

## This week in history: March 30-April 5

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

29 March 2026

**25 years ago: Slobodan Milošević arrested at the behest of US imperialism**

In the early morning of April 1, 2001, Slobodan Milošević, the former president of Yugoslavia, was arrested at the behest of the Clinton administration. His jailer was his presidential successor, Vojislav Kostunica, who had won the previous year's election with 51 percent of the vote compared to Milošević's 38 percent.

The US had been demanding his arrest, using its monetary influence as leverage. On March 30, Secretary of State Colin Powell threatened Belgrade that Washington's pledge of \$150 million in aid would be withheld for refusing the ultimatum. Western imperialism then dangled millions of dollars in IMF and World Bank loans to persuade local authorities to imprison Milošević for war crimes.

After years of dismembering Yugoslavia, dropping bombs, stoking nationalist divisions, destroying vital infrastructure, and committing war crimes, US imperialism used its 1999 war of aggression to spearhead the takeover of the region and the subordination of the Balkans to US capitalist domination. By this time, Milošević had fallen from the graces of Washington. His crude Serbian nationalism, alleged ethnic atrocities, and patronage to local party bureaucrats cut across the goals of US imperialism.

The arrest was preceded by a dramatic 36-hour standoff. Kostunica dispatched elite special forces to arrest the former president at his home, but hundreds of Milošević supporters barred the way. Milošević then issued a public statement, attempting to cultivate anti-NATO sentiment among the population, declaring the warrant by the "lackeys of NATO and the USA" to be illegal.

Milošević's private security units thwarted an attempt to break into his home. More discussions ensued; Milošević said he would die rather than be taken alive. Eventually, negotiations led to a bloodless conclusion. The former president was arrested for 30 days, charged with corruption, abuse of power, embezzlement, financial misdeeds and misuse of public funds, but no charges were brought forward related to the Kosovo war. He pleaded not guilty.

The 30-day imprisonment proved to be a trap. The US and European powers demanded new charges for atrocities in Croatia and Bosnia be levelled. Several months later, Kostunica obliged, handing Milošević over to the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague.

**50 years ago: Palestinian general strike and the First "Land Day"**

On March 30, 1976, Palestinian citizens of Israel launched a general strike and mass demonstrations to protest the state's expropriation of thousands of acres of Palestinian-owned land in the Galilee. The Israeli state responded with a massive military and police mobilization, resulting in the killing of six unarmed protesters and the wounding of hundreds more.

The immediate catalyst for the strike was the Israeli government's "Area 9" plan, a policy aimed at the "Judaization of the Galilee." This involved the seizure of approximately 5,000 acres of land between the Palestinian towns of Sakhnin, Arraba and Deir Hanna.

The Labor-led government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin designated the area a closed military zone to facilitate the construction of exclusively Jewish settlements and industrial parks. This was a continuation of the "Present Absentee" legal framework used since 1948 to seize property from Palestinians who remained within the state's borders but were displaced from their home villages.

The general strike of March 30 saw near-total participation across Palestinian communities in Israel. The construction and agricultural sectors were the most heavily impacted, as thousands of Palestinian laborers refused to report to work in Israeli cities. In Nazareth, the largest Palestinian city in Israel, shops remained shuttered and schools were closed. The strike also saw significant support from Palestinian students at Hebrew University and the University of Haifa.

On the eve of the protest, the Rabin government declared all demonstrations illegal and imposed a strict curfew on the Galilee region. Thousands of soldiers and Border Police units, supported by armored personnel carriers and tanks, were moved into position.

On March 30, in the village of Rafat al-Zuhairi, security forces opened fire on a crowd that gathered in defiance of the curfew. In Sakhnin and Arraba, protesters met the advancing armored columns with stones and burning tires. By the end of the day, six Palestinians—Raja Abu Raya, Khader Khalaila, Khadija Qasem, Kheir Yasin, Mohsen Taha, and Raafat al-Zuhairi—had been shot and killed.

At the same time the Israeli state was suppressing its own Palestinian citizens, it was deeply involved in the Lebanese civil war.

The Rabin government was providing millions of dollars in clandestine military aid, training, and intelligence to the fascist-sectarian Phalangist militias in Lebanon. This alliance was aimed at crushing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its

Lebanese leftist allies, who were using Lebanon as a base for operations after being driven out of Jordan in 1970.

In the following years, March 30 has become an annual day of protest known as Land Day. The day now serves as a global day of protest against the ongoing oppression of Palestinians and land occupation by the Israeli government.

**75 years ago: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg sentenced to death for espionage**

On April 5, 1951, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sentenced to death for conspiracy to commit espionage. The reactionary Espionage Act of 1917 under which they were sentenced contained a clause that allowed for those convicted of passing to a foreign government “information relating to the national defense” to be put to death.

The arrest, trial, conviction, death sentence and eventual execution of the Rosenbergs were a political frame-up and one of the worst expressions of the McCarthyite witch-hunt of that period. Their state murder was aimed above all at intimidating and silencing left-wing tendencies in the American working class, which had taken on a near-insurrectionary scale in the 1930s, under the guise of upholding “national security.”

The couple had been arrested in late 1950 supposedly on suspicion of passing information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. Their trial began on March 6, 1951, in New York, and concluded on March 29 with both being convicted of espionage.

During the trial, the primary witness for the prosecution team was David Greenglass, Ethel Rosenberg’s brother. He had previously been arrested by the FBI for passing on information to the Soviet Union via a courier while he was working as a machinist at Los Alamos on the Manhattan Project. Greenglass claimed throughout the trial that it was Ethel who typed up the notes which he passed to the Soviet Union, and that it was Julius who recruited him into the spy network in which he operated .

For his accusation against the Rosenbergs, Greenglass had his own sentence reduced to 15 years. But as he would admit decades later and as is corroborated by the transcript of his grand jury testimony of August 1950, it was his wife Ruth who actually typed up the notes, and Greenglass falsely implicated his sister to cover this up.

There is in fact no credible evidence that Julius or Ethel Rosenberg “stole the secret of the atomic bomb” and passed it to the Soviet Union, which was a wartime ally of the United States during World War II.

When the US government pressured the Rosenbergs to admit their guilt and provide names of other “spies” under the threat of execution, they refused. In a public statement they declared: “By asking us to repudiate the truth of our innocence, the government admits its own doubts concerning our guilt... we will not be coerced, even under pain of death, to bear false witness.”

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed on June 19, 1953.

**100 years: Kolkata gripped by communalist riots**

On April 2, 1926, violence between Hindus and Muslims ignited in Calcutta (modern Kolkata) in the British Raj when a procession organized by the Arya Samaj, a Hindu revival movement that was associated with Hindutva or Hindu nationalism, played music with loud drums, cymbals, and horns as it passed near the Dinanath Mosque on Harrison Road (now Mahatma Gandhi Road) during afternoon prayer.

The procession then spiraled into a city-wide conflict. The violence involved organized groups from both communities, fueled by underlying political friction and the recent breakdown of the Non-Cooperation Movement’s inter-religious unity. Over the course of the first phase, which lasted roughly two weeks, the city saw brutal street fighting, arson and the desecration of religious sites.

The local police struggled to contain the chaos, prompting a swift intervention by British troops. Battalions were deployed to enforce a strict curfew and patrol the most volatile neighborhoods. Despite the military presence, sporadic outbursts continued into May.

The human cost was staggering. Historical records indicate that roughly 110 people were killed and more than 900 were injured during the April peak. Beyond the casualties, the 1926 riots marked a grim milestone in the “communalization” of Indian politics, as the British administration increasingly treated the two communities as irreconcilable blocs—a perspective that would echo through the decades leading toward Partition. The result was the outcome of decades of British colonial policy—from the imposition of separate religious electoral rolls to the calculated ethno-communal partition of Bengal in 1905—that had systematically institutionalized religious identity as the primary axis of political life, serving to make communal eruptions both more likely and harder to defuse.



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