

This week in history: February 16-22

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

15 February 2026

25 years ago: Autoworkers take over factory in Windsor, Ontario

On February 16, 2001, 180 autoworkers at Star Metal Manufacturing occupied their factory in a dramatic escalation of a bitter lockout that had begun six weeks earlier. The facility produced metal racks used by the Big Three automakers—Ford, General Motors and Chrysler—to transport parts to assembly plants across the region.

Owner Peter Friessen had locked out the workforce on December 31, 2000, amid negotiations for a first collective agreement with Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Local 195, certified as the union three years earlier. Workers rejected management's proposal of a \$1 per hour wage increase spread over three years, coupled with concessions on benefits. At the time, wages stood at just over \$11 an hour, which several employees described as barely livable.

During the lockout, union members alleged that replacement workers entered the facility disguised as "security guards." Tensions mounted as individuals in work clothes were seen slipping past picket lines. On February 16, rank-and-file members pushed their way into the building and escorted management and security personnel out. They then established a 24-hour occupation inside the plant while maintaining pickets outside.

The action drew widespread community support. Workers from Ford, GM and Chrysler facilities joined the lines, and passing motorists honked in solidarity.

Low wages, limited benefits and safety concerns fueled the militancy. Employees cited inadequate protective equipment and high turnover. One worker later remarked, "With the amount of money he has spent on security and scab labor we could have had a decent wage agreement and be back to work."

Union spokesperson Dan Sins framed the occupation as a tactic to force a return to negotiations. "Our goal is to get back to the talks. We want to go back to work, but we can't live on what they are paying us," he said at the time, adding that it was better for workers to "watch over and protect the material" inside the plant.

While officially presented as leverage to resume bargaining, the occupation revealed the depth of worker anger and determination. For several days, production equipment and the facility itself were effectively under the workers' control—an extraordinary assertion of collective power during a period of restructuring and concession demands across Canada's auto sector.

50 years ago: Portuguese Communist and Socialist parties cut deal with military to disband worker committees

On February 22, 1976, the leadership of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Socialist Party (PS), and other major parties in Portugal, reached an agreement with the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) to institutionalize military oversight of the government aimed at stabilizing capitalist rule. The finalization of this "Second Pact" (Plataforma de Acordo Constitucional) betrayed the revolutionary upheavals that had rocked Portugal since the April 1974 "Carnation Revolution," providing the legal framework to dismantle the independent factory and workplace committees established by the working class.

The agreement was forged in the shadow of the November 25, 1975, coup, in which imperialist-aligned military factions had successfully suppressed an attempted takeover by left-wing soldiers within the MFA. By February 1976, the primary goal of the Portuguese bourgeoisie—aided by the Stalinist PCP and the social democratic PS—was to subordinate the mass movement of workers, who had seized factories and vast agricultural estates, to the parliamentary republic.

Under the terms of the pact, the military's Council of the Revolution was established as a supreme "guardian" body. This unelected council, composed entirely of MFA officers, was granted the power to veto legislation and determine the constitutionality of laws. Crucially, the pact dictated that the presidency of the republic must be held by a military officer for the first transitional term. In exchange, the agreeing political parties were permitted to compete in upcoming legislative elections.

Throughout 1974 and 1975, the emergence of worker and neighborhood committees had raised the specter of dual power. Workers had demonstrated their ability to stop and start production independent of capitalist ownership. The February agreement effectively liquidated the revolutionary potential of these bodies by declaring that all political power resided exclusively in the National Assembly and, ultimately, the central military government.

The role of the PCP, led by Álvaro Cunhal, and the PS, led by Mário Soares, was central to this stabilization. While the two parties often appeared as bitter rivals, they were united in their opposition to a proletarian revolution that would have threatened the property relations of Western Europe. The PS acted as the open agent of the European and American bourgeoisie, while the PCP, following the

Stalinist “two-stage” theory, insisted that the revolution must remain within a “national democratic” framework. Acting to preserve its own standing within the state apparatus, the PCP’s betrayal of the Portuguese working class contributed to disorienting workers in neighboring Spain, where a massive strike wave against the reign of the recently installed King Juan Carlos followed the death of the dictator Francisco Franco.

The 1976 pact ensured that Portugal remained a reliable member of NATO and a candidate for the European Economic Community. It successfully halted the revolution, allowing the ruling class to eventually launch a counteroffensive to roll back the nationalizations and land reforms of the previous two years.

75 years ago: US launches “Operation Killer” in Korea to prepare for recapture of Seoul

On February 20, 1951, United Nations forces under the command of US General Matthew Ridgway launched “Operation Killer,” a major offensive by the imperialist powers during the Korean War.

The operation followed a series of reversals for US and UN forces after the intervention of China’s People’s Volunteer Army (PVA) in late 1950. Chinese and North Korean forces had driven UN troops out of North Korea and recaptured Seoul in January 1951. By February, however, the situation had shifted, particularly in the central sector of the Korean peninsula.

Operation Killer was designed to destroy Chinese and North Korean forces south of a defensive phase line known as the “Arizona Line.” Ridgway, who had assumed command of the US Eighth Army after the death of General Walton Walker, aimed not merely to regain territory, but to inflict maximum casualties and restore the morale of American-led forces. The offensive embodied his strategy of aggressive counterattack, following the bloody defensive stand at Chipyong-ni, where heavy Chinese losses blunted their advance and emboldened Washington to resume large-scale offensive operations.

Nearly 100,000 UN troops—including four American divisions, as well as British, Australian and South Korean forces—advanced along a 55-mile front. Within days, they had pushed northward up to 12 miles in some sectors. By the end of the operation on March 6, the Chinese-North Korean troops had been forced back north of the Han River. As with previous operations, the offensive was accompanied by massive aerial bombardment that inflicted devastating casualties on Korean civilians.

Operation Killer paved the way for the subsequent offensive, Operation Ripper, which focused on the recapture of Seoul by the imperialist powers and the securing of surrounding strategic positions. The twin offensives marked the first major victory for US-led forces after China’s intervention in the war. But while the operation produced temporary territorial gains and tactical setbacks for Chinese/North Korean forces, it did not resolve the strategic impasse that would persist in over two more years of bloody conflict.

100 years ago: France announces formation of colonial legislature in Indochinese protectorate

On February 22, 1926, newspapers in the French protectorate of Annam, one of the French colonial provinces in what is now Vietnam, announced the formation of the House of Representatives of the People of Annam, a consultative body to the colonial government. Alexandre Varenne, governor-general of French Indochina, signed the law establishing the assembly on February 24.

The House of Representatives consisted of 33 deputies elected from the upper classes of Vietnamese society from six categories, including wealthy businessmen, civil servants, and university graduates. It functioned as purely an advisory body to the French government.

Because the voter base included many intellectuals and local leaders who were becoming increasingly nationalistic, the House became a vocal platform for reform. This is why a figure like Hu?nh Thúc Kháng was able to be elected as the first president of the House—he represented the voice of the Vietnamese intelligentsia who were opposed to French imperialism.

Hu?nh, who kept his role as president of the House until 1928, was a founder of the nationalist Duy Tan (modernization) movement and participated in the 1908 uprising against the French, who imprisoned him for the next 11 years for his role.

In 1945 he was to participate in the August Revolution led by the Vi?t Minh against the Japanese puppet regime that established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Hu?nh became its first acting president. He fought the return of French troops, which the Stalinist-led Vi?t Minh had negotiated. The Vi?t Minh organized the murder of the leadership of the Vietnamese Trotskyist movement, which opposed the deal to bring back French troops. Hu?nh died under mysterious circumstances in 1947.



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