

This week in history: April 27-May 3

27 April 2015

25 years ago: South Korean workers battle police

Hundreds of thousands of workers and students clashed with police in cities throughout South Korea in May Day protests called to denounce the violent attacks on strikers at the Hyundai shipyard in Ulsan and the headquarters of the Korean Broadcasting System in Seoul. At both locations, sit-in strikes by workers, called over political demands, were broken up by thousands of police. Fighting was reported in 18 cities.

The largest pitched battles on May Day were in the streets of Ulsan and Seoul. Students and workers chanted, “Down with Roh Tae Woo,” calling for the ouster of the country’s US-backed right-wing president, a former army general.

The militant union confederation Chonnohyop, which had been denied legal status, called a general strike for May Day that was carried out by workers at hundreds of factories. A sympathy strike against the police attacks continued at the Hyundai Motor Co. auto plant in Ulsan, where 27,000 workers voted to continue striking at least until May 6.

In Ulsan, a city of 650,000 on the south coast of the country which was the center of the Hyundai industrial empire, about 120 workers were in their sixth day of occupation of a 240-foot-high crane in the Hyundai shipyard. They threatened “an extreme action” unless they were supplied with food and water.

Riot police invaded the shipyard on the morning of Saturday, April 28, to evict workers who had occupied the yard demanding the government release union leaders who had been imprisoned. The army of 12,000 police overpowered the 2,000 workers, who fought back with iron bars, clubs, firebombs and homemade mortars. Over 500 strikers were arrested.

50 years ago: US invades Dominican Republic

On April 28, 1965, over 500 US Marines were airlifted into the Dominican Republic in a blatant act of imperialist aggression aimed at reinstating a

pro-American dictatorship. They were the first contingent of an occupation force that would rise to more than 42,000.

President Lyndon Johnson ordered the troops in on the pretext of protecting civilians, after supporters of former President Juan Bosch, in a popularly supported military uprising one week earlier, ousted the US-backed regime headed by Donald Reid Cabral. Soldiers supporting the uprising distributed weapons to students and workers, who poured into the streets to celebrate the downfall of the dictatorship.

Within a few days US troop strength reached 30,000. American forces began battling the rebels as the Johnson administration shed its phony neutrality. Johnson declared that the uprising had been taken over by “communists” and he would fight to prevent another Cuban-style revolution in the Western Hemisphere.

The short-lived uprising brought with it the eighth change of government in the Dominican Republic since the assassination of US-backed dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961. Popular opposition to the Cabral regime had been mounting as the government implemented US-dictated economic austerity policies. The Bosch government had been overthrown in a military coup in September 1963, approved by US President John Kennedy. In supporting the uprising that reinstated him, Bosch, a bourgeois liberal, declared his support for a return to “constitutional government.”

Over 2,000 Dominicans were killed in the invasion and occupation, more than 1,000 of these civilians. Forty-four US soldiers died.

Himmler orders construction of Auschwitz

On April 27, 1940, SS head Heinrich Himmler ordered the creation of a prison concentration camp near the Polish village of Oswiecim, recently annexed to Nazi Germany after its invasion and dismemberment of Poland. Auschwitz, as it was called in German,

became the site where, by the end of World War II, between 1.1 million and 1.5 million people were murdered, 90 percent of them Jews.

Originally created as a prison for Polish and German war prisoners, Auschwitz was proposed as a site by SS Lieutenant Rudolph Höss, due to its location near a major railway junction. After Nazi Germany launched its war to the east against the Soviet Union in 1941, the operations of Auschwitz were expanded to dozens of buildings and thousands of acres, overseen by some 7,000 SS troops.

By the autumn of 1941, with construction of Birkenau, or Auschwitz II, the full-scale operation of the extermination camp began. Birkenau was the center of the wholesale slaughter of Europe's Jews, along with Poles, Roma and Sinti, Soviet prisoners of war, and the mentally and physically handicapped.

All prisoners were greeted by a sign at the camp entrance bearing the fascist slogan, *Arbeit macht frei*—work makes you free. Prisoners deemed capable of slave labor were separated from those bound for immediate extermination—the elderly, sick, and small children. The healthy and strong were sent to a third camp in the Auschwitz complex, created for the benefit of a major Germany industrial cartel, IG Farben. There they were worked and starved to death.

Rudolph Höss was appointed the camp's commandant. For most of the war the fanatical fascist and anti-Semite remained in charge of the camp, overseeing systematic extermination, slave labor and human experimentation schemes. He was hung at Auschwitz in 1947 after his conviction at the Nuremberg Trials. Thirteen IG Farben executives were given light prison sentences before being allowed to return to their lucrative careers.

100 years ago: Italy breaks alliance with Germany, Austria-Hungary

On May 3, 1915, Italy officially revoked the Triple Alliance, a military alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany. While the two Central Powers had been at war for almost nine months against Britain, France, Russia (the Triple Entente) and other allied powers, Italy had maintained neutrality, claiming that the Triple Alliance was only a treaty with regard to defensive actions. In reality, the Italian government was increasingly preoccupied with gaining territory at the

expense of the Austrian empire.

In the period preceding the war Italy had maintained good relations with the Entente powers. The decision to come into the war and on whose side was determined by which alliance would offer the greatest spoils to the Italian bourgeoisie. While Germany offered small concessions regarding territory, the British and the Entente promised more.

On April 26, 1915 Italy's prime minister, Antonio Salandra, signed the London Pact without the approval of the Italian parliament. The treaty promised Italy huge territorial gains should the Allies be victorious, in return for joining the war on the side of the Allies within the following month. The territories promised included large sections of Austrian territory and German colonies in Africa.

After Italy revoked the Triple Alliance, there was still some resistance in the Italian parliament to entering the war. A majority of the parliament was inclined to maintain Italy's neutrality, while the nationalists, led by Benito Mussolini, organized massive demonstrations in favor of entry. Mussolini had been expelled from the Italian Socialist Party for his pro-war stance. By April 1915 Mussolini had openly adopted a virulent form of Italian nationalism, denouncing socialism and the class struggle and forming the embryo of the future Fascist Party.

The massive Italian working class movement in the Socialist Party (PSI) and the trade unions, while proclaiming neutrality, offered no resistance to the move toward war, or to the right-wing nationalist agitation. Even the "left" of the PSI remained supine, summed up by the slogan of Costantino Lazzari, "neither join, nor obstruct!"

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