

This week in history: September 15-21

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

14 September 2025

25 years ago: Unions end Indian telecom strike, opening the door for privatization

On September 15, 2000, the National Federation of Telecom Employees (NFTE) and the Federation of National Telecom Organisations (FNTO), representing more than 300,000 telecom workers in India, capitulated to government privatization demands and called off a powerful three-day strike. Union leaders presented the agreement—framed around the government’s drive to privatize the telecommunications sector—as a victory, claiming it safeguarded workers’ jobs and pensions. The deal set in motion the transformation of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) into Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL, Indian Communications Corporation) effective October 1, 2000.

From the outset, the union bureaucracies did not challenge the state’s plan for corporatization, restricting their demands to guarantees over job security and pensions. As early as June, NFTE and FNTO leaders had pledged support in exchange for a promise from the communications minister to provide free telephone services to DoT employees.

Despite these concessions, the strike initially drew overwhelming support. About 95 percent of India’s telecom workforce participated, with 300,000 workers paralyzing communications across the country. Internet access and long-distance services were disrupted, while mobile networks also suffered serious interruptions. Major cities such as Delhi and Bombay remained unaffected because they were serviced independently by Mahanagar Telephone Nigam. A further 35,000 workers had been prepared to join the strike but were sidelined through an agreement struck between the government and the Bharatiya Telecom Employees Federation.

The breadth of support revealed the depth of fear among workers about the consequences of privatization. In reality, the government’s assurances on job and pension security meant nothing within the framework of the capitalist market. As a state-owned corporation, BSNL would be compelled to operate according to profit imperatives dictated by global capital, fixing wages, conditions, and employment to the pressures of the international division of labor.

Even as government and union officials denied a blanket endorsement of privatization, the government steadily opened the sector to foreign capital. Regulations were relaxed to permit overseas investors to hold up to 49 percent equity in telecom and mobile

services, and up to 100 percent in Internet service providers. Furthermore, preparations were announced to end the state’s monopoly over international telephone connections through Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL), with privatization scheduled for April 2002. The move was hailed by major media outlets such as the *Hindustan Times* as evidence of the government’s “seriousness” about economic reform.

50 years ago: Patricia (Patty) Hearst arrested

On September 18, 1975, Patty Hearst’s 19-month saga ended with her arrest by the FBI in San Francisco. The 21-year-old granddaughter of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst was initially a kidnapping victim of the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), but became a fugitive accused of bank robbery and other crimes after joining the group while captive. Her capture, along with two other fugitives, ended a widely followed national manhunt.

FBI agents first arrested William and Emily Harris, founding SLA members, who had been under surveillance for several days. About an hour later, agents arrested Hearst and Wendy Yoshimura in a nearby house. Both reportedly surrendered willingly; Hearst stated, “Don’t shoot. I’ll go with you.” Hearst was charged with bank robbery, the Harrises with possessing illegal firearms, and Yoshimura with building up an arms cache. Stephen F. Soliah, owner of the house, was arrested and charged with harboring fugitives.

Events leading to these arrests began in 1973 with the SLA’s assassination of Dr. Marcus Foster, Superintendent of Oakland Schools. The SLA claimed responsibility, claiming to believe it would radicalize Oakland’s working class.

The group gained national attention on February 4, 1974, when it abducted Hearst from her Berkeley apartment, demanding her family distribute millions in food to the poor. As the food giveaway was organized, the SLA released tapes in which Hearst gradually adopted the group’s ideology.

On April 3, 1974, Hearst announced on tape her new underground name “Tania” and declared she had “chosen to stay and fight.” On April 15, she participated in a bank robbery in which \$10,960 was stolen and two bystanders were shot. Hearst was photographed carrying weapons during the robbery and later stated in a recorded

message that she had willingly participated as a full SLA member.

On May 17, 1974, a Los Angeles SWAT team surrounded a house where six SLA members were holed up. After a gun battle, fire engulfed the house, killing all six inside, including leader Donald DeFreeze (“Cinque”), Patricia Soltyski, Nancy Ling Perry, Angela Atwood, Willie Wolfe, and Camilla Hall. The Harrises and Hearst were not present and became the last surviving fugitives.

After her arrest, Hearst was put on trial for bank robbery, convicted, and sentenced to seven years in prison. In 1979, her sentence was commuted by President Jimmy Carter and she was later granted a full pardon by President Bill Clinton in 2001.

The Harrises were convicted and served lengthy prison sentences; Wendy Yoshimura and Stephen F. Soliah were acquitted.

75 years ago: US Congress passes act preparing concentration camps for communists

On September 20, 1950, the United States Congress passed the McCarran Internal Security Act, named after its primary author, Democratic Senator Pat McCarran. Also known as the “Subversive Activities Control Act” and the “Concentration Camp Law,” it required communist organizations to register with the federal government and provided the US president emergency powers to place suspected communists into concentration camps.

McCarran himself was one of the most vocal anti-communists in the US Senate during the period of McCarthyism. As chief sponsor of the Act, his “crusade against Communism” was completely in line with the policy of the US government and the Truman administration. The primary purpose of the Act was to require all members of Communist organizations within the US to register their names and addresses with the Attorney General, thereby facilitating their prosecution under the draconian Smith Act legislation.

However, the law also contained an even more anti-democratic provision under Title II, also known as the Emergency Detention Act. It granted the president the power to declare a state of emergency, which would allow the detention of “each person as to whom there is a reasonable ground to believe that such person probably will engage in, or probably will conspire with others to engage in, acts of espionage or sabotage.”

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had already drawn up a list of 12,000 suspected communists or communist sympathizers to be detained should the president declare such an emergency, and six detention camps were established by the Department of Justice, including one that had previously been used to detain Japanese-American citizens during World War II.

The Emergency Detention Act was ultimately never invoked. The concentration camps were defunded in 1957, but the law itself remained in effect until it was repealed in 1971.

The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party had been the first to be prosecuted under the Smith Act in 1941, with its leaders sent to prison after the opening of World War II. The McCarran Act created the basis for such anti-democratic measures to be extended into the rampant spying and disruption of left-wing organizations into the 1960s and 1970s.

100 years ago: Trotsky’s *Where is Britain Going?* published in the United States

On September 15, 1925, International Publishers published *Whither England?* a collection of essays by Leon Trotsky, better known today by the title *Where is Britain Going?*, which was used when the work was published in Britain in 1926. The book is a translation of articles from the Russian Communist Party daily *Pravda* that appeared in May and June.

It remains one of the most incisive and prescient political works of the last century, appearing at a moment when the British working class was turning sharply to the left and preparing to confront the British capitalist class, which still ruled over an empire that comprised a fifth of humanity, in the general strike of the next year.

In the work, Trotsky laid out not only the historical origins of British bourgeois rule in the Great Rebellion under Oliver Cromwell in the 1640s, but its development in the post-World War I era, when its world hegemony was increasingly overshadowed by the wealth and power of American imperialism. “The United States and Britain constitute twin stars,” Trotsky wrote in the preface to the American edition, “one of which grows dim the more rapidly as the brilliance of the other increases.”

It is remarkable to see, a hundred years on, how Trotsky dealt with the question of a general strike, which was to develop in Britain in a few months. The reader understands that he is giving a perspective and orientation to millions of workers when he writes, for example, “A general strike, if it is not to be a mere protest, signifies an extreme upheaval of society and in any event places at stake the fate of the political regime and the reputation of the revolutionary class force. A general strike can be undertaken when the working class, and above all, its vanguard, is ready to carry through the struggle to the end.”

These words addressed the depth of the crisis of class rule in Britain, and their importance was not lost on the ruling circles on both sides of the Atlantic. It was not an accident that the *New York Times* published a notice of the book with extensive quotations from the work under the headline, “Trotsky Predicts British Upheaval.”



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