

This week in history: July 27- August 2

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

26 July 2026

25 years ago: Professional NFL player Korey Stringer died from heat stroke

Korey Stringer—an offensive tackle for the Minnesota Vikings—suffered heat stroke, collapsed on the field and died on August 1, 2001. The 27-year-old athlete and six-year veteran of the National Football League (NFL) was practicing in temperatures reaching the mid-90s Fahrenheit. The league had no league-wide rules governing heat safety or the treatment of heat-related injuries.

High humidity that day had produced a heat index of 109°F (43°C). When he collapsed, Stringer's body temperature had reached 108°F (42.2°C). At this catastrophic temperature the body's proteins and enzymes start to malfunction, and organs rapidly sustain damage. He died at the hospital 15 hours later without regaining consciousness.

Stringer was the first NFL player to die from heat stroke in the league's 82-year history, but between 1995 and his death, 18 high school and college players had died from heat-related overexertion. Just days earlier, University of Florida freshman Eraste Austin collapsed and died at training camp. And days after, Northwestern University safety Rashidi Wheeler died during conditioning drills.

Obvious signs of an impending disaster were apparent for the 6'4", 335-pound football player. A day before collapsing, Stringer missed practice, exhausted from the intense heat. The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* captured a picture of him bending over, completely spent and winded. Yet, even with this unmistakable indication of heat exhaustion, Stringer suited up the next day for practice. He then vomited three times on the field. No medical team or coaches intervened, even with obvious signs of a medical emergency.

Stringer's completely preventable death revealed the exploitative atmosphere of professional football, in which management and coaches push players to their physical limits and beyond. The NFL's gladiatorial ethos denies any sign of weakness—breaks, fatigue, injuries—which must be cleansed through a grueling regimen and unfaltering discipline. The political economy of the NFL and professional sports demand this spirit of sacrifice—internalized by the players themselves—for the sake of profit. While the owners and their families sit and dine in luxury box seats, accumulating millions in profit, football players are devoured for their talents and then discarded, with careers averaging only 5 years.

50 years ago: West Virginia coal miners vote to defy federal injunction

On July 29, 1976, local union leaders representing tens of thousands of striking coal miners in West Virginia voted to explicitly defy a federal back-to-work injunction. The order, issued days earlier by US Circuit Judge H.E. Widener Jr., attempted to halt a rapidly expanding wildcat strike that eventually shut down coal fields across eight states and drew in more than 100,000 workers.

The walkout had erupted ten days earlier at the Cedar Coal Company near Charleston, West Virginia, after management attempted to bring in non-union labor for dispatcher positions. When miners walked out in protest, US District Judge Dennis Knapp intervened on behalf of the coal operators, fining Local 1759 \$50,000 plus \$25,000 for every additional day on strike, while charging 213 miners with criminal contempt.

The court measures provoked class outrage across the region. Rank-and-file miners recognized the judiciary was acting as an enforcement arm of the mine owners. To rally the expanding walkout, miners issued four fundamental demands: (1) Drop all fines and injunctions; (2) No reprisals against strikers; (3) Equal justice for miners in the courts; (4) Investigation of all federal judges that have handed down fines and injunctions against miners.

The wildcat strikes placed coal miners on a collision course not only with the state, but with the United Mine Workers (UMW) bureaucracy under President Arnold Miller. Miller had been elevated to power with government approval following the 1969 murder of union reformer Jock Yablonski by thugs loyal to corrupt incumbent Tony Boyle. Rather than defend the rank-and-file, Miller bowed to the courts and ordered an immediate end to the walkout. Miners refused.

The Workers League, predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, together with its newspaper the *Bulletin*, played a critical role in politically articulating and organizing this defiance, urging miners to reject both the court injunctions and the UMW leadership's efforts to shut down the strike. Clyde Powers, a miner and former president of the local, told the *Bulletin* he believed Miller was forced on the union by the government and coal operators to suppress labor militants. "He doesn't speak for coal miners. He speaks for the operators and the government," Powers said.

The industrial impact of the month-long wildcat was immense, completely shuttering operations across West Virginia and closing

down mines throughout Ohio, Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois and Indiana. As roving pickets fanned out across the Appalachian coalfields, production was brought to a grinding halt, costing the coal operators over \$30 million in lost production.

75 years ago: UN convention on refugees includes loopholes for imperialist powers

On July 28, 1951, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was signed at a United Nations conference in Geneva, Switzerland. The treaty revised earlier refugee agreements from 1933 and 1938 that had collapsed along with the League of Nations. It was drafted in the aftermath of World War II, which uprooted some 60 million people across Europe.

The Convention defined a refugee as someone who, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality.” It established several core protections, including non-refoulement—the prohibition on returning a refugee to territory where their life or freedom would be threatened—and recognized the right of refugees to equal treatment with nationals in elementary education, public relief, religious freedom and access to courts.

These protections were constrained from the outset. Those fleeing generalized violence, armed conflict or economic collapse were excluded unless they could demonstrate individual persecution on one of the five specified grounds. The Convention provided only a right to flee, not a right to enter and be granted asylum—a person must already be outside their country to qualify, and no state is obligated to admit anyone.

Moreover, as originally drafted, the Convention applied only to refugees displaced by events in Europe before January 1, 1951, meaning it offered no protection to those uprooted by conflicts elsewhere in the world. The 1967 Protocol removed these restrictions for new parties but allowed existing signatories to retain their Europe-only constraint, undercutting any claim to universality.

These limitations were not oversights. The 26 drafting states—mostly from Europe and North America—insisted on retaining the sovereign right to decide who could enter their territory. The United States, Canada and Australia still maintained racist immigration policies that effectively barred non-whites and entrants from impoverished countries and had no intention of signing a treaty that might override them.

The Cold War added a further calculation: a narrow definition allowed the major powers to selectively admit individual dissidents fleeing Eastern Bloc states while keeping the door shut against mass refugee flows. A Red Cross proposal that any person forced to seek refuge “is entitled to be received” was rejected; the US delegate argued against “too vague a definition, which would amount ... to a blank check”—an open-ended obligation to admit refugees that no major power was willing to accept.

100 years: Philippine legislature calls for plebiscite on independence

On July 27, 1926, the Philippine House of Representatives, the colonial institution set up by American imperialism, voted to hold a plebiscite on Philippine independence from the US. On August 14, Governor-General Leonard Wood vetoed the bill.

Later in August, the Philippine Senate and House voted to override Wood’s veto, sending the bill directly to the US President under the Jones Law. On April 6, 1927, President Calvin Coolidge officially vetoed the measure.

The July 27 vote was meant to coincide with Republican politician and veteran of the Spanish-American Colonel Carmi Thompson’s 1926 “fact-finding” mission whose report was a classic example of colonial paternalism. He dismissed independence demonstrations as staged productions and wrote that the “natives” did not seem to realize that severing ties would mean losing American “military protection” and result in ruinous tariffs. In this way, Thompson revealed the actual relationship: the Philippines was a captive market for US goods, a source of cheap raw materials, a forward base for penetrating China’s markets and a military stronghold against Japanese imperialism.

The episode was breathlessly reported in the American press as a constitutional crisis. In reality, the July 27 vote revealed the class character of both American imperialism and Filipino nationalism. The independence movement was not a movement of workers and peasants. It was led by the Filipino bourgeoisie, who sought to replace direct colonial rule with their own exploitative rule. When formal independence finally arrived in 1946, it transferred power to a pro-US landowning elite. US companies retained parity rights; military bases remained. An oligarchy of 400 families came to own 90 percent of national wealth. When unrest threatened this arrangement in the 1970s, Washington backed the Marcos dictatorship.

The US had first seized the Philippines in 1898 in the Spanish-American War, crushing the fledgling Philippine Republic in a savage war of conquest, and subjecting the population to mass slaughter, torture and concentration camps. The death toll approached 1 million. As the WSWs has documented, this was “benevolent assimilation”—the birth of American empire caked in Filipino blood.



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