

This week in history: September 29-October 5

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

28 September 2025

25 years ago: Ariel Sharon provocation triggers Second Intifada

In the final days of September 2000, a wave of protests erupted across the occupied Palestinian territories, marking the beginning of the Second Intifada. The immediate spark that ignited the mass uprising was when Israeli Likud leader and war criminal Ariel Sharon made a highly provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, a holy site among Muslims. This move was widely seen as an effort to derail peace efforts. The following day, protests, demonstrations, and a general strike swept across the West Bank and Gaza.

Israeli forces responded with overwhelming firepower and a murderous crackdown. Backed by US military aid, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) deployed live ammunition, tanks, and helicopters against largely unarmed demonstrators, many of them stone-throwing youth. In the first five days alone, at least 60 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed, and nearly 1,900 more injured. Israeli casualties were minimal, highlighting a striking imbalance that made it difficult for the imperialist powers to condemn the Palestinians alone for the violence, their usual approach. Israeli soldiers reportedly fired around 1.3 million rounds during those opening days.

One incident on September 30 became seared into global memory. A video circulated worldwide showed 12-year-old Muhammad al-Durrah and his father crouching in terror as they sought cover from Israeli gunfire. Despite repeated pleas for help, the boy was fatally shot, his father hit and wounded moments later, and an ambulance driver attempting a rescue was also gunned down. Israel claimed that Palestinians were using children as human shields, but the images broadcast across Arab and international media told a different story and fueled outrage.

The uprising did not subside quickly. Known as the Second Intifada, it lasted several years and brought intense confrontation between Palestinians and Israeli occupation forces. It echoed the First Intifada of 1987-88, which had been sparked by the crushing social and political conditions under Israeli rule since 1967. By 2000, those hardships had deepened: unemployment exceeded 50 percent in Gaza, while basic necessities like clean water and

sanitation were scarce. Limited self-rule through the Palestinian Authority benefited only a small ruling layer around Yasser Arafat, leaving the vast majority facing poverty and despair. The Arab bourgeois-nationalist regimes issued calls for peace through the United Nations while permitting the wretched conditions and the slaughter to continue. Their financial ties and backing with the imperialists were more important than the lives of the Palestinians.

50 years ago: Workers Revolutionary Party begins campaign against British police repression

Fifty years ago this week, on September 29, 1975, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), the British Trotskyist movement at the time, began a campaign against state repression and infiltration. The campaign was initiated after an unprecedented armed police raid on the WRP College of Marxist Education in Parwich, Derbyshire September 25.

The official pretext for the raid was a defamatory article published in *The Observer* which carried the false allegation that the WRP was stockpiling weapons at the college. Clearly having coordinated its long-planned raid with the publication of *The Observer* article, within just hours of the paper being released, Special Branch police stormed the grounds of the WRP school.

Members of the WRP who were at the school at the time reported that the police ransacked the building and harassed all those who were there. Including forcible strip searches carried out against all the women present. No weapons were found. The police would claim to find a handful of small-caliber bullets in the building, but no guns of any kind were on the premises.

The WRP's immediate response was to mobilize the working class against the state attack and launch a legal counter-offensive. The party immediately initiated a lawsuit against *The Observer* editor, David Astor, for libel concerning the article that served as the pretext for the raid. Furthermore, the WRP demanded a full inquiry into the circumstances of the police operation and set up a Trade Union Inquiry to investigate the facts of the raid, enlisting

the cooperation of numerous Labour MPs and trade union officials.

The WRP defense campaign garnered widespread support. Faced with this mobilization, the government was forced to acknowledge the baseless nature of its attack. By November 5, 1975, Solicitor General Peter Archer was compelled to inform Parliament that “the evidence in respect of the findings of firearm bullets does not justify proceedings” against the WRP.

The attempted police frame-up of the WRP was a political decision made at the highest levels of the bourgeois state. It followed a debate in the House of Lords earlier that year in which the WRP was singled out as a target. The Earl of Kimberley declared that the WRP was “by far the most dangerous of the Trotskyist organizations in this country. It is larger, better organized, and, from the point of view of industrial agitation, more intelligently led than its rivals.”

The police action was an essential component of the Wilson Labour government’s campaign to use state power—such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act—in preparation for massive attacks on the British working class, which had become increasingly militant in recent years. In 1974 British coal miners had carried out a nationwide strike against inflation, wage cuts, and anti-union laws so powerful that it forced out the Conservative government of Edward Heath.

75 years ago: Truman approves NSC-68 and vast expansion of US military

On September 30, 1950, United States President Harry S. Truman approved the National Security Report 68 (NSC-68) policy document, also known by its full title: “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security.” After Truman’s signature of approval, the policy came into effect and resulted in a massive expansion of US military capabilities and reflected an escalation of the Cold War during its early years.

NSC-68 was initially drafted by Paul Nitze, Director of Policy Planning in Truman’s State Department, and presented to Truman himself in April 1950. It was almost six months later when the document was approved by the National Security Council (NSC) on September 29, followed a day later by Truman’s official approval.

The document advocated for a “rollback” strategy against the Soviet Union and set as one its chief aims to “reduce the power and influence of the USSR.” The rationale presented was to render the USSR no longer capable of posing “a threat to the peace, national independence, and stability of the world family of nations.” In reality, the Truman administration’s offensive against the USSR was aimed at consolidating the untrammeled global dominance of American imperialism.

To achieve the “rollback” strategy put forward in the document, NSC-68 called for “a much more rapid and concerted build-up” of US military strength, which included a tripling of the defence budget. From 1950 to 1951, the US military budget increased from \$13.5 billion to \$48 billion. In

the same time span, the personnel size of the US military more than doubled from 1.5 million to over 3 million.

The NSC’s approval officially proposed a timeline of “four to five years” for foreign policy to be based on the recommendations contained within NSC-68. In actual fact, the document guided foreign policy of the US for the duration of the Cold War and was only declassified in 1975.

100 years: Dancer Josephine Baker premiers in France

On October 2, 1925, the dance cabaret *La Revue nègre* made its first performance in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, featuring for the first time the extraordinary African American dancer and actress Josephine Baker.

A revue was a popular theatrical form of the time that combined various songs, dances, and sketches, often with a common theme. *La Revue nègre* combined jazz with original choreography, burlesque, and scenes with mobile sets. Jazz had been introduced to France in 1918 by American soldiers and the music was still novel but becoming enormously popular in Europe.

The star of the show was the 19-year-old Baker, whose *Danse Sauvage*, was, to most critics, the high point of the show.

While the show pandered to some extent to colonial images of Africa and its people, it marked a step forward for the equality and rights of artistic expression for performers of African descent.

Baker herself was associated with the Harlem Renaissance, one of the most significant literary and artistic movements in the United States of the period and one which had many connections with socialist and working class movements. She had performed to musical shows led by Duke Ellington in the Plantation Club and had been in the chorus in the 1921 performance of *Shuffle Along*, the first successful full-length musical productions on Broadway to be written, directed, and performed entirely by African Americans.

Baker came to epitomize the Jazz Age and was one of the first international black celebrities. She became not only beloved with the public in France (where she eventually became a citizen), but also among artists and writers. Pablo Picasso and Jean Cocteau were among her admirers, and the American writer Ernest Hemingway called her “the most sensational woman anyone ever saw.”



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