

This week in history: November 24-30

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

23 November 2025

25 years ago: United Nations climate summit ends in failure

On November 25, 2000, the United Nations climate summit in the Netherlands collapsed, due to disagreements over implementing the Kyoto Protocol and achieving a 5 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2010. Sharp divisions emerged between the United States, the European Union, and developing nations among the 180 countries represented, exposing the self-serving priorities of imperialist nation-states and the capitalist system in confronting climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had given the summit a sense of urgency with a report warning that global temperatures could rise by as much as 6 degrees Celsius within a century, double previous estimates. Such an increase would greatly heighten the risks of extreme weather events, ecological destruction, widespread disease outbreaks, and economic turmoil.

The main disputes centered on Washington's proposal to meet its emission targets through "carbon sinks," such as reforestation projects that absorb carbon dioxide. Many scientists questioned the effectiveness of this strategy. Rather than making meaningful cuts, the US, backed by Australia, Canada, and Japan, pushed for an emissions-trading scheme and for reforestation projects abroad to count toward their emission targets. The US also demanded that existing forests and farmland be factored in.

No enforcement mechanism was established for countries that failed to meet their pledges, largely due to US pressure. The American oil industry and climate-change deniers in the US Senate claimed that reducing emissions would harm the economy. Developing nations, meanwhile, condemned the hypocrisy of the imperialist powers seeking to "buy the right to pollute" instead of taking real action.

Even among the imperialist nations, fierce infighting erupted. French President Jacques Chirac publicly attacked the US position, noting that America's per capita emissions far exceeded those of the EU. Within the EU itself, tensions flared between the United Kingdom and France over how to negotiate with Washington. At one point, Britain's Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and French Environment Minister Dominique Voynet openly blamed each other for the failure to reach a deal.

As the summit neared its end, chair Jan Pronk proposed a last-minute compromise allowing limited use of carbon sinks by the US, excluding nuclear investments from credit trading, and offering financial aid to developing countries for clean technology. Both the US and EU rejected the plan. Further changes proposed by Germany and the Scandinavian countries led the EU to withdraw its support entirely, ultimately dooming the summit.

The breakdown of the 2000 climate summit underscored the inability of global capitalism to confront an existential crisis that requires rational

planning of society and technology for human need, on a global scale, rather than private profit accumulation. For the capitalist leaders, national and economic interests prevailed over the collective good of humanity.

50 years ago: Right-wing consolidates power in Portugal

On November 25, 1975, armed struggle in the form of a coup and counter-coup broke out between the left and right wings of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), the military regime that had been governing Portugal since the Carnation Revolution in April 1974, which had brought to an end of the fascist Estado Novo government.

The struggle first emerged as a disorganized, left-wing military rebellion. Paratrooper regiments and revolutionary-minded soldiers, reacting to the sudden removal of their left-wing commanders, seized key airbases and military installations in the Lisbon area. This spontaneous rebellion, however, was quickly defeated by the right-wing forces who seized on the opportunity to begin a purge of all left-wing elements in the state.

The right-wing MFA coup was led by Colonel António dos Santos Ramalho Eanes, who had been preparing for months to purge the left-wing elements from the military and the government. Eanes would become president in 1976 after gaining the favor of international capital.

This putsch culminated intense political divisions that had emerged within the MFA itself, splitting the army into an imperialist-backed right-wing faction and a "left" faction aligned with the Stalinists of the Communist Party, the most conscious opponents of socialist revolution.

Throughout the preceding "hot summer" of 1975, the working class had been engaged in an explosive movement, taking over factories and farmlands, and establishing countless committees of workers, peasants and soldiers. These committees, born out of the struggle, held the potential to serve as the nucleus for genuine dual power and ultimately a workers' government.

However, this revolutionary promise was fatally undermined by the Stalinist leadership. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) pursued a deliberate policy of sabotaging the revolution, constantly declaring the MFA to be the "guarantor of democracy" and tying the mass movement to the military's left-wing officers like Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho.

The PCP subordinated the independent workers' committees and mass organizations to the political control of the so-called "left MFA." They argued that this faction of the military would act to defend workers' interests and implement reforms. This policy halted the developing independent political mobilization of the working class.

This Stalinist treachery completely disarmed the working class in the face of the right-wing counter-offensive. When Ramalho Eanes launched his coup on November 25, the celebrated left-wing officers, including Carvalho, meekly capitulated, putting up no resistance.

The PCP would double down on its betrayal by denouncing the left-wing military rebellion as “adventurism” and urging workers to remain in their homes and take no action to stop the consolidation of power by the right or to defend the revolutionary soldiers.

The consequences were swift and brutal. After consolidating power, the right-wing of MFA imposed a state of siege. Civil rights were suspended, and mass repression began against left-wing organizations. Leftist newspapers were silenced, union activity was suppressed, and arrested soldiers and political militants were purged from their positions.

75 years ago: Chinese begin Second Phase Offensive in Korean War

On November 25, 1950, China began its Second Phase Offensive in the Korean War with a counterstrike against advancing United Nations forces, led by the United States. The opening battle of this offensive took place along the Ch’ongch’on River Valley in North Korea, shortly after UN Commander General Douglas MacArthur launched the “Home-by-Christmas Offensive” aimed at expelling Chinese forces from Korea by the end of the year.

China’s First Phase Offensive began one month earlier, with initial successes in halting the northward advance of US-led troops to the Chinese border. After China’s People’s Volunteer Army (PVA) withdrew following the Battle of Pakchon, US troops continued their advance, reaching the Chinese border on November 21.

One day before the PVA launched its Second Phase Offensive, MacArthur announced a new “general assault,” aiming to consolidate the recent string of US victories and bring the entire Korean peninsula under US control over the coming month. These plans were disrupted the following day when the PVA launched surprise counterattacks, quickly halting the advance of US forces.

The attack at the Ch’ongch’on River was the initial western front of China’s new offensive, lasting for a week. The eastern front of China’s offensive began on November 27 with the Battle of Chosin Reservoir (also called Lake Changjin), where over 100,000 PVA troops encircled approximately 30,000 US-led troops over a period of two weeks.

While these battles involved heavy casualties on both sides, they ended in decisive victories for Chinese forces. They marked the abrupt end to the northward advance of imperialist troops, and the beginning of the mass retreat from North Korea by the United States and its allies.

These defeats were a major blow to the plans of US imperialism. Washington’s response was to escalate with further threats of war, up to and including the use of nuclear weapons. US President Harry S. Truman announced in a press conference in the days after China’s offensive began that there was “active consideration” for the use of the atomic bomb in Korea in response to these defeats.

100 years: British communists sentenced to prison in frame-up

On November 25, 1925, a court sentenced 12 British communist leaders, including Harry Pollitt and William Gallagher, on charges of conspiracy to “utter seditious libels, to incite to mutiny and seduce

soldiers and sailors away from their duty.” The 12 leaders had been convicted under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797, a law originally passed during the Napoleonic Wars to prevent naval mutinies.

The judge sentenced five leaders, including Pollitt, to a year in prison because of previous convictions and the remaining seven to six months because they refused the judge’s offer to free them if they promised to disavow the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In issuing his sentence, the judge referred to the claim that the prosecution of the defendants was done at the behest of the Conservative Party, “since if the defendants were proved guilty, it did not matter how low were the motives which animated the prosecutors” according to the *New York Times*.

The prosecution’s case relied heavily on articles published in the communist newspaper *Workers’ Weekly* (specifically an “Open Letter to the Fighting Forces,” asking soldiers not to shoot striking workers) and in the *Communist Review*. The prosecution argued that the CPGB was an “illegal party carrying on illegal work” “funded by “Moscow gold.”

The trial was an effort by the ruling class to decapitate the leadership of the Communist Party at a time when rising militancy in the working class was leading to an open confrontation with the government. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) had already seen the rise of the Communist-led Minority Movement. In the Labour Party a National Left-Wing Movement was formed in 1925, which fought for the right of the CPGB to affiliate with it. Over 400 delegates backed the motion at Labour’s annual conference.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted of this period:

Against this background, Stanley Baldwin’s Conservative government was determined to take on and defeat the miners, having concluded earlier, on July 31, 1925, “Red Friday,” that it was not yet ready to carry out a plan to break a miners’ strike promised the backing of the rail workers. It had given a nine-month subsidy to the mine owners while it set up the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) to head strikebreaking operations, involving the military and right-wing civilian volunteers.

By April 1926, the Baldwin government would impose lockouts in the mines, and the TUC was forced to call a general strike in May.



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