This week in history: November 23-29

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

22 November 2026

25 years ago: German Greens vote to back imperialist war in Afghanistan

On November 24–25, 2001, the national conference of the German Green Party in Rostock voted to support the US-led war in Afghanistan. In a show of delegate cards, more than two-thirds of the roughly 700 delegates backed an executive resolution ratifying the Bundestag's November 16 decision to commit up to 3,900 German soldiers to Washington's "war on terror."

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) tied the deployment to a vote of confidence, forcing coalition deputies to choose between the war and the survival of the government. Eight Green deputies had declared their opposition. They then split their votes evenly to ensure passage: Hans-Christian Ströbele and three others voted no, while four supplied the votes the chancellor needed. The government received 336 votes, two more than the 334 required.

The Greens threw their support behind the war just as its murderous character came into full view. Backed by American air power, the warlords of the Northern Alliance had taken Kabul on November 13. As the conference closed, the Taliban surrendered Kunduz, and US Marines seized an airstrip near Kandahar for their first base in the country. Hundreds of prisoners taken at Kunduz were killed when Northern Alliance forces, backed by US air strikes, crushed their uprising at the Qala-i-Jangi fortress. Two days later, Fischer opened UN-sponsored talks near Bonn to decide who would govern Afghanistan under American occupation.

In Rostock, Fischer made clear that rejecting the motion would end the coalition. The only choice, he declared, was to accept responsibility as a party of government or "to leave." The party's task now was "to formulate Green conditions in a war." He received a standing ovation.

The left wing offered only symbolic opposition. Ströbele and Annelie Buntenbach demanded "a clear No" to German intervention and drew nearly identical applause, often from the same delegates. Ströbele then helped Fischer's supporters polish the main motion, adding a single sentence: "The Green Party also remains committed and bound to the tradition of pacifism." The resolution backed the coalition and the war while praising the deputies who had voted against it.

This rehearsed game was possible only because no one raised the real aims of the war: control of the energy resources of Central Asia and the Caspian basin, and a violent redivision of the world among the great powers. A decade earlier, the Greens had marched against the Gulf War under the banner "No blood for oil." In Rostock, not a single delegate mentioned oil. Two and a half years after endorsing the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia at Bielefeld, the Greens had again placed themselves at the service of German imperialism.

50 years ago: Massive earthquake in eastern Turkey kills thousands, displaces a quarter million

On November 24, 1976, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Turkey's Van Province near Çald?ran and Muradiye, close to the Iranian and Soviet borders. The six-second tremor killed between 4,000 and 5,000 people and destroyed more than 80 percent of buildings across 2,000 square kilometers.

Rural villages suffered catastrophic destruction. In Çald?ran, 95 percent of houses collapsed, killing 615 of the town's 3,304 residents, while 2,313 perished in surrounding villages. Despite eastern Anatolia's active fault lines, Turkish authorities had classified Çald?ran as only an intermediate seismic risk zone because no major quake had struck within 100 kilometers in 74 years. Most homes were built from rubble masonry held together with mud mortar and topped with heavy earth roofs, offering no resistance to shaking. Reinforced concrete structures, meanwhile, suffered no complete collapses.

As driving snow and sub-zero temperatures swept the mountains, roughly 250,000 survivors were left exposed without shelter, food or medical care. A *Financial Times* dispatch noted that "there are no tents, no blankets, no medicine, no doctors, no food, no water and no shrouds." One observer commented: "Organization does not exist at all. There is only one thing the thousands of victims have in common—hopelessness."

Even basic tools were absent. *The Bulletin*, US predecessor of the WSWS, quoted villager Mehmet Zeki, who lost his wife, three children, and 86-year-old mother after digging through the rubble with his bare hands until they bled: "We had no help. If I had had a shovel my wife and mother would not have died." An estimated 1.35 million people across the region required emergency assistance in the aftermath of the quake, more than half of them children.

The disaster exposed the rot of Turkey's right-wing capitalist

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regime under Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, which had been threatening martial law against a militant wave of strikes and factory occupations. In October police killed an Istanbul metalworker when they stormed an occupied plant to break a strike.

While the US-backed Demirel government mobilized police and security forces to suppress workers in the cities, it left thousands to die under the rubble and abandoned hundreds of thousands more to freeze on the barren plains. Ankara kept its 150,000-strong Third Army stationed nearby along the Soviet border, initially supplying only 400 tents and 470 blankets.

Though triggered by a natural fault rupture, the scale of the slaughter in eastern Anatolia was a social crime. It formed part of a global pattern across several major earthquakes in the 1970s—from Peru in 1970 and Nicaragua in 1972 to Guatemala and the Philippines in 1976—in which capitalist governments' neglect of safe housing, planning, and emergency relief turned natural disasters into major catastrophes resulting in mass death for workers and peasants.

75 years ago: Coup d'état in Syria consolidates pro-US military rule

On November 29, 1951, Syrian military leader Adib Shishakli carried out a coup against the government of Prime Minister Maarouf al-Dawalibi, leading to the resignation of President Hashim al-Atassi and consolidating a pro-US military dictatorship in the country.

This was the fourth coup d'état in Syria since its independence from France in 1946. Shishakli himself had become the de facto leader of Syria in December 1949, following a US-backed coup, and sought in the following years to concentrate greater power in the hands of the military.

The immediate trigger for the 1951 coup was al-Dawalibi's refusal to appoint Fawzi Selu, a political ally and confidant of Shishakli, as defence minister. Instead, the prime minister assumed the defense portfolio himself, challenging the military's control over the government. Shishakli ordered the arrest of al-Dawalibi and his cabinet. President al-Atassi resigned on December 2, and Selu was subsequently installed as head of state, while Shishakli retained effective control.

The Syrian parliament was dissolved; opposition political parties were suppressed and restrictions imposed on the press. Shishakli exercised dictatorial powers behind the nominal leadership of Selu, before formally assuming the presidency himself in 1953.

The coup took place amid the efforts of US imperialism to supplant the French and British colonial powers in the Middle East and assert its own interests in Syria. The Truman administration was determined to protect the American oil industry in the region—including the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (TAPLINE), which carried Saudi oil to the Mediterranean—and to counter the growing influence of the Syrian working class and Communist Party.

The CIA played a central role in organizing the March 1949 coup led by Syrian Army Chief of Staff Husni al-Zaim. After Zaim was overthrown and executed in August that year by a rival military faction, the CIA supported Shishakli's rise to power in December. His regime was regarded favorably by Washington, which saw military rule as a means of securing Western interests against nationalist and left-wing opposition.

Shishakli's dictatorship was overthrown in February 1954, but US subversion of Syria did not end. Washington continued its efforts to install a compliant regime, including through the CIA's abortive 1957 coup plot, Operation Wappen.

100 years ago: Zinoviev removed as chairman of the Communist International

On November 23, 1926, at the Seventh Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), Grigori Zinoviev was removed from the chairmanship he had held since the Comintern's founding in 1919. His ouster marked a further stage in the Stalinist bureaucracy's destruction of the world party of socialist revolution.

Zinoviev had been one of the principal architects of the bureaucratic degeneration that followed Lenin's death, joining Stalin and Kamenev in the "triumvirate" that hounded Trotsky and suppressed the Left Opposition. But by 1925, having broken with Stalin to form the "New Opposition" with Kamenev, and in 1926 uniting with Trotsky in the United Opposition, Zinoviev found himself devoured by the very apparatus he had helped build.

The plenum that removed him was an endorsement of the Stalin-Bukharin theory of "socialism in one country" over permanent revolution, developed by Trotsky, which had guided the October 1917 seizure of power by the Russian working class. The Comintern, which Lenin and Trotsky had forged as the general staff of world revolution, was being converted into an instrument of the Soviet bureaucracy's foreign policy, including the subordination the Chinese revolution of 1925–27 to the Kuomintang, and the British working class to the Anglo-Russian Committee. Zinoviev's expulsion from the ECCI, and Bukharin's elevation, consolidated this counter-revolutionary course.

The episode vindicated Trotsky's warning that the bureaucracy, once entrenched, would not tolerate any opposition within its ranks. Zinoviev, who had once denounced Trotskyism, was himself expelled from the party in 1927, capitulated, and was finally murdered in the Moscow Trials of 1936.

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