

This week in history: October 26-November 1

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

25 October 2026

25 years ago: Japan repudiates pacifist clause in Constitution

On October 29, 2001, Japanese lawmakers approved legislation that permitted the deployment of military troops—euphemistically called the Self-Defense Force (SDF)—to assist the US-led war operations in Afghanistan on a logistical basis. The legislation held grave significance. For the first time since World War II, Japan's military was now authorized to engage in operations outside of Japan. It was the first major step in unleashing Japanese militarism, which had conquered much of eastern Asia in the first half of the previous century.

Right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his three-party ruling coalition composed of the Liberal Democratic Party, New Komeito and New Conservative Party, holding strong majorities in both legislative chambers, quickly passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law. Oppositional parties—the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Social Democratic Party—voted against the measure. But they channeled their dissent into a nationalist direction rather than targeting the reemergence of imperialist politics and flag-waving militarism. The JCP's criticism largely consisted of accusing Koizumi of subservience to the US, with its newspaper *Akahata* attributing the rush to deploy forces to the government's concern that "Japan may fail to 'show the flag' and fail to meet US expectations."

The Japanese bourgeoisie saw an opportunity to use the September 11 terrorist attacks to assert its predatory interests in the Middle East. Having handed over \$13 billion to Washington during the First Gulf War (1990-91), Japan was nonetheless excluded from negotiations that decided the division of spoils over the resource-rich region. Japan purchased a vast majority of its oil and gas from the Gulf states. Determined not to be shut out again, Koizumi campaigned on a pledge to scrap Article 9 of the Constitution that prohibits war or the use of force as a "means of settling international disputes."

While still proscribed from active combat, the technologically sophisticated SDF was authorized to provide vital military services. These included erecting field hospitals, clearing mines, search-and-rescue missions and providing security for supply bases and airfields. The government volunteered troops to police refugee camps and offered the navy to transport equipment and fuel to US forces, with up to four ships, including a destroyer, potentially deployed to the US base at Diego Garcia. New rules of engagement permitted Japanese forces to use deadly force to protect not only themselves but "those under their care," and there was open discussion of the doctrine allowing overt combat missions.

Militarization was used as justification to undermine democratic rights within Japan. A secret defense bill curtailed public access to military

information, and police were granted access to monitor private e-mail using a modified version of the FBI's "Cannibal" surveillance system.

50 years ago: South African Apartheid regime proclaims sham independence of Transkei

On October 26, 1976, the white minority apartheid regime in South Africa formally declared the territory of Transkei an "independent" nation. In a ceremony in the capital of Umtata, South African President Nicolaas Diederichs handed constitutional documents to Chief Kaiser Matanzima, who was installed as prime minister of the phony state.

Transkei was the first of ten "Bantustans"—nominally self-governing black "homelands" created by the apartheid government in order to preserve racial segregation and economic exploitation amid growing working class rebellions.

The legal framework for the system had been established under the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959, which divided the black population into ethnic and linguistic groups such as Xhosa, Zulu, and Tswana. Under this policy, the apartheid regime claimed that black South Africans were not citizens of South Africa at all, but belonged instead to these fragmented, economically barren territories. Transkei was granted nominal self-government in 1963 before becoming the first homeland declared fully "independent" in 1976.

Far from representing genuine national self-determination, the Bantustan system functioned as a mechanism of political disenfranchisement. Now legally foreign citizens, roughly 3 million Xhosa-speaking people were effectively stripped of any political right to petition the South African government, despite the fact that over 1 million Xhosa lived and worked permanently in urban centers like Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Transkei and the other Bantustans served as reservoirs of cheap labor for South African capitalism. Millions of people were forcibly removed from "white" areas and placed into overcrowded territories which lacked basic industry and infrastructure. Black workers were permitted into South Africa proper only as temporary migrant laborers to work in the mines, factories and farms, while their families remained confined to the homelands, allowing employers and the state to avoid providing social benefits to dependents.

The Bantustan administrations were headed by corrupt chiefs and collaborators like Matanzima, whose government depended almost entirely on Pretoria for its budget and followed its every order. These puppet authorities policed the population on behalf of the apartheid state while fostering ethnic divisions to undermine a unified struggle

by the working class.

The proclamation of Transkei came just four months after the June 1976 Soweto uprising had shaken the apartheid regime. The move aimed to break up this emerging class struggle by dividing the working class along ethnic lines and completely denying the right for the black population to protest.

No country outside South Africa recognized the new state, and the United Nations General Assembly voted 134 to 0—with the United States casting the sole abstention—to reject the declaration and prohibit international dealings with Transkei.

The Trotskyist movement opposed the Bantustan system categorically, explaining in the *Bulletin*, US predecessor of the WSWs, that “far from granting them independence, the homeland scheme legitimizes apartheid and permanently denies the African population any political rights,” relying on “the old colonial tactic of divide and rule” to salvage a regime “shaken to its foundations by the mass revolt of workers and youth.”

75 years ago: US air strike kills 500 in Korea, days after ceasefire talks resume

On October 29, 1951, 16 US Navy warplanes struck a compound in Kapsan, deep in North Korea, where regional North Korean and Chinese military and party leaders had gathered. For nearly an hour, the planes repeatedly attacked the site, dropping 1,000-pound bombs and napalm and carrying out strafing runs.

“We set up a daisy chain,” one pilot involved in the operation later recalled. “We went round and round hitting [the target] again and again . . . just blasting the hell out of it.” By the US Navy’s own account, between 510 and 530 people were killed.

The raid was a planned assassination operation enabled by the Young-do Unit, CIA-trained Korean guerrillas whose spy network, including North Korean officers and party officials, had located the meeting. The intelligence was passed to the Navy, which carried out the attack. The gathering had been organized to coordinate operations against the CIA-backed guerrillas inside North Korea. The US military had carried out a diversionary air strike the previous day to conceal preparations for the raid.

The attack came just four days after armistice talks had resumed at Panmunjom on October 25, following a two-month suspension. The negotiations were marked by bitter disputes over the military demarcation line, with Washington demanding territorial concessions from the Chinese and North Koreans. The Truman administration used the war to justify a vast military buildup in Asia and internationally, directed against China and the Soviet Union.

The massacre at Kapsan was one operation in a much broader air campaign that devastated the Korean peninsula over three years. The United States dropped an estimated 635,000 tons of bombs, including more than 32,000 tons of napalm, on Korea during the war—more than across the entire Pacific theatre of World War II. Much of North Korea’s population were forced to seek shelter underground, in caves and tunnels. In the closing months of the war, US aircraft bombed irrigation dams that supplied much of the water used for the North’s rice production. An estimated two to three million Koreans were killed during the war, many of them civilians.

100 years ago: Fourth assassination attempt on Mussolini

On October 31, 1926, a bullet grazed the Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini as he was riding in an open-top car past a crowd along Via dell’Indipendenza in Bologna to inaugurate the newly constructed Stadio Littoriale (now the Stadio Renato Dall’Ara). The occasion was to mark the fourth anniversary of the March on Rome when his fascist movement came to power. The bullet damaged the dictator’s coat near the chest but left him uninjured.

Immediately after the shot, the crowd and nearby Fascist Blackshirts converged on Anteo Zamboni, a 15-year-old boy from Bologna who had allegedly fired the shot. Before any formal interrogation, let alone a trial, could take place, members of the fascist militia and cavalry officers beat, shot and stabbed Zamboni more than a dozen times. He died on the spot.

Zamboni’s father had been associated with anarchism earlier in life and he was interrogated in the days following the assassination attempt. The elder Zamboni and his sister were later tried by a fascist tribunal and found guilty of influencing the boy and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Historians have cast doubt on whether Anteo Zamboni was responsible for the assassination attempt and theorized that someone else may have fired at Mussolini as a part of inter-fascist rivalries in Bologna.

The shooting, nevertheless, sparked an outbreak of fascist violence throughout Italy. In Genoa the offices of the socialist newspaper *Il Lavoro* were set on fire, and in Naples the house of the philosopher Benedetto Croce was ransacked by a fascist mob.

Mussolini’s regime used the incident to solidify the fascist totalitarian rule in Italy with a series of “exceptional decrees” by the end of November. Non-fascist political parties, independent trade unions and anti-fascist newspapers were dissolved and outlawed; non-fascist deputies in parliament (including Communist leader Antonio Gramsci) were stripped of their seats; a special political police was created to monitor and suppress dissent; a special tribunal was created to try political crimes; and the death penalty was reinstated for attempts against the head of state.

Two films have been made about Anteo Zamboni and the assassination attempt: *Gli ultimi tre giorni* [*The Last Three Days*] (1977) directed by Gianfranco Mingozzi and *Love and Anarchy* (1973) directed by Lina Wertmüller.



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