

This week in history: April 6-12

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

5 April 2026

25 years ago: Autoworkers in South Korea beaten by police

On April 10, 2001, South Korean police violently assaulted 350 laid-off Daewoo autoworkers at the Pupyong assembly plant in Incheon city, near Seoul. Several workers sustained severe injuries after police beat them with batons, shields, fists and boots. Among the wounds were vision loss, temporary paralysis, punctured lungs, broken ribs, a fractured pelvis and a kicked-in face. At least 43 needed hospitalization. The total number of injured surpassed 90.

The police rampage came after a judge had issued a court order that granted the Daewoo Motor Workers Union access to their union offices at the plant. A tense standoff ensued. Union lawyer Park Hoon, flanked by several hundred workers, planned on entering the plant. A force of 1,500 well-armed riot police blocked the path. Hoon shouted to the police that their actions were unlawful. The police chief yelled back, “the government is above the law.”

Law enforcement tightened the circle around 350 workers who were lying non-violently on the ground, shirtless. Rushing on them, the police unleashed a shocking onslaught of violence. Bloodied autoworkers fled, shielding their faces and pursued by their attackers.

Video of the one-sided melee went viral—viewed over 1.5 million times over a two-day period—and sparked nationwide outrage. Mass support for the autoworkers compelled the ruling class parties to cynically posture as their defenders. The Grand National Party (GNP), the ruling party of military dictatorships in the 1980s, demanded the resignation of President Kim Dae-jung’s prime minister, administration minister and police head. Eventually the government sacked the Incheon police chief while the national head of police issued a formal apology.

Despite the fact that the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) backed Kim Dae-jung’s anti-worker policies that led to the Bupyeong (Pupyong) incident, the bureaucracy attempted to defang popular outrage, staging demonstrations in major cities and calling for charges to be brought against the police.

Social tensions in South Korea had sharpened owing to IMF-imposed restructuring. The Asian economic crisis of 1997-98 had driven Korean capitalists and international finance to destroy the social gains of the working class—dismantling the “lifetime employment” system, conducting privatizations, and issuing fire-sale transfers of assets to foreign and domestic rivals.

The financial crisis, together with rampant corruption by its own executives, bankrupted Daewoo. Investors demanded dramatic cuts in labor costs and plant closures as conditions of “rescue,” while the government used police and receivership to enforce those cuts. The trade union bureaucracies—particularly the KCTU leadership—had already

compromised by cooperating with tripartite committees and accepting “pain-sharing,” leaving the working class to bear the brunt of restructuring.

50 years ago: Deng Xiaoping stripped of positions in CCP

On April 7, 1976, the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced the appointment of Hua Guofeng as First Vice Chairman of the CCP Central Committee and Premier of the State Council. Simultaneously, the bureaucracy stripped Deng Xiaoping of all his official posts inside and outside the party, including his positions as Vice Chairman of the CCP Central Committee and Chief of the General Staff of the People’s Liberation Army.

These moves were a direct response to the “Tiananmen Incident” of April 5, 1976. During the Qingming Festival, hundreds of thousands gathered in Tiananmen Square to pay tribute to the late Zhou Enlai, who had died in January 1976. The event evolved into a massive protest against the “Gang of Four”—the faction led by Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao Zedong, which had spearheaded the repressions of the Cultural Revolution.

The bureaucracy, fearing a genuine movement of the working class that could challenge its rule, viewed the demonstrations as a direct political attack. The CCP leadership responded with a brutal police crackdown, clearing the square and making hundreds of arrests.

The CCP leadership, under an ailing 82-year-old Mao Zedong, blamed Deng Xiaoping for instigating the protests. Deng, who had been rehabilitated in 1973 after being purged during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, represented a “pragmatist” wing of the bureaucracy. This faction sought to modernize the Chinese economy through increased integration with the world market and deals with the US and other imperialist powers.

The elevation of Hua Guofeng was an attempt by Mao to find a “centrist” figure who could bridge the gap between the warring bureaucratic factions. Hua’s promotion was accompanied by a nationwide political campaign aimed at denouncing Deng and framing his efforts to reform the economy as an illegal attempt to overturn the Cultural Revolution.

The struggle between the “Gang of Four” and the Deng faction was a conflict between two wings of the privileged Stalinist bureaucracy. Both sought to maintain the anti-democratic rule of the CCP bureaucracy over the working class and the nationalized Chinese economy, but fierce disagreements had emerged over how this rule would be maintained.

The “Gang of Four” utilized pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric to suppress the working class and maintain a policy of Chinese isolationism. In contrast, the Deng faction recognized the potential for a massive expansion of the Chinese economy through integration with global capitalism. They sought to generate immense wealth for the bureaucracy by striking deals with US and international imperialism, initiating a process that would transform the massive Chinese working class into a highly exploited workforce for global manufacturing.

The mass protests in Tiananmen Square signaled a growing exhaustion and anger within the Chinese population as a result of the deprivation and political volatility of the Maoist era. However, lacking revolutionary leadership and a program based on internationalism, the opposition to the Gang of Four and the Cultural Revolution was diverted into the hands of Deng’s wing of the bureaucracy.

75 years ago: US President Truman dismisses General Douglas MacArthur

On April 11, 1951, United States President Harry S. Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur of his military commands, which included the post of Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command forces fighting in the Korean War. He was replaced by Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, Commander of the Eighth Army in Korea.

In a national address that morning, Truman explained his decision as a result of MacArthur being “unable to give his wholehearted support to the policies of the United States Government and of the United Nations in matters pertaining to his official duties.”

The disagreements between Truman and MacArthur which came to a head in the latter’s dismissal reflected tactical differences in ruling circles over how to conduct war in Korea that had been brewing for months.

In October 1950, MacArthur—who had advocated for a policy of pushing completely into North Korea—assured Truman that the chances of a Chinese military intervention were slim. After the President authorized the advance of American troops to the Chinese border, China’s entry into the war reversed the military gains of the US and South Korean forces. While Truman initially considered a response which involved the use of atomic weapons, he later shifted to a policy of limiting the expansion of war. This was a reaction to the fear of a confrontation with the Soviet Union, China’s principal ally, which had developed its own nuclear weapons.

MacArthur, on the other hand, pushed for a direct attack on China. In March 1951 he issued a public ultimatum against China, in opposition to Truman’s proposal of proposing a truce. The deliberate sabotage of Truman’s planned negotiations came after months of statements by MacArthur which publicly disagreed with the president’s official position and tacitly challenged his authority.

In Truman’s April 11 address, he claimed it “would be wrong—tragically wrong—for us to take the initiative in extending the war ... Our aim is to avoid the spread of the conflict.”

But as *The Militant*, the American Trotskyist newspaper of the time, explained, Truman “tells only part of the truth. He is trying to hide that his own course is likewise exclusively designed to promote war.” In the very same statement, Truman maintained his overall position on the Korean War. “It is right for us to be in Korea,” he said, and condemned the “communists in the Kremlin [who] are engaged in a monstrous conspiracy to stamp out freedom all over the world.”

100 years: Assassin lightly wounds Mussolini

On April 7, 1926, Irishwoman Violet Gibson fired a pistol at Rome’s Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini as he was walking through Rome’s Piazza del Campidoglio after giving a speech to an international congress of surgeons. The bullet grazed Mussolini’s nose and he was bandaged at the scene. A crowd of Fascist supporters nearly lynched Gibson before police were able to remove her. Fascist mobs in Rome then destroyed oppositional newspaper offices and killed 3 staffers.

Gibson was the daughter of the prominent Irish lawyer and politician Edward Gibson, 1st Baron Ashbourne (d.1913), who had served as a Conservative MP and Lord Chancellor of Ireland. She was by all accounts a fragile but idealistic person. She worked as a peace activist and became deeply religious. She had suffered from physical illness since childhood and had a nervous breakdown in 1922 for which she was institutionalized. After her release, she traveled to Rome where she attempted suicide. She apparently viewed killing Mussolini as a sacrifice that God was asking of her.

In prison she told interrogators that God had sent an angel to steady her hand as she fired at Il Duce. The fascist government judged her to be insane and eventually released her to the British government since she did not recognize the Irish Free State. She was institutionalized in Northampton, despite repeated appeals to be released, until her death in 1956.

Mussolini rode a wave of popularity in Italy after the attempt. His National Fascist Party was able to pass a spate of repressive laws and Mussolini prepared to visit the Italian colonial possessions in North Africa.

The international bourgeois press was unabashed in its celebration of the dictator in the days and weeks after Gibson’s assassination attempt.

In its April 7 report, the *New York Times* wrote of the aftermath of the attempt when the Fascist mobs had learned that he was alive: “The entire day a procession went through the streets of Rome which were gay with bunting and resplendent with the brilliant hot sun acclaiming Mussolini and singing fascist war songs.”

On April 8, the *Times* reported on the dictator’s trip to the Italian possessions in Libya with the headline, “Mussolini sails in blaze of glory.” It described the dictator in the following terms: “He smiled and nodded at the crowd, which lustily cheered him, and waved his hand with easy familiarity.”

On April 9, in an article headlined “Mussolini holds Italy in his hand,” the *Times* enthused, “the Duce looms up as a daring and impetuous patriotic figure, representing all that is greatest in Italian life and as a living incarnation of the ancient glory of Italy.”



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