

This week in history: November 17-23

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

16 November 2025

25 years ago: Peru's president Alberto Fujimori resigns

On November 20, 2000, the president of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, submitted his resignation via fax after more than a decade in power. Fujimori then fled to Japan (where he also held citizenship) to avoid prosecution for serious crimes. Japan's constitution shielded him from extradition due to his citizenship status.

News of his resignation sparked widespread, spontaneous celebrations across major cities in the country, highlighting the massive opposition to a leader whose regime was seen as serving the profit interests of both the Peruvian bourgeoisie and of US imperialism.

To assuage public outrage, Peru's Congress barred Fujimori from holding public office for ten years and removed his presidential immunity, enabling criminal proceedings against him for abandonment of office and dereliction of duty. But this "accountability" buried the regime's most egregious crimes, including corruption, extrajudicial killings, a eugenics scheme called Plan Verde, and the theft of hundreds of millions of dollars, out of fear that exposing these revelations could destabilize capitalist rule.

The events leading up to his downfall revealed a president and cliques embodying rampant corruption and self enrichment, holding close ties to US imperialism, and hostile to the interests of Peru's workers and rural poor. One of the principal architects of this brutal regime was intelligence leader Vladimiro Montesinos. A few months before the regime collapsed, an infamous television incident occurred showing Montesinos openly bribing an elected official to secure a vote.

The financial trail that funded the bribes led directly to Washington. The CIA funneled millions of dollars to Montesinos for combat operations against Shining Path, a Maoist-inspired guerrilla force, yet he illegally orchestrated the delivery of 10,000 AK-47s to the Colombian FARC, pocketing the money. Once the regime's demise was inevitable, the Clinton administration withdrew support, belatedly calling for "free and fair" elections.

The fall of Fujimori threw the Peruvian ruling class into a bitter factional power struggle. The Peruvian Congress, headed by conservative opposition parties united around Popular Action, rejected his resignation and instead voted to remove him for "permanent moral incapacity," a constitutional provision intended to block him from returning to office. Both of Fujimori's vice presidents, Francisco

Tudela (First Vice President) and Ricardo Márquez (Second Vice President) resigned, leaving the posts vacant. Congress then appointed its newly elected president, Valentín Paniagua, as interim president to oversee a caretaker government until new elections.

50 years ago: Fascist dictator Franco dies in Spain

Francisco Franco, 82, Spain's fascist dictator for nearly four decades, died in Madrid on November 20, 1975, after a desperate effort by doctors to prolong his life. The weeks-long medical intervention reflected the instability of the fascist state. The regime rested its legitimacy on little more than Franco's cult of personality.

The Franco dictatorship was rooted in the bloody defeat of the working class during the Spanish Civil War, one of the greatest struggles of the international working class of the 20th century. A powerful workers' revolution had emerged in response to Franco's fascist coup of July 17, 1936, but it was betrayed and crushed by the Popular Front leadership—a coalition that included the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE)—which subordinated the revolutionary struggle to the dictates of the bourgeois Republic; that is, to the defense of capitalism. Aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, Franco defeated the Republican forces in 1939. What followed was a brutal counterrevolution. Hundreds of thousands were executed, imprisoned, or forced into exile. An estimated 200,000 victims were murdered by Franco in the immediate post-civil war years alone.

When the news of Franco's death broke, imperialist governments, which had long embraced the butcher for his suppression of the Spanish working class and as a Cold War ally against the Soviet Union, offered public displays of mourning. US President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sent their "heartfelt condolences." US Vice President Nelson Rockefeller flew to Spain to attend the funeral. The *New York Times* lauded the fascist as a "political leader of extraordinary qualities" who brought "economic recovery" and "unified a divided nation."

The mood was different among Spain's workers, who had suffered brutal repression and poverty for four decades under Franco. Fearful that workers would seize on the death to launch new mass struggles in the wake of the revolutionary upheavals that had brought down the fascist New Order regime in neighboring Portugal, Spain's ruling

class launched a new wave of arrests and repression against political opponents even in the days before Franco's death.

The death of Franco did not bring the fascist regime to an immediate end. Franco had years earlier designated Juan Carlos de Borbón, the grandson of Spain's last monarch, as his successor, who would reclaim the title of King. But the critical role in preserving Spanish capitalism was once again played by the Stalinists of the PCE. Despite mass militancy in the working class and calls for a general strike, the PCE subordinated the working class to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy that would defend the agents of the fascist state, absolving them of their murderous crimes, and perpetuate capitalism in Spain.

75 years ago: American troops reach Chinese border in Korean War

On November 21, 1950, soldiers from the 7th Infantry Division of the US Army reached the Yalu River which separated North Korea and China, marking the first time that US forces reached the border of China in their northward advance in the Korean War. The 17th Infantry Regiment captured the city of Hyesan, the furthest north that US ground forces would advance during the conflict. From their positions along the riverbank at Hyesan, American troops could see the Chinese village of Changbai only 300 metres across the frozen Yalu.

China's earliest involvement in the war occurred almost one month prior, during its "First Phase Offensive." This was the immediate response to US-led forces capturing Pyongyang and continuing to march north toward the Yalu River. After days of fighting with initial successes in halting the opposing side's northward advance, Chinese forces withdrew after the Battle of Pakchon.

On November 12, the 17th Infantry received their orders to continue the northward advance, beginning with the capture of Kapsan, which occurred one week later. Kapsan was situated approximately 30 miles south of Hyesan, which became the next target. The city had already been devastated by air strikes, culminating in a November 13 US Navy carrier plane attack aimed at barracks, buildings and warehouses. After that strike, combined with those before it, 85 percent of the town had been destroyed. A battalion from the 17th Infantry was thus able to march in and occupy Hyesan without opposition on November 21, reaching the banks of the frozen Yalu River.

The string of US victories in their northward advance, combined with the three-week absence of any confrontation with Chinese forces, led to an overconfident mood among the imperialist high command. UN Commander General Douglas MacArthur wrote from Tokyo to the officers leading the Korean campaign that the march north to the Yalu River over the previous 20 days "will be recorded in history as an outstanding military achievement." Less than a week later, China launched its "Second Phase Offensive" that completely reversed these gains, and the overall tide of the war itself.

100 years: Archaeologists unwrap mummy of Tutankhamen

On November 19, 1925, British archaeologist Howard Carter and his team finished unwrapping the mummy of Tutankhamen, who ruled Egypt during the 18th dynasty from approximately 1333 to 1323 BC. The pharaoh's face was exposed for the first time in nearly 3,400 years.

Carter had discovered the tomb, which, unlike any other royal burial site in Egypt, had not been extensively plundered in ancient times, in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor in Upper Egypt in 1922. Carter had found the pharaoh's splendid stone sarcophagus in January 1924 but then suspended excavation because of a dispute with the semi-independent Egyptian government about who should own the artifacts.

Carter returned to work on the sarcophagus in 1925 and by November had opened the three coffins. The innermost coffin was made of solid gold and weighed about 243 pounds (10.4 kg) and was covered with a red shroud. On October 28, the mummy of Tutankhamen wrapped in linen was exposed. A gold mask covered the pharaoh's face and shoulders, depicting the king as the god Osiris. In between the layers of linen—which were difficult to remove because they were carbonized and powdery—priests had placed hundreds of sacred objects, including amulets and jewelry.

When Carter exposed the mummy's face it revealed, according to press reports, a "youth of about 18." On his arms were bracelets, with golden sandals on his feet and a diadem of gold with the insignia of a vulture and a serpent.

The discovery and unwrapping of the mummy was a world event widely covered in the press, exciting the interest of scientists and the public alike, and presenting in a particularly vivid way to millions the antiquity of human civilization.

In subsequent decades, using testing techniques unknown in 1925, researchers discovered that Tutankhamen likely died from malaria and that a broken leg may have also been a factor in his death.



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