

This week in history: September 9-15

9 September 2019

25 years ago: Castro bows to imperialism on immigration

On September 9, 1994, the Castro and Clinton governments signed an agreement to halt further uncontrolled immigration to the United States from Cuba. The deal marked a further step in the capitulation to imperialism by the bourgeois-nationalist Castro regime.

Cuban negotiator Ricardo Alarcon accepted the terms dictated by the Clinton administration before the talks even began. There were no discussions regarding the ongoing embargo by the US against Cuba, at that point more than three decades long, thereby limiting the deal to immigration. While continuing the imperialist blockade in the name of democracy and human rights, the Clinton administration insisted that the Cuban government use dictatorial methods to prevent immigrants from seeking refuge from the economic and social devastation in their country created by the US.

State Department officials initially opposed language put forward by Alarcon that “persuasion will always be the fundamental method employed” to discourage immigration out of the country. The US representative demanded that “actions will take place right away.”

Five days after the agreement was signed, Communist Party newspaper *Gran ma* reported: “The objective has been reached without a single incident, without a single death or injury, without a single drop of blood spilled.”

The agreement sanctioned the indefinite detention of over 15,000 refugees at the US naval base at Guantanamo, reopened just weeks earlier to intercept and house 1,300 Haitian refugees fleeing violence by US imperialism in that country. Detainees were only allowed to leave the detention center if they were returning to Cuba. The US government maintained its tightened economic sanctions against Cuba, including a ban on remission of funds from Cuban-Americans to their relatives still remaining on the island.

Cuban officials hailed the accord and issued statements urging refugees to comply with the immigration ban in order to prove to the US that “we are a serious dignified country that knows how to and will comply with its commitments.” The accord was followed with a series of gestures from Havana demonstrating its determination to continue restructuring its economy along capitalist lines.

The wave of immigration, known as the 1994 Balsero crisis, occurred over five weeks that summer. Responding to the Maleconazo riots on August 5, Castro announced that any

residents who wished to leave the island were free to go. Around 35,000 attempted to flee via makeshift rafts, an increase from just 5,000 the previous year.

The crisis arose out of a crisis set into motion by the dissolution of the Soviet Union a few years earlier. This had taken away a primary source of foreign trade, tourism, as well as direct cash subsidies that had amounted to several billion dollars annually. In seeking a deal with American imperialism, the Cuban revolution had come full circle. It had begun, under Castro and Che Guevara, as a nationalist struggle that adopted socialist rhetoric and turned to the Soviet Union only after the United States attempted to destroy it.

50 years ago: US government conducts underground nuclear test in Colorado

On September 10, 1969 the United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) set off a nuclear blast as part of research into two different projects, Operation Mandrel and Operation Plowshare.

Operation Mandrel was a series of 52 nuclear tests conducted between 1969 and 1970 to test and refine new atomic weapons technology, while Plowshare was a group of 27 tests intended to explore the possible uses of nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes.

The test in Rulison, Colorado was an underground blast measuring 40 kilotons, more than twice the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. In addition to testing the bomb itself, the goal of the explosion was to see if nuclear bombs could be used to access deeply buried pockets of natural gas.

It was successful in the sense that the gas could be accessed in the wake of the explosion. However, the resulting radiation contaminated the entire supply, making it unusable for any ordinary purpose for natural gas, such as cooking or heating.

The area around the blast had to be quarantined to prevent exposure to harmful levels of radiation. It remains a restricted area today as the levels of radiation and the potential to spread are still being monitored by the Department of Energy.

The AEC was formed in 1946 to officially transfer the control and regulation of nuclear science to civilian authority from the military, which had maintained total control over atomic and nuclear projects during the Second World War. Nonetheless, the AEC’s main concern was developing weapons technology to stay ahead of the Soviet Union.

Programs like Plowshare were little more than half-hearted

attempts to give the production of nuclear weapons a progressive cover. Many civilian areas close to AEC test sites have reported dramatically higher rates of cancer and other radiation-related illnesses. In some cases, the AEC intentionally exposed populations to the effects of radiation. For example, in 1949 in an operation called “Green Run,” the AEC deposited large quantities of radioisotopes over civilian populations in Washington State to test if US Air Force systems could detect a similar hypothetical attack from Russia.

75 years ago: Greek resistance fighters defeat Nazi collaborators at battle of Meligalas

On September 15, 1944, partisans of the Greek People’s Liberation Army, the Communist popular resistance movement against the German occupation of the country, defeated security forces that had collaborated with the Nazis in the southwestern town of Meligalas. The brutality of the fighting, and the large-scale killings that followed the battle have made it one of the most famous Second World War events in Greece.

The battle was preceded by the announcement by the German command that it was withdrawing all forces from Greece immediately. The decision came amid a series of catastrophic defeats of the Nazis in Eastern Europe, and a crisis of Axis forces throughout southern Europe in the wake of the fall of the fascist Mussolini regime in Italy.

Following the signing of an armistice between the new Italian government and Britain in 1943, German troops had taken overall command of the Axis occupation of the country, in league with its collaborationist government. At the same time, they raised fascist “Security Battalions” from among extreme right-wing and anti-communist sections of the population.

By early 1944, five such battalions had been established. They rapidly became infamous for carrying out extrajudicial killings of suspected resistance fighters, working class and peasant militants, and massacres of civilian populations suspected of being hostile to the collaborations.

Amid the September withdrawal of German troops from the Peloponnese, Greek collaborationist forces in Kalamata withdrew to Meligalas. Among them was a “Security Battalion” numbering some 1,000 fighters.

Having captured Kalamata days before, the Greek partisans launched an attack on Meligalas on September 13. Over the course of three days, they besieged the collaborationist forces using stealth attacks and a series of surges. The fighting involved the use of bombs, hand grenades, and machine-gun fire on both sides.

The collaborationist forces were defeated on September 15. Inhabitants of surrounding villages, including some which had been destroyed by the Nazis, immediately began entering the city. Estimates of the number of people killed as collaborators in the following weeks vary from 1,000 to 2,000.

100 years ago: Italian nationalists seize Fiume on Yugoslav

coast

On September 12, 1919, an armed detachment led by the proto-fascist poet and aviator Gabriele D’Annunzio took Fiume (now Rijeka, Croatia), a city then with a largely Italian-speaking population, disputed by Italy and the newly established state of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later renamed Yugoslavia.

D’Annunzio landed near Fiume and approached the city with about 200 volunteers. An Allied army stood in his way but was comprised of Italians who sympathized with him and either allowed him to pass or joined the expedition. By the time he reached the city, his ranks had swelled to about 2,000.

The crisis had developed when the British, French and American imperialists at the Paris Peace Conference decided to hand the city over to Yugoslavia. Italy had entered the war on the Allied side only in 1915 on the promise of spoils from Germany’s ally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including territory to the north of the Alps and along the Adriatic coast, as well as parts of the Ottoman Empire, and some of Germany’s overseas colonies.

But the developing nationalist movements in the former territories of Austria-Hungary after its surrender in 1918, and particularly the possibility of the spread of Soviet power in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian revolution, had made Europe a very different place than it was during the war. The leading imperialist victors decided to award Fiume to the new state of Yugoslavia. The Italian delegation withdrew from the Paris Peace Conference in protest.

The Italian government opposed D’Annunzio’s takeover of the city, and the Italian navy blockaded D’Annunzio’s micro-state, known as the Regency of Carnaro. The city was then made a free state by the Treaty of Rapallo between Italy and Yugoslavia in November 1920, and after a bombardment by the Italians in December, D’Annunzio and his supporters evacuated. Fascist Italy annexed the city in 1924.

The lasting impact of the Fiume adventure and the decision of the Paris Peace Conference not to award Italian imperialism everything it wanted from the spoils of the war, was the myth of the “mutilated victory” (*vittoria mutilate*), which became a rallying cry for Italian nationalists and fascists and fueled Italian imperial ambitions under Mussolini’s regime after 1922, in much the same way that the German extreme right used the “stab in the back” myth for the German surrender in 1918 to forward its goals.

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