit the flow of essential support to the forces in Korea to be interrupted." Congress largely backed Truman's decision, recognizing that a major strike by railroad workers could jeopardize the ambitions of US imperialism in Korea.

100 years: French troops withdraw from Germany's Ruhr region

On August 25, 1925, the last French and Belgian troops began to withdraw early in the morning from Dortmund and other cities in Germany's highly industrialized Ruhr Valley. Before they marched out and crossed the Rhine, French troops lowered the tricolor and sang the French national anthem, the Marseillaise. Germans celebrated with ringing church bells, torchlit processions, and dancing in the streets.

The French had occupied the area since January 11, 1923, because Germany had defaulted on its reparations payments from the First World War as imposed by the onerous Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The French sought to extract these payments directly from the Ruhr Valley in timber, coal and industrial products. This came in the context of economic dislocation in the area as well as the rest of Germany. Unemployment and hyperinflation drove millions into poverty.

The French occupation faced massive opposition. The Communist (KPD) and Social-Democratic (SPD) parties began to organize strikes in the Ruhr area as well as the rest of Germany as the economic crisis worsened leading to a revolutionary crisis in the summer and autumn of 1923. The German government eventually adapted a policy of passive resistance to the occupation.

After the Communist Party allowed the revolutionary situation to pass, American imperialism intervened to stabilize the German economy with loans, and an economic receivership known as the Dawes Plan that renegotiated Germany's reparations payments, with France's agreement. After September 1924, control of the Ruhr was returned to German civilian authorities and a gradual withdrawal of troops began.

Right-wing organizations attempted to channel opposition along nationalist lines. They kept up a campaign of terror against French troops that included bombing railway lines and bridges and damaging other infrastructure to disrupt the flow of supplies, as well as assassinations of German politicians whom they perceived as collaborating with the French. There were 137 deaths of occupying troops by 1924. About 130 German civilians were killed during the whole occupation, including strikers shot by French troops.



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