

This week in history: February 29-March 6

29 February 2016

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: LA police videotaped brutally beating Rodney King

During the early morning hours of March 3, 1991, up to a dozen Los Angeles police officers were videotaped viciously torturing a helpless black motorist, Rodney King. He was repeatedly administered electric shocks with a Taser dart, while being kicked and beaten with batons.

Police stopped King in the San Fernando Valley, allegedly because he had failed to pull over for a highway patrol officer. The noise woke up George Holliday, who decided to record the ensuing confrontation from his second floor apartment on a newly purchased video camera.

When the tape begins, King had already been struck with a Taser fired by LAPD Sergeant Stacy Koon. While lying on the ground and offering no resistance whatsoever, King was struck approximately 40 times by two or three officers who are swinging their batons against all parts of his body with full strength. The other officers stand around watching for two minutes.

The blows stop only when the officers appear to need some rest, or when they pause to kick King in the neck and head. The badly injured man is then “hog-tied,” with his hands and feet strapped together behind his back like a rodeo animal until an ambulance arrives.

King sustained a broken leg and multiple bruises and lacerations, and was then jailed without bail for “evading arrest” and an alleged parole violation.

There were several witnesses from the same apartment building as Holliday who watched the entire incident, never observing any resistance by King. One, Dorothy Gibson, said that King repeated, “Please stop! Please stop!” while the officers “were all laughing and chuckling, like they had just had a party.”

Three days later, King was released from Los Angeles County Jail in a wheelchair after the Los Angeles District Attorney determined that the police report of the incident, which describes King as the aggressor, was so full of holes that charges could not be filed. Before leaving, King displayed his many injuries to the press and described in harrowing detail the entire ordeal. “I’m glad I’m not dead, that’s all. I’m lucky they didn’t kill me,” King said.

Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl F. Gates, a notorious right-wing racist who had previously called Hispanic people “lazy,” stated that blacks do not react to police chokeholds in the same manner as “normal” people and advocated the summary execution of casual drug users, immediately defended the officers’ death squad actions.

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50 years ago: India unleashes savage repression against Mizos

On March 5-6, 1966, the Indian government of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi unleashed an air assault on the Indian province of Mizo, destroying several villages and paving the way for the forced collectivization of the population in Mizoram, a remote part of northeastern India, then administered by the state of Assam.

The aerial assault, the first of its kind the Indian government directed against its “own” population, came in response to an uprising by the Mizo people, whose longstanding grievances intensified in 1958 and 1959 when New Delhi failed to respond to a major famine that gripped the region. A Mizo organization set up to respond to the famine had, with indirect support from East Pakistan (today Bangladesh), been transformed into a nationalist movement seeking independence from India. Beginning on February 28, 1966, the Mizo National Army seized a number of government targets, including treasuries and administrative centers.

From March 5 until March 13, the Indian military aircraft strafed the regional capital, Aizawl, with machine gun fire and incendiary bombs that destroyed most of the city. There was no official count of civilian casualties, though estimates range from 15 to more than 20. Most civilians fled in the face of the attack, creating a large refugee population. The Mizo National Army suffered nearly 100 deaths, as opposed to 58 among Indian soldiers. Hundreds more among the Mizo were arrested.

The following year, the Indian government launched a program called the “regrouping of villages,” modeled on the brutal US “strategic hamlet” program then being waged against the population of South Vietnam. The Mizo were forced out of their villages with only what they could carry in their hands, and then their villages were torched. Civilians were numbered and tagged and then marched into poorly located “Protected and Progressive Villages”—in reality squalid concentration camps. In this manner, of 764 Mizo historic villages, 516 were

destroyed.

The episode was another illustration of the failure of the India's capitalist and nationalist "independence." None of the basic democratic tasks facing the oppressed masses of the subcontinent had been resolved—genuine national unification, the overcoming of caste, religious, and ethnic divisions, or relieving extreme poverty.

The case of the Mizo revealed that just the opposite was the case. India's caste system resulted in the designation "backward" or "scheduled tribe" being forced upon the Mizo, a Sino-Tibetan and largely Christian population. Meanwhile, the imposition of new boundaries choked the Mizos off from their traditional trading routes into China, Southeast Asia, nd Bangladesh, setting the economy and living standards back.

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75 years ago: Bulgaria joins the Nazi Axis

On March 1, 1941 the premier of Bulgaria, Bogdan Philoff, declared his country would adhere to the Axis in a ceremonial meeting with Adolf Hitler, as Nazi Germany sought to strengthen its position in the Balkan countries against Great Britain, and World War II threatened to engulf all of southeastern Europe.

On the same day, German air force and armored units surged across the Romanian border to occupy strategic cities, air bases, ports and bridges throughout the country. German forces took up positions along Bulgaria's borders with Turkey, which was allied with Britain, and Greece, which was presently inflicting military setbacks against Hitler's ally Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy.

One week earlier, Hitler had met with King Boris of Bulgaria to secure passage for his military through Bulgaria in order to join the war against Greece. In return, Bulgaria was to be rewarded with Thrace, a northeastern province of Greece. The whole operation was necessary from Hitler's standpoint to protect strategic Romanian oil reserves that fueled the German army from possible raids by the British air force. On March 6, Germany attacked Greece. One day later a British expeditionary force landed on Greece and engaged the German army.

The joining of Bulgaria to the Axis also led to the first public clash in relations between Germany and the USSR. Under the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939, Bulgaria was designated to lie in the Soviet sphere of influence. Tass, the official Soviet news agency, declared that Bulgaria lay in the USSR's "security zone" and that it disapproved of Bulgaria's agreement with Germany and passage of German troops. But the widening scope of the war was rapidly eroding the pact and leading German imperialism towards conflict with the USSR.

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100 years ago: Persian government collapses under pressure from Britain

On the March 5, 1916, Prince Firman Firma, the prime minister of Persia (modern day Iran) and Mohtashim ed Douleh, the foreign minister, both resigned office. Firma had been prime minister for a little over two months while the foreign minister had served for just over 10 months.

Firma's appointment in December had been brought about by pressure from Britain and Russia on the Shah, as they fought politically to maintain their joint control of the region. With the British government demanding a treaty that would turn all of Persia's military and financial resources over to the Allied powers, Firma resigned.

The parliamentary system had only been established in the Persian constitutional revolution of 1905-1907. This was driven by several groups including merchants who were hostile to semi-colonial rule and sought a greater share of the national wealth. It was also in part inspired by the 1905 revolution carried out by the Russian working class.

Although Persia remained neutral throughout WWI, it became the battleground for conflicts between the major powers, with Russia and Britain on the one hand, and Germany and the Ottoman Empire on the other, vying for influence.

Persia had long been the subject of imperialist interest due to its strategic location between Britain's colonial interests in south Asia and the Ottoman Empire and its substantial oil reserves to the west. In the late 19th century, Persia along with Afghanistan formed a buffer between Russian colonial interests and British colonial interests in Central and South Asia. With the rise of Germany as a world power, Russia and Britain came to an agreement to consolidate their power in the region.

The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 formalized an agreement between the two powers with respect to Persia. While Persia was nominally permitted to retain its independence, the country was divided into three zones, the northern zone came under Russia's influence, the southern part Britain's, and the central zone was considered a neutral zone where both countries could compete for influence and commercial interests. The government of Persia was not consulted about the agreement.

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