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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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This week in history: October 7-13

25 years ago: Iraq disarmament crisis

On October 8, 1994, the United Nations ordered Iraq to withdraw its troops from the Kuwait border and immediately cooperate with weapons inspectors, amid media propaganda about Iraqi development of weapons of mass destruction. The crisis foreshadowed the widely unpopular 2003 invasion of Iraq less than a decade later.

Washington portrayed its military buildup as a defense of Kuwait against an imminent Iraqi invasion. There was no evidence beyond its official propaganda that Iraq had any intention of invading Kuwait, from which it had been driven three years before.



A US military vehicle arrives for operations against Iraq, October, 1994.

Capitalist countries seeking to reopen economic relations with Baghdad pointed to Iraqi compliance with UN conditions and demanded the lifting of economic sanctions, in particular the embargo on Iraqi oil sales, which had been renewed by the Security Council on September 15. Such objections were denounced by American officials.

Opposition from a section of the ruling class in France was based only on regret over a lack of French influence in the region. It was implied that US charges against Iraq were invented at least in part to bolster Clinton's image in advance of the 1994 congressional elections.

The American media, faithfully parroting the US government line in spite of zero real evidence presented, sought to exaggerate the possibility of an Iraqi invasion by portraying Saddam Hussein as insane and capable of anything.

Iraqi military forces were decimated by overwhelming US fire power in the 1991 Gulf War. After over four years of crippling sanctions, the country was not only unable to procure military supplies, but it could not provide adequate food, medicine, or other basic necessities for its people.

On September 25, the Iraqi government announced it was cutting food subsidies on a wide range of necessities by one half. Food prices immediately skyrocketed in Baghdad markets, with rice jumping from 180 dinars a kilogram to 250 dinars, lentils rising to 350 dinars per kilogram, and prices of flour, salt and matches all doubling.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein denounced the United States and Britain for vetoing a resolution brought to the Security Council by the sanctions committee to allow an emergency shipment of rice and wheat to his country.

50 years ago: "Chicago Eight" trial and "Days of Rage"

From October 8 through October 11, 1969, the trial of the "Chicago Eight" was under way: Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, Lee Weiner, and Bobby Seale. The group was charged with conspiring to incite a riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.



Bobby Seale

Judge Julius Hoffman rejected the Black Panther leader Bobby Seale's request for a delay in the trial, or to allow Seale to represent himself. Seale refused to be silent and continually protested the judge's decisions. Hoffman ordered Seale to be bound, gagged, and chained to a chair. He appeared this way in the court for several days struggling to free himself, able only to make muffled sounds. One of the defense attorneys told Hoffman, "This is no longer a court of order, Your Honor, this is a medieval torture chamber." Eventually Hoffman removed Seale from the case, sentencing him to four years in prison for contempt of court.

After Seale's removal, the seven others refused to cooperate in the trial and mocked the judge and the court. Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin appeared in court wearing judge's robes and Chicago police uniforms. All of the defendants and their lawyers were cited with contempt of court charges. Ultimately, five of the defendants were found guilty of crossing state lines to incite a riot. This decision would later be overturned in appellate court for constitutional violations at the trial, and all charges were dropped.

While the trial progressed, several groups, including the newly formed anarchistic "Weathermen" faction of the Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panther Party, organized a series of separate protests that would become known as the "Days of Rage." On October 8, some 800 Weathermen marched through Chicago's affluent Gold Coast neighborhood damaging cars, smashing house windows, and attempting to storm the

Drake Hotel. In clashes with police, six demonstrators were shot and wounded, and 68 were arrested.

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The largest demonstration came on October 10, when a group of 2,000 peacefully marched in protest of the trial. By this time over 2,000 National Guard troops had been called in ready to suppress demonstrations. They would get their chance on the 11th when the Weathermen attempted to march on Chicago's business district. The group of 300 was easily broken up with about half being arrested.

75 years ago: Revolt at Auschwitz concentration camp brutally repressed

On October 7, 1944, prisoners at the notorious German-operated death camp in Auschwitz, Poland, staged a courageous revolt, in a desperate struggle for their freedom and their lives. The rebellion, which was brutally repressed, inspired resistance fighters throughout Western and Eastern Europe as they sought to overthrow the yoke of Nazi oppression.



"Selection" of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz, 1944.

At around 3 p.m., Polish Jewish prisoners in Crematorium 1 defied the Nazi guards, and sought to escape. They were rapidly joined by Hungarian Jewish detainees in Crematoriums 3 and 4. The prisoners targeted those guards who had subjected them to torture. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, in Crematorium 1 an "especially sadistic Nazi guard" was "disarmed and stuffed into an oven to be burned alive."

The officers in charge of the concentration camp responded swiftly. German soldiers initially bombarded the detainees with small arms fire, encountering only limited resistance from fighters who had smuggled in small amounts of gunpowder and munitions. Shortly after, they barraged the centers of resistance within the camp with heavy machine-gun fire. German soldiers summarily murdered everyone they encountered as they suppressed the revolt.

During the course of the war, 1.1 million people would be killed at the Auschwitz concentration camp, out of a total prison population of some 1.3 million. Among the casualties were children, the elderly, political dissidents, Soviet prisoners of war, and nearly one million Jews.

100 years ago: Land reform in Estonia

On October 10, 1919, the bourgeois government in the new Estonian republic nationalized 58 percent of the farmland in Estonia. Over 1,000 estates were seized. Owners could keep only 50 hectares (123 acres) and were eventually compensated 3 percent of the value of their land. The land was redistributed to Estonian peasants and veterans.

Most of the estates belonged to Baltic German landowners, a ruling aristocracy of about 4 percent of the population of approximately 1 million. The Baltic Germans had dominated Estonia since the Middle Ages and continued to be the principal landowners under Tsarist rule after 1710, and later assumed important posts in the Tsarist bureaucracy.



Right-wing "White" Finns arrive to assist Estonia in war against Soviet Russia, 1918

In the aftermath of the 1917 October Revolution, the Soviet Republic was forced to cede the Baltic territories to Imperial Germany in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. Germany occupied Estonia but withdrew after its surrender to the allies in November.

The Bolsheviks were driven underground during the German occupation but established the Commune of the Working People of Estonia in the eastern Estonian city of Narva in November 1918 with the support of the Red Army.

The Red Army conducted an offensive that month against the nationalist regime, which was, however, able to push the Soviet forces back with the assistance of British weapons and the British Royal Navy operating in the Baltic, as well as the White Russian counter-revolutionary armies. The Red Army was driven out of Estonia by February 1919 and it became imperative for the Estonian government conduct a land reform to prevent the Bolsheviks from winning support in the countryside.

7 October 2019