

This week in history: October 20-26

19 October 2025

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.

25 years ago: General Robert Guei removed from power in Ivory Coast

On October 26, 2000, General Robert Guei, who had seized power on Christmas Eve 1999 in a military coup, was removed from power after protests erupted in Abidjan, the capital of the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), and the military withdrew its support. The preceding presidential elections, held the previous Sunday, signaled his eventual downfall. While Guei captured no more than a third of the votes, Laurent Gbagbo, a self-proclaimed socialist and longtime trade union bureaucrat—but in reality a defender of capitalism—secured roughly 60 percent. Guei had barred several prominent rivals, including Alassane Ouattara of the Rally of the Republicans and Emile Bombet of the Democratic Party, prompting opposition calls for an election boycott and resulting in low turnout.

Faced with clear defeat, Guei attempted to cling to power by declaring himself the winner and sacking the electoral commission. His move triggered massive demonstrations across Abidjan. When members of the gendarmerie (a key paramilitary force) joined the protesters, the regime's collapse accelerated. Defections spread among army and police units that had propped up Guei's undemocratic reign. With armored vehicles mounted with machine guns, Gbagbo's faction stormed the state television station. He declared himself president of the country and vowed to form "a broad-based government of national unity." During the brief gun battle and rioting, around 30 people had been killed.

The confrontation in the West African country bore the unmistakable imprint of French imperialism. Though France's formal colonial rule had ended in 1960, its economic, political, and cultural dominance persisted. Paris maintained a deep interest in "stabilizing" Ivory Coast, the world's largest cocoa producer and a central economic hub in West Africa and the continent. Decades of IMF-mandated austerity and plummeting cocoa prices had driven up unemployment and poverty, fueling social unrest and political instability.

The greater the turmoil, the sharper the response from French imperialism. French ruling circles eventually turned decisively against Guei, not because of his xenophobic and anti-immigrant policies, but because he failed to consolidate the Ivorian bourgeoisie and quell social unrest in the Ivorian working class. With hundreds of French troops stationed in the country, Paris worked through the local

gendarmerie to ensure a transition favorable to its interests. The bourgeois Socialist Party government in France cultivated ties with Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front, publicly endorsing him as the "least worst" option for preserving French influence in West Africa. Any talk about "free and fair" elections fell by the wayside.

50 years ago: Soviet Venera space probes send first images from another planet

On October 22, 1975, after a four-month journey across the solar system, the Soviet Union's Venera 9 descent module successfully touched down on the surface of Venus. Equipped with a camera designed to withstand the intense pressure of Venus's atmosphere, Venera 9 sent back to Earth, a distance of 360 million kilometers, the first images ever seen of the surface of another planet.

The panoramic image revealed a stark, hostile landscape, littered with sharp, jagged rocks up to 40 cm across. The area was found to be geologically active, meaning that recent lava flows or tectonic movement was likely.

Just three days later, on October 25, its identical twin, Venera 10, also successfully landed on Venus in a different region of the planet. It too sent back a panoramic image, but this time revealing a dramatically different landscape of smoother, weathered, pancake-like rocks suggestive of ancient lava flows. For 53 and 65 minutes respectively, the two landers transmitted a wealth of data from one of the most forbidding environments in the solar system, measuring surface temperatures of 485°C (905°F) and atmospheric pressures 90 times that of Earth.

These enormous successes were the culmination of a long and difficult campaign of Venus exploration, directed by scientists at the Space Research Institute (IKI) and engineers at the Lavochkin Association. The Venera program, initiated in 1961, was marked by numerous early failures that slowly built a foundation of knowledge. The first probes were designed based on Earth-based observations that proved wildly inaccurate.

In 1967, Venera 4 became the first probe launched from Earth to enter another planet's atmosphere and send back direct measurements, but it was crushed by pressures far exceeding its 25-atmosphere design limit. However, the information received was enough to teach scientists how to build stronger probes for future missions.

The most significant breakthrough came in 1970, when the Venera 7 became the first spacecraft to achieve a successful soft landing on another planet and transmit data from its surface. This was followed by the successful Venera 8 landing in 1972, which confirmed the extreme conditions and carried a photometer that determined

photography on the surface would be possible, paving the way for Venera 9 and 10.

Previously imagined in science fiction as everything from a jungle-like world to a global ocean, Venus was revealed to be a geologically complex and active planet with a volcanic past. The two distinct landing sites proved that Venus, like Earth, had diverse terrains shaped by powerful geological forces.

In an interview, Boris V. Nepoklonov, one of the Soviet scientists leading the mission, commented, “We thought there couldn’t be rocks on Venus, they would all be annihilated by erosion, but here they are, with edges absolutely not blunted. This picture makes us reconsider all our concepts of Venus.”

75 years ago: Communist Party Dissolution Act signed into law in Australia

On October 20, 1950, the Communist Party Dissolution Act received royal assent and thus passed as law in Australia. The sweeping bill declared the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) to be “an unlawful association and is, by force of this Act, dissolved.” The Bill gave additional sweeping powers to the Governor-General, the federal representative of the British monarch, to declare a person or organisation such as a trade union to be a communist and a “threat to national security.” Such individuals or organisations would not be allowed to be employed in a government position, as well as being barred from holding office within a union which had been declared by the Governor-General to be “vital to the security and defence of Australia.”

While specifically seeking to outlaw the CPA, the Bill sought to crack down on left-wing political opposition much more broadly. This was expressed by its far-reaching definition of a “communist”: anyone who “supports or advocates the objectives, policies, teachings, principles, or practises of communism, as expounded by Marx and Lenin.”

The Bill was originally brought into the Australian Parliament by the right-wing Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies in April 1950. While the first version of the Bill did not get passed, a second version was introduced to Parliament and passed in the Senate with the support of the Labor Party on October 19, 1950. It was signed into law by the Governor-General the following day.

The passing of the Communist Party Dissolution Act marked an escalation of the anti-communist campaign being waged by Liberal and Labor parties alike. Numbers of CPA members were arrested and jailed in 1949, including CPA leader Lance Sharkey, who was sentenced to three years in prison for “having uttered and published seditious words.”

Notwithstanding the anti-democratic attacks against it, the CPA had for decades been a counter-revolutionary Stalinist organisation, which rejected any fight for the political independence of the working class instead subordinating it to parliament and the Labor Party. The true target of the anti-communist attacks was the working class, which in the years immediately after the Second World War engaged in mass industrial struggle with broad anti-capitalist sentiment that had been fuelled by war and depression.

The Communist Party Dissolution Act 1950 was later deemed unconstitutional and struck down by the High Court of Australia in March 1951.

Read more:

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) Stalinism, Trotskyism and World War II

100 years: Italian imperialism pushes into Somaliland

On October 20, 1925, the world press reported that the Italian Royal Corps of Colonial Troops had invaded the Hobyo Sultanate in what is now north-central Somalia. The action was overseen by the governor of what was then called Italian Somaliland, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, a devoted Fascist who had been appointed to his role in 1923 by Benito Mussolini.

Italian Somaliland had been a protectorate of Italy since 1898, but Italy had very little control over the sultanate and neighboring regions and was constrained by a series of treaties from direct rule. In line with Fascist colonial policy, Mussolini ordered De Vecchi to invade the semi-independent regions, which included not only Hobyo, but the Sultanate of Majeerteen, abrogate treaties and disarm the population.

The *New York Times* glowingly reported that the inhabitants of Hobyo “welcomed the Italians with benevolence and sympathy.”

In only a few weeks, however, a rebellion under the leadership of one of the local officials, Omar Samatar, was raised against the Italians. With popular support the colonizers were driven from their positions and harassed. One ranking Italian officer was assassinated and another ambushed.

De Vecchi called for help and took personal command, but the Italian casualties mounted and the invasion increasingly turned into a debacle. Rebel forces retook key strongholds, and it was only with massive reinforcements that the Italians were finally able to consolidate control by December. De Vecchi was effectively removed from control and eventually dismissed as governor.

Hobyo and Majeerteen were annexed to Italian Somaliland in 1927 and Italy established direct rule over the region.



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