

This week in history: October 5-11

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

4 October 2026

25 years ago: US military operation Enduring Freedom unleashes death and destruction on Afghanistan

On October 7, 2001, Washington launched an imperialist war against Afghanistan named Operation Enduring Freedom. Using the September 11th terrorist attacks as the pretext, the Bush administration directed the confusion and anger into plans for domination of the Middle East and western Asia. Congress overwhelmingly approved the invasion with the Senate voting 98–0 (two senators absent), and the House voting 420–1. The Senate’s Democratic majority leader, Tom Daschle, made a joint appearance with Republican leader Trent Lott, who summed up the bipartisan moment with the true remark, “There is no opposition party.”

US and British warplanes inaugurated the war by bombing Kabul and other Afghan cities. Within days, reports indicated mounting civilian casualties. The Afghan Islamic Press reported more than 250 civilians killed in the first week, with Western diplomats suggesting the true figure was far higher. Warplanes bombed a hospital in Herat, killing up to 100 people. A UN spokesperson described the resulting humanitarian crisis as “the most serious, complex emergency in the world ever.”

While the Bush administration and corporate-controlled media sought to whip up a frenzy solely targeting bin Laden—a former CIA asset—as the *raison d’être* for war, Washington’s actual intentions had much less to do with eliminating “terrorism” than imperialist conquest and plunder.

With the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, a political vacuum emerged in Central Asia, home to the world’s second-largest deposits of proven oil and natural gas reserves. The Caspian Sea region held roughly 270 billion barrels of oil, about 20 percent of world proven reserves, and 665 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, about one-eighth of the planet’s reserves. By attacking Afghanistan, installing a client regime, and moving vast military forces into the region, the US aimed to establish hegemonic control over these resources.

From the beginning, the WSWs opposed the war, writing that it was an imperialist war of aggression and calling for the international unity of the working class against the war and for socialism. The launch of Operation Enduring Freedom represented the militarization of American society amid a deepening social crisis.

50 years ago: Military coup and student massacre in Thailand

On October 6, 1976, Thai police and heavily armed fascist paramilitaries carried out a barbaric massacre of left-wing students and workers at Thammasat University in Bangkok. That evening, the military, led by Defense Minister Admiral Sangad Chaloryu, seized state power in a bloody coup d’état, abolishing the constitution, banning political parties, and imposing martial law.

The massacre marked the culmination of a three-year counter-revolutionary campaign orchestrated by the Thai ruling class, the monarchy, and American imperialism. In October 1973, a massive uprising of hundreds of thousands of students and workers had toppled the hated military dictatorship of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn.

But King Bhumibol Adulyadej intervened to defuse the revolutionary threat—demanding Thanom’s resignation and installing a civilian government—not out of democratic conviction, but to buy time for the counter-attack. The collapse of the military regime nonetheless opened a tumultuous period of mass strikes, peasant land struggles, and radical student mobilizations, which deepened after the humiliating defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975.

Terrified that the revolutionary wave would sweep across Southeast Asia and topple the capitalist order in Thailand, the military and monarchy systematically prepared a fascist counter-offensive. Under the supervision of the military’s Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) and the Border Patrol Police—both trained and funded by the CIA—ultra-royalist death squads were mobilized, including the Red Gaurs, the mass vigilante organization the Village Scouts, and Nawaphon, whose leader, the monk Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, a close associate of the king, declared killing communists a Buddhist duty.

The deliberate trigger for the coup was the orchestrated return from exile on September 19 of former dictator Thanom, whom Bhumibol allowed to return and personally visited. When thousands of students, trade unionists, and socialist activists gathered at Thammasat University to protest, the right-wing press and palace fabricated charges of *lèse-majesté* (the crime of having insulted the monarch) against the demonstrators to incite public hysteria.

At dawn on October 6, royal police and paramilitary thugs encircled the barricaded campus. Armored personnel carriers breached the university gates, and forces fired high-caliber machine guns, anti-tank

rockets, and grenades into the trapped crowd. Scores of unarmed students were slaughtered on the campus grounds. In the adjoining Sanam Luang royal field, wounded students were dragged into the streets, lynched from trees, mutilated, and burned alive before cheering mobs. Official reports admitted to over 40 dead, but independent eyewitnesses and rescue workers placed the toll well above one hundred, with over 3,000 demonstrators brutalized and arrested.

Within hours, Admiral Sangad Chaloryu announced the formation of the National Administrative Reform Council, installing the extreme right-wing judge Thanin Kraivichien as prime minister. American officials in Bangkok immediately pledged cooperation with the new junta, continuing Washington's decades-long backing of the military-monarchy alliance to protect Wall Street's investments and maintain a strategic garrison in the region.

75 years ago: Truman signs Mutual Security Act

On October 10, 1951, United States President Harry S. Truman signed the Mutual Security Act, authorizing roughly \$7.5 billion a year in military, economic, and technical aid to allied governments. The Act consolidated multiple strands of postwar American foreign policy: the Marshall Plan's economic assistance, the Point Four technical program, and the bilateral military aid that had grown up since 1949 were all brought together into a single legislative framework.

The Mutual Security Act replaced the Mutual Defense Assistance Act and the Economic Cooperation Act of 1949. As such, it also abolished the Economic Cooperation Administration, which had run the Marshall Plan, and transferred its functions to a new administrative body called the Mutual Security Agency (MSA).

The purpose of the Act and the agency it created, in the words of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, was to shore up Western Europe against Soviet "encroachment" and to signal Washington's resolve to contain what it called "communism"—in reality any movement or government that threatened the interests of American capitalism, above all the revolutionary struggles of workers and colonial peoples.

The \$7.5 billion authorized by the Act—more than 2 percent of a \$340 billion national economy—was dominated by military assistance, much of it for rearming the armies of Western Europe and financing the war in Korea rather than economic development. Its recipients included dictatorial regimes such as Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Syngman Rhee's South Korea, the Shah's Iran, and Batista's Cuba.

The Mutual Security Act was renewed each year until 1961, when it was replaced by the Foreign Assistance Act, which created the Agency for International Development (AID) to administer aid, with a new emphasis on Latin America. That reorientation reflected the shock of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, which had overthrown Batista—one of the regimes the Mutual Security Act had armed—and Washington's determination to prevent further upheavals in Latin America.

Moscow

On October 5, 1926, the Moscow Art Theatre presented *The Days of the Turbins*, written by Mikhail Bulgakov and directed by Konstantin Stanislavski.

The play was based on Bulgakov's 1925 novel, *The White Guard*, which depicts an upper-middle class family, the Turbins, in Kiev in 1918 as the political and military situation in Ukraine disintegrates. The men in the family are officers in the (pro-tsarist and anti-Bolshevik) White Guard units that supported the local puppet regime of the Germans, who had overthrown Soviet power in Ukraine in February. Bulgakov himself fought for the White Army.

In November, when the play opens, the German army, now defeated by the Allied powers, is withdrawing from Kiev as its puppet government collapses and the Ukrainian nationalist troops under the command of Symon Petliura fill the power vacuum.

The Turbins react to the various disasters that face them. One husband abandons the family. Another dismisses his troops, who are untrained cadets, but is later killed. His brother, who refuses to leave his side, is severely wounded. A pall of grief, fear and a sense of betrayal dominate the characters. In the end, these supporters of the counter-revolution exhibit an exhausted and pragmatic resignation to the Soviet power as the Red Army defeats Petliura's troops. The play is a humanistic portrayal of those who fought the Bolshevik revolution.

The play was criticized in the Soviet press, but it was a popular success. Soviet authorities banned it in 1929 as the Stalinist grip on culture consolidated itself with the defeat of Trotsky's Left Opposition in the Russian Communist Party. Stalin, however, liked the play and saw it over a dozen times. On his orders the ban was rescinded and the play returned to the stage in 1932.

This did not constitute official protection of Bulgakov by the Stalinist bureaucracy and its secret police, the NKVD, however. As with almost all Soviet writers, Bulgakov and his family's lives were in danger, particularly after the mass Stalinist purges in 1937. Many of his literary colleagues were shot or sent to the gulag. In 1937–1939, Bulgakov and his wife kept a packed suitcase by the door, bracing every night for the NKVD's knock. His greatest novel, *The Master and Margarita*, which satirizes the Stalinist regime, was not published until 1966, 26 years after his death, and even then, in censored form.

Although Bulgakov was born and raised in Ukraine, the current right-wing Ukrainian nationalist government, which has elevated Symon Petliura (whose troops massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews) to the status of state hero, has systematically removed Bulgakov's works from open access in public and state libraries across Ukraine and destroyed monuments to him.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

100 years: Bulgakov play, *The Days of the Turbins*, premieres in