

This week in history: October 12-18

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.

11 October 2026

25 years ago: Protests erupt in Europe and Australia against US invasion of Afghanistan

Anti-war demonstrations against the US invasion of Afghanistan erupted in Australia and Europe on October 13, 2001, and continued throughout the week. The protests highlighted the mounting opposition to the US bombing campaign among broad sections of the population, but it was undermined by bourgeois pressure politics.

The rally in Sydney, the largest in the country, drew around 3,000 people. The crowd was socially diverse: professionals, workers with children, university and high school students, and older people who had campaigned against the Vietnam War. A wide range of organizations participated, including radical protest groups, green and environmental associations, student groups, churches and pacifist organizations.

Members of the Afghani community distributed flowers and carried banners condemning both the September 11 attacks and the Bush administration's response. Young people carried placards denouncing the bombing as "answering terrorism with more terrorism," and banners called for lifting sanctions on Iraq and opposing any commitment of Australian troops.

In addition, over 1,000 marched in Melbourne to the US Consulate and an estimated 1,500 protested in Adelaide and 500 in Perth.

Around 20,000-30,000 demonstrated in Berlin against the US military action, and 15,000 gathered in Stuttgart to oppose the Social Democratic Party-Green Party coalition government's support for the war. The demonstrations were organised by a broad alliance of pacifist groups, political organizations, and professional bodies, drawing large numbers of youth and older people who had grown up in the ruins of Germany's cities after the Second World War.

Immigrant community delegations also participated. Banners condemned the government's support, including one reading, "Participation in war has a tradition within the SPD—1914," referencing the SPD's 1914 vote to fund the First World War, and another, "No shedding of blood for oil and gas."

In London, estimates ranged from 20,000 to 50,000, organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Around 1,500–2,000 rallied in Glasgow; about 30,000 took part in Italy's 40th annual Perugia-to-Assisi peace march; and an estimated 5,000 protested in Berne, Switzerland.

The political limitations of the protests were obvious from the pro-capitalist orientation of the organizers and leaders. There was an absence of large contingents of workers, while the official labor bureaucracies refused to call protests or general strikes. Pseudo-left and liberal groups channelled the anti-war energy behind nationalist and capitalist political

parties that ultimately backed imperialist wars rather than mobilizing the working class for revolutionary socialism.

50 years ago: Over one million Canadian workers strike against wage controls

On October 14, 1976, more than 1.2 million Canadian workers walked off the job in a 24-hour general strike, officially designated by the unions as "National Day of Protest." The strike was the largest organized work stoppage in the nation's history and the first general strike since the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. It paralyzed auto assembly lines in Oshawa, steel mills in Hamilton, nickel mines in Sudbury, paper mills, docks, transportation networks and public services from coast to coast.

The mobilization was organized to fight statutory wage controls imposed by the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau. In October 1975, Trudeau enacted the Anti-Inflation Act, establishing the Anti-Inflation Board (AIB), chaired by Jean-Luc Pépin, to cap wage increases at 8, 6, and 4 percent over three successive years. While the government claimed the measures targeted both wages and prices, price controls went unenforced, allowing corporate profits to surge while inflation decimated workers' real wages. These controls were part of a global austerity offensive, as the ruling classes internationally sought to make the working class pay for the deepening crisis of post-war capitalism.

The strike demonstrated the colossal social power of the Canadian working class. Industrial centers across Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta and the Maritimes were brought to a standstill. Tens of thousands joined mass rallies in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Windsor, and Ottawa.

Significantly, the action forged unity between French- and English-speaking workers. Quebec's three major union federations, the FTQ, CSN and CEQ, struck alongside the CLC, breaking through the chauvinist divisions fostered by the ruling elite and Quebec bourgeois nationalists.

One striking Canadian autoworker explained the situation to reporters from the *Bulletin*, US predecessor to the WSWs: "Right now we've got an added problem because the Trudeau government in Canada has put on wage restraints... We're up against something in Canada we've faced for the first time, so it promises to be interesting... We're prepared to fight for what we've got and we'll stay out till we get it."

But the strike's potential was deliberately derailed by the union bureaucracy. Under intense pressure from rank-and-file militancy, the Canadian Labour Congress, had adopted a convention resolution in May authorizing a full general strike to bring down the government. But the

leadership never intended to honor it, retreating instead to a single-day “protest” designed to dissipate working-class anger.

Terrified of a revolutionary confrontation with the state, the CLC leadership promoted “tripartism,” the idea that labor, capital and the state shared common interests and could rule in the form of a partnership. An arrangement that clearly subordinated the working class to big business.

The 1976 general strike provided a critical lesson for the international working class, revealing the irreconcilable conflict between the militancy of the rank and file and the corporatist role of the union bureaucracy. With the complicity of the CLC and NDP, the wage controls were allowed to remain in effect until 1978, paving the way for an escalating capitalist counter-offensive against workers’ living standards.

75 years ago: Pakistan prime minister Liaquat Ali Khan assassinated

On October 16, 1951, Liaquat Ali Khan, the first prime minister of Pakistan, was shot dead while addressing a crowd of around 100,000 people at Company Bagh in Rawalpindi. Khan had risen to speak when a man near the front, later identified as Sayyid Akbar, an Afghan national, fired two shots into his chest. Police shot Akbar dead on the spot. Khan was rushed to hospital, where doctors attempted a blood transfusion, but he died of his wounds shortly afterward. The assassination has never been solved; the killer’s motives and the identity of any co-conspirators remain unclear to this day.

Khan had been prime minister since Pakistan’s creation in 1947, which was the product of the communal partition of the Indian subcontinent, engineered by the All-India Muslim League in collusion with the Indian National Congress leadership and the departing British imperialists.

The League had raised the demand for a separate Muslim state to divert the rising unrest of workers and peasants into communal channels and to stake out a share of power for the Muslim elite. The partition it secured resulting in up to two million deaths and the displacement of twelve to fourteen million more.

A close lieutenant of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League leader, Khan helped lead the campaign for a separate Muslim state and was known as Jinnah’s “right hand.” His government promulgated the Objectives Resolution in 1949, declaring Pakistan an Islamic state, and he personally held the portfolios of foreign minister, defense minister and frontier regions minister.

In foreign policy he aligned Pakistan firmly with the United States in the emerging Cold War.

After Khan’s assassination, Khwaja Nazimuddin, the governor-general, resigned in order to succeed Khan as prime minister. Nazimuddin’s administration was marked by further crisis and a stepped-up campaign to incite communal divisions, entrench Urdu as the official language of Pakistan and crack down on Bengali protesters with police violence.

100 years ago: Joint Left Opposition in the Russian Communist Party renounces factional activity

On October 16, 1926, six leading figures of the United Opposition in the Russian Communist Party—Leon Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Yuri Pyatakov, Grigory Sokolnikov, and Grigory Evdokimov—signed a statement renouncing factional activity. Published in *Pravda* the following day, the declaration was the climax of a month-long confrontation with the Stalin–Bukharin majority.

In the words of the Soviet historian Vadim Rogovin: Trotsky and his comrades “considering their views to be correct and reserving for themselves the right to struggle for them within the party framework, refused to defend their views by factional methods and called upon all of their comrades who shared their views to do the same.” These methods included clandestine meetings, separate platforms, and appeals over the head of the Central Committee that the apparatus was using as the pretext for expulsion.

What gave rise to the statement was the Opposition’s attempt to break through the bureaucratic wall that the apparatus had erected around the party. In late September and early October, Oppositionists had appealed directly to the rank and file in Moscow and Leningrad factories—the Aviapribor, Dynamo, and Krasnyi Bogatyr plants.

The response of the Stalinist faction was to substitute organized violence for political argument: “fighting detachments” of Stalinist loyalists and the OGPU were dispatched to shout down Opposition speakers and organize administrative suppression. (These methods sometimes failed to work, particularly in Leningrad.) *Pravda* and *Izvestia* ran a daily campaign denouncing the Opposition as a “second party” and “Menshevik defeatists.”

Faced with expulsion under the 1921 ban on factions, the Opposition leaders chose tactical retreat. Their reasoning was that by formally renouncing factional activity they could remain inside the party and continue the struggle through legal channels—that the party could still be won back to the Leninist program.

As Trotsky later noted in his autobiography: “The opposition was obliged to beat a retreat. On October 16, we made a declaration announcing that although we considered our views just and reserved the right of fighting for them within the framework of the party, we renounced the use of activities that might engender the danger of a split. The declaration of October 16 was intended not for the apparatus but for the mass of the party. It was an expression of our desire to remain in the party and serve it further. Although the Stalinists began to break the truce the day after it was concluded, still we gained time. The winter of 1926-7 gave us a certain breathing-spell which allowed us to carry out a more thorough theoretical examination of many questions.”



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