

This week in history: October 6-12

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

5 October 2025

25 years ago: Union bureaucrats sabotage public transit strike in Los Angeles

On October 7, 2000, the Los Angeles transit workers' strike entered its fourth week, making it the longest city transit stoppage in more than a decade. The 4,400 striking bus and train operators, members of the United Transportation Union (UTU), were resisting the Metropolitan Transit Authority's (MTA) push for more part-time workers and privatization of routes. Workers were also trying to reverse over a decade's worth of union-backed concessions such as tiered wages, elimination of COLA, and subcontracting.

Four days later, on October 11, some 42,000 Los Angeles County workers—library staff, sanitation and maintenance crews, health clinic and jail employees, and others—joined the wave of labor unrest by launching a strike and picketing at 250 sites across the county. They demanded a 15 percent wage increase over three years to offset the rising cost of living in one of the nation's most expensive cities, while the County Board of Supervisors countered with a 9 percent offer coupled with cutbacks to healthcare coverage and higher medical co-pays. In the country's second largest city, county workers made poverty wages, averaging \$32,000 per year and dropping as low as \$20,000 per year for some essential government employees.

With the possibility of nearly 50,000 workers shutting down public services that hundreds of thousands of people relied upon, a coordinated effort by the union bureaucracy and the capitalist state sought to undermine their struggle, break the strikes, and shatter crystallizing proletarian solidarity.

On October 12, the leadership of the AFL-CIO and Service Employees International Union ordered Los Angeles county workers to return to work without a contract. This undemocratic strikebreaking was intended to sabotage the public transit strike.

After the back-to-work order, UTU President James Williams immediately moved to bring the MTA's final offer to the membership for a vote. Although Williams recommended a "no" vote in an effort to protect his own credibility, he had worked closely with the AFL-CIO and Democratic and Republican officials to wear down the public transit strike, leaving workers

little alternative but to accept management's terms.

The week before, Williams had backed a brokered proposal between Democratic Governor Gray Davis and the bureaucracy in the Amalgamated Transit Union and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees to shut down the strike. In this scabbing maneuver, the union bureaucracy had ordered its members to cross the picket lines. However, the vast majority of rank-and-file workers refused to collaborate in strikebreaking and stood with their fellow transit workers.

50 years ago: John Lennon wins deportation battle to remain in US

On October 7, 1975, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals handed down a major decision granting musician John Lennon of the Beatles the right to permanent residence in the United States. This legal and political victory for Lennon ended a four-year campaign of harassment by the US state apparatus aimed at silencing one of the world's most prominent anti-war musicians by revoking his immigration status on political grounds.

Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono had initially moved to New York in 1971. Lennon was a well-known public opponent of the US imperialist war in Vietnam. He utilized his immense platform as a popular musician to promote the anti-war movement, which would put him in the crosshairs of the massive repressive state machinery built up under programs like the FBI's COINTELPRO. His activism included planning a concert tour to coincide with the Republican National Convention in 1972 to mobilize the youth vote against Richard Nixon.

Internal memos later revealed a coordinated effort between the White House, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the FBI, which had been tracking Lennon for years. A memo from Senator Strom Thurmond explicitly called for Lennon's deportation as a "strategic counter-measure" to "neutralize a potential leader of the anti-war movement." The INS initiated deportation proceedings against Lennon, citing a minor 1968 marijuana possession conviction from the UK as the pretext.

In court, Lennon's attorney, Leon Wildes, argued that the drug conviction was not a valid reason for deportation under U.S. law, as British law at the time did not require a showing of "guilty knowledge" for a conviction. Furthermore, Wildes argued that the government's pursuit of Lennon was an act of "selective prosecution" based on his political views.

During his initial deportation hearings before an immigration judge in 1972, Lennon was questioned on his political beliefs and activities. When asked about his association with political figures like Jerry Rubin, a founding member of the Youth International Party (Yippies), Lennon responded simply, "I am a musician and I came to America to perform music."

He maintained that his interactions were with individuals, not political organizations, but did not shy away from his anti-war position. Lennon's testimony, along with the detailed arguments from his lawyer, made apparent the government's politically motivated repression against the musician.

While Lennon's case established that the direct "selective prosecution" based on non-threatening political speech is considered an illegal abuse of power, the government maintains it has the power to deport non-citizens on broad "national security" grounds; including against individuals who have committed no crime if their speech or actions are considered to be aiding "terrorism."

75 years ago: Police massacre of civilians begins in South Korea

October 9, 1950, marked the beginning of a three-week-long massacre of civilians which took place in the Gyeonggi-do district of South Korea. By the end of October, at least 150 unarmed civilians were killed by South Korean police.

The massacre took place in and around the Geumjeong Cave, a man-made vertical tunnel which had been dug for gold mining during the Imperial Japanese occupation of Korea. Over a period of three weeks beginning on October 9, officers from the Goyang Police Station rounded up men, women and children and either shot them at the cave, or at a nearby location before discarding their bodies at the cave.

These civilians were killed by police officers merely on the suspicion that they were communists, communist sympathizers, or alleged collaborators with the North Korean army. Individuals suspected of any such "disloyal" activity were summarily executed by the police along with their families. Among the victims were eight teenagers and seven women.

The massacre began in the immediate aftermath of US-led forces capturing the South Korean capital of Seoul at the end of September. The Battle of Seoul was followed by the reinstallation of Syngman Rhee as President of the Republic of Korea (ROK), the US-backed puppet regime in South Korea. Far from an isolated incident, the massacre at Goyang by South Korean forces was a continuation in practice of the brutal anti-communist repression which Rhee's government had overseen even prior to the outbreak

of the Korean War.

The crime at Goyang remains one of the lesser-known atrocities of the Korean War, owing to the decades-long cover-up by the ROK government. None of the perpetrators for the Goyang massacre were ever held to account, and the remains of the victims were only discovered and excavated by family members in 1995.

100 years ago: American troops sent to Panama City to suppress strike

On October 12, 1925, at the request of Panamanian president Roberto Chiari, the United States sent 600 troops to Panama City to suppress a general strike. The troops, from Fort Clayton in the Canal Zone, the American-controlled enclave that surrounded the Panama Canal, entered the city with fixed bayonets and orders to disperse gatherings of more than five people and to put out fires. The troops dispersed a crowd of thousands that had come to protest their presence. Three workers were killed and dozens arrested. The Americans then set up machine-gun nests around public buildings.

Peaceful demonstrations had been occurring in the city since June, and a renters' strike organized by the trade unions had begun to protest rent hikes by landlords. Housing stock was in short supply partly because of the influx of thousands of unemployed former canal workers who had been forced out of the Canal Zone in 1924.

On October 10 Panamanian police fired on an open-air demonstration, killing two protesters. Workers then shut down businesses and transportation in a general strike.

American newspapers portrayed the invasion as necessary to suppress dangerous radicals but in fact the troops were present to protect the wealthy Panamanian elite. The *New York Times* ran articles that contained the vilest racist and imperialist slurs on the Panamanian people, quoting, for example, an American steamboat captain who witnessed the strike as saying the " 'nucleus of a revolution is a bottle of rum, two halfbreeds [sic] and a negro armed with rifles and machetes.' "

According to one historian, "The chief of the Army's Panama Canal Department, General William Lassiter, wanted to go further and remain in Panama City to oversee mass evictions of tenants, but the State Department in Washington overruled him."



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