

This week in history: October 27-November 2

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

26 October 2025

25 years ago: Kosovo elections expose deepening nationalist divisions and discontent with KLA-NATO rule

On October 8, 2000, local elections were held in Kosovo under the supervision of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), established in June 1999 following NATO's bombing campaign and the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces. The vote took place amid a volatile regional atmosphere: only weeks earlier, a political crisis gripped Yugoslavia when Slobodan Milošević lost the presidential election to Vojislav Koštunica.

Western officials and media celebrated the Kosovo elections as a "democratic milestone" for the war-torn province. In reality, the results revealed both the persistence of severe poverty—marked by unemployment exceeding 50 percent, collapsing public services, and an economy in ruins—and the nationalist fractures created by imperialist intervention. Far from resolving the region's underlying problems, the elections signaled the deepening of ethnic and political divisions across the Balkans.

The vote exposed how the Western powers had long manipulated nationalist forces to serve their regional interests. Figures such as Franjo Tuđman in Croatia, Alija Izetbegović in Bosnia, and even Slobodan Milošević in Serbia were all, at various times, supported by the major powers to advance their strategic aims. In Kosovo, the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) filled this role. This encouragement of nationalism unleashed devastating conflicts that NATO later intervened in under the banner of "peacekeeping," ultimately intensifying the fragmentation and bloodshed.

Against this backdrop, voters, who were primarily ethnic Albanians, expressed their opposition to the violent nationalism championed by the KLA, an organization backed by NATO during the war. Hashim Thaçi, the former KLA commander running under the Democratic Party of Kosovo, won only 27 percent of the vote, while Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo secured just 8 percent. Their poor performance reflected popular resentment toward the KLA's criminal methods and its collaboration with Western powers.

In the end, Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo, which contrasted itself to the extreme nationalism of the KLA, achieved a landslide victory with nearly 60 percent of the vote. Most Kosovan Serbs boycotted the election entirely, as they had been excluded from meaningful participation in the government under joint NATO-UN occupation. By that time, roughly half of Kosovo's Serb population had already been expelled following NATO's 1999 intervention.

The 2000 elections thus marked not a step toward "democracy," but the consolidation of ethnic partition and imperialist control over the Balkans. For the working masses in the region, unifying along class lines in

opposition to both imperialism and nationalism was the only solution to the immense problems in the region.

50 years ago: Ford declares federal support for the NYC austerity budget

On October 29, 1975, US President Gerald Ford delivered a speech at the National Press Club in which he announced that he would veto any act of Congress intended to resolve the New York City budget crisis. In the speech, Ford made it clear that he would side with the banks in implementing austerity measures to cut thousands of jobs and decimate the living standards of New York City workers. The New York *Daily News* famously summed up the speech with the headline: "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD."

As the Workers League, the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, wrote in the *Bulletin* at the time, the speech was not simply a fiscal policy dispute with the city government. It was a "bitter, snarling attack on the working class" and a signal that the concessions and reforms of the post-war boom were over.

The budget crisis in New York City stemmed from the decision of city and state government officials to fund the city budget for a number of years by taking out loans from Wall Street. In 1975 the banks began demanding payment on the debt and ordered the city government to cut tens of thousands of public service jobs in order to raise the funds.

The situation in New York was the highest expression of the global economic crisis that began with the end of the Bretton Woods monetary system in 1971 and intensified with imperialist setbacks in Vietnam, the Middle East, and Africa. The American ruling class, through Ford, was now declaring openly that it would be workers who must be forced to pay for the failures of their wars.

In his speech, Ford stated with disdain that city workers enjoyed a moderate standard of living. "The record shows that New York City's wages and salaries are the highest in the United States. A sanitation worker with three years' experience now receives a base salary of nearly \$15,000 a year," Ford said.

Ford added to his list of social services to be gutted as "impermissible luxuries," pensions for city workers, paid vacation time, a surplus of available hospital beds, free tuition to City University of New York (CUNY), and welfare benefits.

Ford's "solution" was to veto any federal bail-out and instead pass new bankruptcy laws. This gave the signal to the Emergency Financial Control Board (EFCB), an unelected New York state body appointed in September

1975, dominated by corporate and banking interests, to manage the budget, that the federal government approved the austerity measures the board was planning to impose on the city.

The EFCB would seize control of the city's budget, superseding all democratic processes. Its first acts were to implement the cuts Ford demanded: it imposed a three-year wage freeze on city workers, ordered thousands of new layoffs, dismantled free tuition at the CUNY, and forced massive cuts to hospitals, libraries, and basic social services.

75 years ago: Puerto Rico uprising suppressed by United States

On October 30, 1950, an attempted insurrection led by the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (PNPR) against the US-controlled government in San Juan broke out in several towns on the island.

The PNPR had for months been planning an armed revolt that sought to overturn the colonial status of Puerto Rico and establish an independent state. Widespread hostility to US rule had intensified in the aftermath of the 1937 Ponce massacre, when police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators, killing 18 and injuring more than 200. Repressive measures were instituted to criminalize opposition to US rule, including the 1948 "Gag Law," which imposed up to 10 years in prison for displaying the Puerto Rican flag.

The immediate pretext for the uprising was the police killing of four PNPR members on October 27, one day after party president Pedro Albizu Campos was informed that his house had been surrounded by police waiting to arrest him while he was attending an out-of-town meeting. In response, Albizu Campos called for a revolution, with uprisings planned in Jayuya, Utuado, San Juan, and several other towns.

The Jayuya uprising became the center of the insurrection. It was the town of PNPR leader Blanca Canales, in whose home weapons had been stored. Armed Nationalists stormed the Jayuya police station, cut telephone lines, and burned down the US Post Office building. In defiance of the Gag Law, the insurgents led by Canales raised the Puerto Rican flag in the town square and declared the island a free republic.

The uprisings were swiftly and brutally suppressed. US-backed Puerto Rican governor Luis Muñoz Marín declared martial law, and Washington sent fighter planes to assist the Puerto Rican National Guard in crushing the rebellion. Nearly every rooftop in Jayuya was bombed or machine-gunned, leaving the town in ruins. An estimated 70 percent of Utuado was demolished in the same manner, and four insurgents were executed by the National Guard after surrendering, their bodies publicly displayed for hours as a warning.

In the aftermath of the crushed uprising, in which at least 28 people were killed, thousands of civilians who supported Puerto Rican independence were arrested by the government.

100 years: Soviet military leader Mikhail Frunze poisoned at Stalin's orders

On October 31, 1925, the Soviet People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, Mikhail Frunze, died during routine surgery, almost certainly poisoned under the orders of Joseph Stalin, the Russian Communist Party General Secretary and leader of the bureaucratic faction that had come to dominate the party.

Frunze had gone into the hospital for surgery on a chronic ulcer and was given an overdose of chloroform. The Russian historian Vadim

Rogovin recounts the circumstances:

The doctors did not recommend an operation because of his weak heart, which might not withstand chloroform. Stalin ordered a consultation of specially chosen doctors, who recommended surgical intervention. The Politburo approved their decision. Frunze was forced to submit, and proceeded to meet his end. ...

Evidently, A. K. Voronsky, his close friend from the Ivanovo-Voznesensk underground and an oppositionist, tried even more strenuously to talk Frunze out of the operation. ...

The memoirs of Anna M. Larina [the wife of Stalin's ally at the time, Nikolai Bukharin] provide the testimony of Frunze's mother, who said that Stalin removed Frunze because the latter "had acknowledged Trotsky's authority until very recently and treated him with great respect."

Stalin was seeking to uproot opposition to the bureaucracy wherever he could. Already at the start of 1925, the "troika" consisting of Stalin, Lev Kamenev and Gregorii Zinoviev that had sought to slander and sideline Trotsky, had begun to break up. As a political ally of Zinoviev and an admirer of Trotsky, Frunze became an obstacle to Stalin.

Frunze joined the Bolshevik party as an 18-year-old in 1903 and had done underground work on behalf of the party in the textile center of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, where he led a major strike during the 1905 revolution. He was arrested in 1907 and spent 10 years in Tsarist prisons. During the February 1917 revolution he led a workers' militia in Minsk and was elected to the Byelorussian Soviet. He played an outstanding role in the Civil War, defeating counterrevolutionary armies as a commander and eventually put in charge of the entire Eastern Front by Trotsky. He replaced Trotsky in January 1925 as the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council.

His murder was described in a short story by the writer Boris Pilnyak, who was close to Voronsky, "The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon," in 1926, which briefly appeared in the journal *New World* before it was censored. Both Pilnyak and Voronsky were later murdered by Stalin.



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