

## This week in history: April 20-26

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

19 April 2026

**25 years ago: Peruvian government and CIA shoot down civilian aircraft**

On April 20, 2001, a CIA surveillance plane directed a Peruvian fighter jet to fire on a civilian aircraft over the Amazon. A small Cessna 185 Skywagon carrying an American missionary family was in its crosshairs. Machine-gun fire tore through the fuselage, wounding the pilot and forcing a crash landing into the river below. As the survivors clung to the wreckage, the fighter aircraft continued to strafe them.

Veronica Bowers and her infant daughter were killed. The injured pilot, along with Bowers's husband and their six-year-old son, survived. Rescued by nearby villagers, they made their way to Iquitos, carrying the bodies of the dead with them. Believing they had intercepted drug traffickers, Peruvian forces and DEA agents subjected the survivors to interrogation.

The murders deepened public hostility toward America's supposedly benevolent drug-eradication program.

The Pentagon immediately distanced itself from the killings, denying ownership of the surveillance aircraft, though US officials acknowledged that the plane may have been operated by another American agency involved in counter-narcotics efforts, such as the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau. Peruvian military officials, however, contradicted these claims, asserting that the aircraft was linked to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and that US personnel played a direct role in guiding the interception that led to the attack.

To deflect anger over the deaths, President George W. Bush called for a thorough investigation surrounding the "tragedy" and announced a suspension of the US-sponsored air-interdiction program known as the Air Bridge Denial Program. At the same time, Washington attempted to pin the deaths on the Peruvian military. US officials leaked recordings purporting to show that CIA spies objected to the attack on the civilian aircraft and that the Peruvian pilot violated procedures.

Whatever the actions of individuals, the drug-eradication program masked the true nature of America's war on drugs: imperialist control over Latin America. Corporate penetration, military expansion, and the enrichment of national elites were its real goals. For the working class and indigenous peoples, the results were oppression, poverty, displacement, and death.

The event did not result in any reduction in the US-backed violence against alleged drug smugglers, nor did it reduce or diminish the supply of drugs in the US.

**50 years ago: Socialist Party wins in Portuguese elections**

On April 25, 1976, Portugal held its first legislative elections since the 1974 "Carnation Revolution" brought an end to nearly five decades of fascist rule. The elections marked the stabilization of the Portuguese capitalist state after a period of revolutionary upsurge of the working class.

The Socialist Party (PS), led by Mário Soares, secured the largest share of the vote at approximately 35 percent, followed by the right-wing Popular Democratic Party (PPD) and the Social Democratic Center (CDS). The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), under Álvaro Cunhal, received roughly 14 percent. The vote was conducted under a new constitution that institutionalized the military rule of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), designating the military hierarchy as the official "guarantor" of the political transition.

The election results also revealed a significant level of support for several smaller left-wing organizations standing outside the PCP. While these various groups—including the Popular Democratic Union (UDP) and the Socialist Left Movement (MES)—received smaller individual percentages, they collectively accounted for hundreds of thousands of votes. This reflected a deep-seated dissatisfaction among sections of the working class and youth with both the capitalist-aligned Socialist Party and the Stalinist-controlled Communist Party.

The election served as a maneuver by the MFA to restore and institutionalize bourgeois order. In the two years following the 1974 coup, the Portuguese working class had engaged in a series of massive strikes, factory occupations, and land seizures that threatened the foundations of private property. However, the PCP and the PS worked to subordinate the independent movement of the workers to the military government.

While presented in the capitalist press as the first free elections since the fall of the dictatorship, the military maintained a tight grip over the process. Prior to the vote, the major parties, including the Communist Party, signed an agreement with the MFA establishing the military as the central power of the state. The workers' councils that had emerged as a challenge to capitalist rule were forcibly suppressed.

The 1976 election signaled the close of the revolutionary upsurge and the beginning of a stabilization phase under a minority Socialist government led by Soares. This administration, operating with the tacit approval of the military and the PCP, implemented the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Over the following years, the gains made by the working class during the heat of the revolution, including land reforms and experiments in workers' control of factories and other workplaces, were systematically dismantled.

The close of the Portuguese Revolution was not a product of the strength

of the right-wing parties, or the military apparatus, but rather the counterrevolutionary role played by Stalinism and Social Democracy. By promoting the illusion that the military officers were “progressive” liberators, the PCP and PS prevented the working class from organizing for its own independent struggle for power and dismantled the committees which had emerged as a form of dual power.

**75 years ago: 500,000 Spanish workers strike against Franco dictatorship**

On April 23, 1951, approximately half a million workers in the Spanish industrial provinces of Vizcaya and Guipozcoa engaged in a two-day sit-down strike. Most of the factories in those regions were shut down for the duration of the strike, including major production plants of steel, locomotives and weapons.

The strike occurred under conditions where all strikes had been outlawed by the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, who had taken power in the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish working class revolted against the mass impoverishment and high cost of living that had been burdened on to them by the Franco regime, which oversaw massive inflation and real wage cuts. Prices had risen at double the rate of wages since 1945.

The striking workers of April 23-24 demanded a 50 percent wage increase, price controls and elimination of the black marketeers. Workers also distributed leaflets that denounced US imperialism for “starving Spain and the rest of the world.” The US government under Harry S. Truman, following the policy of the previous Roosevelt administration, both controlled by the Democratic Party, backed the Franco regime with millions of dollars.

The strikers were met with heavy repression. Some 200 workers were arrested on the first day, having been deemed the “ringleaders” of the strike. Yet over 300,000 workers remained on strike on the second day, leading to an additional 300 arrests. Though the strike was scheduled to only last two days, thousands remained off the job for several more days, among their chief demands being the release of the 500 arrested workers.

The sit-down strike occurred only six weeks after a major strike in Barcelona, the largest industrial city of Spain, in early March. More than 300,000 factory workers in Barcelona walked off the job for a one-day protest, halting all transportation and closing all the shops in the city. Reflecting the deep hostility workers held towards the Franco regime, protesters burned the cars of state officials and attempted to set fire to the City Hall.

It was the most determined struggle of the working class since the Spanish Civil War, which had concluded 12 years earlier, ending in a bloodbath for the working class and other anti-fascists. As with the April strike which followed it, the Barcelona demonstration was also met with bloody repression. At least 3 protesters were killed and hundreds of others wounded by police. About 300 additional striking workers were arrested.

These upsurges of struggle by the Spanish working class brought forward a potentially revolutionary situation that could have overthrown the Franco regime. However, the absence of a genuine Marxist vanguard party to lead these struggles with a socialist program—above all due to the betrayals of Stalinism—resulted in Franco ultimately remaining in power until his death in 1975.

**100 years: Reza Khan crowned Shah of Iran**

On April 25, 1926, Reza Khan, the de facto dictator of Iran, was crowned as Shah, the first member of the Pahlavi dynasty that was to rule until 1979 when the Iranian revolution overthrew his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Since the age of 14, Khan, a commoner, had belonged to the Persian Cossack Brigade, the crack military unit of the ruling Qajar Dynasty, which had been modeled on Tsarist Cossack units and was under the command of pro-Tsarist Russian officers until 1920.

In 1921, under Khan’s leadership, the Cossack Brigade organized a coup with British support, capturing Tehran and overthrowing the highly corrupt, constitutional monarchy ruled by a Majlis (parliament) with Ahmad Shah, the Qajar monarch, at its head. Reza Khan dissolved the cabinet and took the position in a new government as minister of war.

The coup had been necessary from the point of view of British imperialism because a Persian Soviet Socialist Republic, based in the northwest of Iran, with support from the Soviet Red Army, had threatened to seize power. The coup of 1921 effectively put the country under the rule of the British embassy and the Anglo-Persian Petroleum Company (later to become British Petroleum). Reza Khan quelled dissent throughout the country and dissolved the Persian Socialist Soviet Republic.

In 1923 Khan forced the Majlis to make him prime minister and grant him dictatorial powers. In 1925 he deposed Ahmad Shah, who went to exile in Italy, and had the Majlis declare him Shah.

At his official coronation the next year, his son was declared crown prince.

Reza Khan ruled as Shah until 1941. He generally sought the modernization of industry (except for the oil industry which was controlled by imperialist interests) and came into conflict with the mullahs, the Islamic clergy, because of his secular policies.

After Hitler’s seizure of power, German imperialism sought closer ties with the Iranian state, and Germany became Iran’s largest trading partner. Hitler’s regime declared Iranians to be exempt from the Nuremberg race laws, since they were “true Aryans.”

In 1941 at the outset of the Second World War, the British and Soviets combined forces to invade Iran and establish Allied control of the country until 1946. After the Red Army occupied Tehran, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate and was replaced by his son. He went into exile and died in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1944.



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