

# This week in history: January 5-11

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

## 4 January 2026

### 25 years ago: Democrats officially sanction theft of the 2000 presidential election

On January 6, 2001, the 107th Congress convened in Washington to certify the Electoral College vote and proclaim Republican George W. Bush the next president of the United States over Democratic candidate Al Gore, who had won the popular vote and would have won a recount in the disputed state of Florida. Despite popular opposition over the Supreme Court's intervention blocking a recount in Florida, the Democrats ratified the tainted election.

This formal act of certification revealed the contempt of the entire ruling class for the basic right to vote. Bush's installation would be seen by the population as the outcome of an antidemocratic conspiracy, exposing the crisis of the American political system and jeopardizing US global authority. Democratic leaders entered into dirty negotiations with Republicans even before Congress convened, trading committee assignments and influence behind closed doors in anticipation of ratifying the election and suppressing any challenge from within their own ranks.

According to the 1887 Electoral Count Act, objections to the presidential results required at least one senator and one representative. Every Democrat in the Senate, without exception, voted to recognize Bush's victory. Among those endorsing this subversion of popular will were Edward Kennedy, Paul Wellstone, Tom Harkin, Barbara Boxer, Robert Graham, Bill Nelson, and newly elected Hillary Clinton. Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy bluntly summed up the party's position of unifying around the new president: "There is a great deal of frustration that the Supreme Court decided the election... I uphold it as the law of the land and won't object. We will, all of us, Democrats and Republicans, accept George W. Bush as the next president."

The only spark of resistance to this judicial coup came from members of the Congressional Black Caucus. This symbolic dissent was animated more by fear of the anger among their constituents rather than a fundamental break from the party's pro-corporate policies. Al Gore himself, presiding over the session as vice president, silenced Black Caucus members seeking to contest the final outcome, validating the Democrats' loyalty to the existing capitalist order. The Republicans greeted this gagging with resounding cheers.

### 50 years ago: Seymour Hersh exposes CIA funding of Italian political parties

On January 7, 1976, the *New York Times* published a front-page exposé by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh revealing that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had secretly funneled at least \$6 million in cash payments to anti-communist political leaders in Italy. The funding, authorized by the Ford administration and overseen by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, was aimed at preventing the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from making gains in national elections or entering a governing coalition. The money, Hersh wrote, "was intended to strengthen the hands of those in the Italian Government and elsewhere who are most opposed to any accommodation with the Communist Party."

The timing of the revelation was explosive. On the same day the story broke, the government of Prime Minister Aldo Moro, of the Christian Democratic Party (DC), collapsed after the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) withdrew its support from the ruling coalition.

Hersh's report confirmed what many workers already suspected: that the "democracy" of the Italian republic was deeply influenced, if not directly managed, by US intelligence agencies. Kissinger had believed that the inclusion of the Communist Party in a European government would have a "domino effect" on working class militancy throughout Europe. The \$6 million (\$34.18 million in 2026 dollars) was intended to strengthen right-wing factions within the DC and other "secular" parties to ensure they remained a reliable bulwark against the working class.

While Hersh exposed the ruling parties' hostility toward the working class, the PCI Stalinists worked to preserve the capitalist system. Under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer, the PCI would promote what it called the "Historical Compromise"—a program intended to form a governing alliance with the CIA-backed Christian Democrats to stabilize the Italian state during a period of intense working class rebellion.

Berlinguer justified this class collaborationist position by pointing to the 1973 CIA-backed coup in Chile. He claimed that the Chilean coup proved that a socialist government could not survive without the consent of the conservative middle class and the military—revealing the real nature of the "euro-communist" trend that he represented, explicitly disavowing socialist revolution and the Marxist conception of the working class as the revolutionary force in society.

The Stalinist PCI sought to prove its loyalty to the capitalist order and NATO by offering to share power with the very parties backed by the CIA. Its Stalinist leadership aimed to reassure the bourgeoisie and the US State Department that it was a “responsible” force capable of maintaining order, using its control over the trade unions to curb mass strikes and factory occupations in favor of “national unity” over class struggle.

After a general election in June 1976 where the PCI won over 12 million votes, it entered into a “National Solidarity” arrangement, propping up a minority Christian Democratic government by abstaining from no-confidence votes. This “non-no-confidence” government relied on the PCI to enforce labor discipline while the DC implemented austerity measures demanded by international capital.

**75 years ago: South Korean forces massacre hundreds of civilians in Ganghwa**

From January 6-9, 1951, armed members of the South Korean police, military, and right-wing militia groups murdered at least 200 unarmed civilians in the county of Ganghwa, a group of islands west of Seoul.

Very little information has been publicly revealed about the killings. Estimates of the number of people killed range from 212 to 1,300. Civilians were targeted based on suspected collaboration or sympathies with the North Korean military. As the Korean People’s Army (KPA) along with Chinese military forces had just recaptured Seoul, the pro-South Korean forces stationed in Ganghwa executed people thought to have favourable views of the KPA, along with their families, before retreating from the area.

The Ganghwa massacre was not only committed by official military and police units, but also a right-wing civilian militia group called the Ganghwa Regional Self-defense Forces, who were responsible for an estimated 139 civilian killings. The South Korean government, with the support of the United States, provided arms and supplies to this group, as a means to expand its campaign of anti-communist repression outside of official military channels.

Ganghwa had a previous history of similar massacres, such as 140 people that were killed the previous year on the island as part of the Bodo League massacres ordered by South Korean president Syngman Rhee to eliminate left-wing political opposition. They were in turn part of a broader series of war crimes committed by the US and South Korea before and during the Korean War, such as the July 1950 No Gun Ri massacre and the October 1950 massacre at Gyeonggi-do.

Like most of the crimes committed during the Korean War, the Ganghwa massacre was covered up for decades afterwards. An official document authored in August 1951 by South Korea’s Attorney General reported the massacre to Prime Minister Chang Myon, meaning that the crime was known by the highest levels of government since the Korean War. Yet it was only in 2008 that the massacre was officially acknowledged the South Korean government’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

**100 years: Sacco and Vanzetti appeal heard by Massachusetts Supreme Court**

On January 11, 1926, lawyers for Nicola Sacco and Bartolemeo Vanzetti, appeared before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) to petition for a new trial, the culmination of five years of post-trial motions.

The two Italian anarchists were convicted of first-degree murder in 1921 for the deaths of a night watchman and a paymaster during a robbery in Braintree, Massachusetts in 1920. The judge in that case, Webster Thayer, had already denied them a new trial three times.

Sacco and Vanzetti alleged that the trial had been terminally flawed by judicial bias, prosecutorial misconduct, and suppressed evidence.

Judge Thayer had referred to the defendants out of court as “dagos,” and after the guilty verdicts, boasted to an acquaintance, “Did you see what I did to those anarchist bastards!” One historian has noted that Thayer, “refused to allow evidence to be presented by Italian witnesses that placed the defendants elsewhere at the time of the [murders].”

A major pillar of the prosecution’s case was the testimony of Captain William Proctor, a state ballistics expert. At the trial, Proctor was asked if a specific bullet (Bullet III) was fired from Sacco’s gun. He answered that it was “consistent with being fired” from that gun. In 1923 Proctor admitted that the language of his reply had been arranged in advance with the prosecutor. In addition, some witnesses later signed affidavits stating they had been pressured or coached by the prosecution to identify Sacco and Vanzetti.

On May 12, 1926, the SJC denied the appeal. The court ruled that it did not have the authority to re-examine the facts or the weight of the evidence; it could only review whether Judge Thayer had committed an error of law, and because Thayer’s decisions were technically within his “discretion,” the SJC refused to overturn them.

Despite mass international protests, on April 9, 1927, Judge Thayer ruled that Sacco and Vanzetti should “suffer the punishment of death by the passage of a current of electricity through your body.”



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