This week in history: November 16-22

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.

15 November 2026

25 years ago: Danish Social Democrats suffer historic election defeat

On November 20, 2001, Denmark's ruling Social Democratic Party suffered a historic electoral defeat. Its share of the vote fell from 35.9 percent in 1998 to 29.1 percent, a decline of 6.8 percentage points, and it lost 11 seats, leaving it with 52 in the 179-seat Folketing. The right-wing Liberal Party (Venstre) won 56 seats, ending the Social Democrats' unbroken run as the largest party in parliament since 1924. On November 27, Venstre leader Anders Fogh Rasmussen succeeded Poul Nyrup Rasmussen as prime minister, heading a minority coalition with the Conservative People's Party.

The election marked a sharp shift to the right across the bourgeois parties, and the far-right Danish People's Party, led by Pia Kjærsgaard, gained the most from it. It won 12 percent of the vote and 22 seats, nine more than in 1998, and became the third-largest party in parliament. The new government depended on its votes. With the collapse of the Social Democrats, the right-wing parties together won their largest majority since 1926.

The Social Democrats' defeat was rooted in their own right-wing policies, which alienated their working-class base. During the 1998 election campaign, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen personally pledged to preserve the early retirement scheme (efterløn), which allowed workers to retire at 60. That November, his government agreed to tighten its terms, increasing the required contribution period from 20 to 25 years.

Earlier that year, it had adopted a package of tax measures to restrain consumer spending and legislated an end to a major strike whose central demands included a sixth week of paid vacation. The dispute, including employers' lockouts, involved about 500,000 workers. This record allowed the right-wing parties to pose as defenders of welfare, healthcare and care for the elderly, despite years of economic growth, low inflation and unemployment near a 25-year low.

The three-week campaign was dominated by attacks on immigrants, in which the Social Democrats took full part. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, government and opposition parties competed to propose harsher restrictions on immigration, asylum and family reunification, fueling anti-Muslim prejudice. Even former Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen of the Social Liberals (Radikale Venstre) called it the most offensive campaign in his 30 years in parliament.

Spain's failing Francoist regime sets date for elections amid mass strikes

On November 18, 1976, Spain's parliament, the Cortes Españolas, voted 425 to 59, with 13 abstentions, to approve Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez's Law for Political Reform. The measure set into motion the Cortes' own dissolution, scheduling general elections for June 1977—Spain's first since 1936.

Suárez's government was the remnant of the fascist dictatorship remaining after longtime dictator Francisco Franco's death in November 1975. Drafted by Cortes President Torcuato Fernández-Miranda and backed by King Juan Carlos, the reform aimed to transition the crumbling regime into a constitutional monarchy while preserving the state apparatus, military and crown.

The vote came six days after the November 12 general strike—the first since Franco's death. Called by the Coordinator of Trade Union Organizations (COS) and including banned union and socialist groups, the walkout drew over half a million workers across Barcelona, Madrid's industrial belt, Seville and the Basque Country.

Workers struck against Suárez's recent austerity decree, which imposed a wage freeze and restricted collective bargaining amid a deepening economic crisis marked by inflation running between 17 and nearly 25 percent and more than 800,000 unemployed out of a 13.5 million workforce. At factory assemblies, strikers demanded an $85 monthly wage increase, amnesty for political prisoners and full recognition of independent trade unions.

As *The Bulletin*, the US predecessor of the WSWS, wrote on November 23, 1976, "All the publicity about the 'triumph' of President Adolfo Suarez in the Cortes cannot cover up the panic in the ruling class as all the institutions of the fascist state built by Franco disintegrate." While the bill set a December referendum and 1977 elections for a 350-seat lower house and a Senate partially appointed by the king, it excluded the Communist Party and any party to its left and denied union recognition. Yet the Stalinists and Social Democrats held secret talks with Suárez, propped up the fascist unions, and even floated an interim military government under General Mellado.

Far from representing a break with fascism by the Spanish ruling

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class, the newly proposed parliamentary framework was a desperate effort to save capitalism in Spain. As the Francoist state disintegrated under mass strikes and economic crisis, the ruling class called controlled elections to prevent workers from seizing factories, ports and centers of production, as had unfolded in Portugal during the 1974–1975 Carnation Revolution.

The collaboration by the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) with Suárez continued the Stalinists' counterrevolutionary treachery throughout the period since the Spanish Civil War. During the Civil War, Moscow and the PCE dismantled workers' committees, defended bourgeois property under the program of the Popular Front alliance with the liberal bourgeois. This meant the hunting down of revolutionary socialists and the sabotage of the revolution, which cleared the path for Franco's victory.

Forty years later, the Stalinists' interests remained unchanged. As the Franco dictatorship collapsed, Moscow and the PCE sought to block the working class from taking power to prevent a revolutionary workers' government from arising in Europe as a rival to the USSR. By propping up the fascist unions and backing the monarchy, they once again defended European capitalism.

75 years ago: Deadly clashes between British troops and Egyptian police in Suez Canal Zone

On November 18, 1951, British troops and Egyptian police exchanged gunfire in the city of Ismailia, on the Suez Canal, leaving numerous people dead. The fighting, which continued over several days, occurred amid an escalating struggle against Britain's military occupation of the Canal Zone, which was provoking mass protests and armed resistance.

The confrontation followed the Egyptian government's unilateral abrogation in October of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, which permitted Britain to station troops in the Canal Zone despite Egypt having gained formal independence in 1922. Britain refused to recognize the treaty's repudiation and reinforced its military presence.

Ismailia, the headquarters of British military operations in the Canal Zone, had already witnessed bloody confrontations. In October, British troops killed five Egyptians amid widespread protests against the occupation.

The anti-British movement extended well beyond the armed clashes. Thousands of Egyptians joined volunteer formations organised to resist the occupation. Egyptian workers withdrew their labor from British military installations, disrupting supplies and transport. According to a contemporary US diplomatic report, 85 percent of the Egyptian workforce employed by the British in the Canal Zone had left their jobs. A broader boycott of British interests was also developing.

The November fighting involved repeated exchanges of gunfire between British soldiers and Egyptian police. Contemporary reports recorded numerous casualties on both sides. Hundreds of British military dependents were subsequently evacuated from Ismailia.

The clashes foreshadowed an even bloodier confrontation on January 25, 1952, when British forces attacked Egyptian police barracks in Ismailia, killing more than 40 policemen. The massacre triggered mass demonstrations and riots in Cairo the following day, deepening the crisis of the Egyptian monarchy. In July 1952, the Free Officers movement overthrew King Farouk, opening a new stage in the struggle against British imperialist domination.

100 years ago: Striking British coal miners begin return to work

On November 22, 1926, Britain coal miners began returning to the pits, ending a lockout that had lasted nearly seven months. The return to work was a defeat, not because of the coal owners' superior strength, but through the betrayal of their own trade union and Labour Party leadership.

The miners struck on May 1, 1926, against wage cuts and longer hours and were joined by railwaymen, transport workers, printers and engineers in a near-total stoppage of the economy. This was the General Strike, the greatest class confrontation in British history.

But the General Strike had been called off by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) on May 12, after just nine days. Its leaders, men like Jimmy Thomas and Walter Citrine, had gone cap in hand to Downing Street, terrified that a successful struggle would "create a revolutionary state of affairs," as Thomas, the leader of the railway workers' union, is reported to have said.

The trade union bureaucrats had never wanted victory. When the miners refused to surrender and fought on alone, the TUC and Labour Party did nothing to support them and worked instead to isolate and demoralize the struggle.

Men who had held out through the summer and autumn—through hunger, eviction and the strikebreaking of the Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies—filed back to work on the owners' terms, many to be victimized as "agitators" and refused re-employment.

The conditions miners returned under were the very terms they had struck to resist. The Samuel Commission's demands, which the miners had rejected in May, were now imposed wholesale: wage cuts, longer hours and the abolition of the national wages agreement in favor of district-by-district bargaining that pitted one coalfield against another. The eight-hour day, won in 1919, was effectively abandoned.

The Communist Party of Great Britain, following the line of the Stalin-led Comintern, offered no alternative. Its strategy of tailing the trade union "lefts" and pressuring the TUC leadership left the miners leaderless. Leon Trotsky, then leading the Left Opposition in the USSR, argued that a correct revolutionary line would not have guaranteed victory but would have weakened the bureaucracy's grip and prepared future struggles.

The return to the pits on November 22 was the bitter confirmation of that lesson: militant struggle without an independent, revolutionary party ended in defeat.

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