

This week in history: August 24-30

24 August 2020

25 years ago: US and NATO bomb Bosnian Serbs

On August 30, 1995, the United States and NATO launched Operation Deliberate Force against Serb-inhabited regions of Bosnia. They were the largest bombing raids in Europe since WWII.

US Navy and Air Force planes flew over 2,000 sorties over Bosnia throughout the three-weeks-long attack. After a four-day lull, the airstrikes resumed September 5 with increased intensity. They were expanded from the Sarajevo area to a total of 70 target zones throughout Bosnia, including bridges required to bring in food and medical supplies. Serb militia were virtually defenseless against the attacks. Dozens of soldiers and civilians were killed.

NATO and the US cynically seized on a mortar shelling of the Sarajevo marketplace on August 28 as justification for the massive bombardment. However, Bosnian Serb leaders denied responsibility for the atrocity, in which 43 died, charging that the Muslim-led government staged the attack to provoke a US intervention. UN peacekeepers concluded that a similar shelling in Sarajevo in February 1994 had been the work of Muslim forces.

At a conference in London on July 21, 1995, the NATO powers had agreed to a change in tactics to a wide-scale bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs. After the meeting, contingents of the UN peace-keeping forces stationed in Serb-held territory were moved to safer ground and French peace-keeping troops around Sarajevo were reequipped with heavy weaponry.

The exact timing of the raids was determined not by the situation in Sarajevo but by the success of the Croatian army's invasion the previous month of the Krajina region and its expulsion of a quarter million Serbs. It was the greatest case of ethnic cleansing since communal wars erupted in 1991, carried out with the full support of the US government and virtually no criticism in the official media.

Within days of the Croatian offensive, Washington announced a new plan for the partition of Bosnia and US diplomats took the proposal to major European capitals. Some Clinton administration officials openly declared that the purpose of the bombing was to force the Bosnian Serb regime to accept the US-drafted plan for the carve-up of the former Yugoslavia along ethnic lines.

50 years ago: Four killed, including *Los Angeles Times* reporter, by police at Vietnam protest

On August 29, 1970, about 20,000 people marched in East Los Angeles against the Vietnam War. The demonstration was organized by the National Chicano Moratorium Committee Against The Vietnam War, known more simply as the Chicano Moratorium. The march was attacked by the Los Angeles Police Department, who killed four demonstrators, including Rubén Salazar, a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times* and a well-known figure in the Chicano movement.

The protest was characterized by great hostility to the Vietnam War, but was also muddled with petty-bourgeois nationalist demands. One of the main focuses of the Chicano Moratorium Committee was to denounce the drafting of Mexican-Americans into the US military at higher proportions than both white and black Americans. Some of the slogans advanced by the Committee included "Bring our *Carnales* (blood brothers) home" and the promotion of the idea of "La Raza" (The Race), which was a call for the unity of ethnically Mexican people.

The march began at Laguna Park, where the Chicano demonstrators assembled. After the main march and speeches had concluded the LAPD attempted to disperse the demonstration by attacking protesters with batons and tear gas. What had been a peaceful protest against the war was turned into a police riot. Some of the demonstrators resisted and clashed with the police, who arrested 150 people.

As they cleared the streets of demonstrators, police also fired tear gas canisters into buildings where people had gathered to take shelter. Rubén Salazar was killed while standing in one such location, a cafe. He was struck in the head with a tear gas canister fired by an officer through the front of the store.

Salazar had been a *Los Angeles Times* foreign correspondent covering the 1965 United States occupation of the Dominican Republic, the Vietnam War, and the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico. Most recently he had covered stories involving the poor treatment of Mexican-Americans by police and in jails. Salazar had also, in January of 1970, become the news director of the Spanish language TV station KMEX, where he covered the activity of the Chicano movement. He had been watched by the FBI, which collected files on his activity in the Chicano movement and his opposition to the Vietnam war.

In a press conference after the demonstrations, Rosalio Muñoz, a leader of the Chicano Moratorium, made an appeal to the right-wing Mexican President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz asking him to "call off his meeting with Nixon until the murderers of Rubén Salazar are brought to justice."

But Diaz Ordaz had no issue with the violent police repression of protesters. It is a policy he had embraced in the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, where Mexican police opened fire on a mass

demonstration of students and workers, killing around 400.

75 years ago: US military occupation of Japan begins

On August 28, 1945, 150 US military officials arrived in the city of Atsugi as the advanced guard of the American occupation of Japan. Over the following days, thousands of US troops would be deployed in an operation that would extend into 1952.

The occupation followed Japan's formal surrender on August 15. That announcement, which marked the end of WWII, followed the unprecedented dropping of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US administration of President Harry Truman, in a war crime that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The nuclear attack followed 12 months of US air raids, which had already destroyed up to one seventh of urban areas in Japan.

The surrender had been followed by the suppression by the imperial regime of elements within the Japanese military opposed to a capitulation to the US. After this, Japanese officials travelled to the Philippines to meet with US General Douglas MacArthur, who commanded Allied forces throughout the region.

MacArthur, after negotiating the terms of surrender, went directly to Tokyo. There he promulgated laws by decree, including an effective ban on the raising of Japan's imperial "Rising Sun" flag and other nationalist activities. MacArthur also issued orders against US violence against civilians and the forceful requisitioning of food, in a bid to present American imperialism's subjugation of the Japanese population as an exercise in line with international laws.

On September 2, the Japanese government formally presented an instrument of surrender to US representatives. Four days later, on September 6, Truman approved an "initial post-surrender policy," centered on assuring that Japan would not again arise as a military power capable of challenging US interests in Asia, and establishing bourgeois-democratic forms of rule.

This policy was inextricably connected to US designs to become the hegemonic power in the Asia-Pacific region, including through the securing to the new order China, which was then embroiled in a civil war between the peasant army of Mao Zedong's Stalinist communist party and the right-wing nationalist forces of the Kuomintang, backed by the US.

100 years: Workers occupy factories in Milan, Italy

On August 30, 1920, in what was to become the height of the revolutionary movement of the Italian working class in the "two red years" (Biennio Rosso) of 1919-1920, workers in the metallurgical industry in Milan, the industrial capital of Italy, occupied over 300 factories in response to a lockout by employers at the Romeo plant on that Monday morning.

Since the end of the First World War in 1918, Italian workers

had suffered a sharp decline in living standards. The country was ravaged by inflation and the mass demobilization of soldiers created an unemployment crisis.

The workers' demands were initially for higher wages, but the employers found that they could not live with factory councils, set up independently of the trade unions, that had begun to regulate production inside the factories. In April, Fiat autoworkers had begun to occupy factories in Turin under the influence of factory committees.

Of the Milanese occupations, one newspaper reported: "One reached them through crowds of women and children, coming and going with dinners for the strikers ... Entrances were strictly guarded by groups of workers. Not the ghost of an official or a police officer was in sight. The strikers were complete masters of the field."

Italian imperialism was frantic. It had failed to obtain any of the geo-strategic goals for more colonies and control of the Adriatic Sea, in particular, that it had set out to accomplish when it entered World War I in 1915 on the side of the Allies. Now the situation had made it impossible to govern at home by traditional methods.

By early September, nearly 400,000 workers had occupied factories. The government was paralyzed. Peasants and agricultural workers had begun to occupy the estates of large landowners. The country was poised on a knife's edge.

The official organizations of the working class, the Socialist Party in particular, refused to give leadership to this mass movement or organize a seizure of power by the working class.

The Second Congress of the Communist International, which had just met in Moscow, issued a stark warning:

"Proletarians of Italy, remember the fate of Hungary, which has entered the annals of history as a terrible warning to the proletariat that in the struggle for power as well as after the conquest of power, it must stand firm on its own feet, sweeping aside all elements of indecision and hesitation and dealing mercilessly with all attempts at treachery!"

The absence of a revolutionary party in Italy allowed the situation to shift quickly, and by 1922, Mussolini was able to accomplish his March on Rome and bring his fascist movement to power.



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