

This week in history: September 11-17

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago.

10 September 2023

25 years ago: Starr report calling for Clinton's impeachment made public

On September 11, 1998, the full text of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report to Congress was released, calling for the impeachment of President Clinton on 11 counts. The political character of the protracted legal investigation of the White House was clear for all to see.

Starr's report was not an impartial recounting of the evidence uncovered by a four-year-long, \$40 million investigation. It did not make a coherent or convincing legal argument on why the president should be impeached. Instead, it aimed, through a flood of salacious details about Clinton's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, to stampede public opinion and force Clinton to resign.

By any objective standard, the Starr report was a politically motivated diatribe, drafted by enemies whose hatred of Clinton knew no bounds. As the Supreme Court correspondent for the *New York Times*, Linda Greenhouse, noted in her analysis, the Independent Counsel's report was "a document with an attitude." Greenhouse contrasted it with the report filed by Watergate special prosecutor Leon Jaworski, which consisted of a mass of documents and an index, but "provided no analysis and drew no conclusions."

It aimed to preempt any serious deliberation and produce a panic-stricken response in Congress, and especially among congressional Democrats. The report began its chronology of events with the filing of a sexual harassment lawsuit by Paula Jones in 1994, followed by the 1997 Supreme Court decision upholding her right to bring the president to trial during his term of office. The bulk of the report concerned Clinton's efforts to fight the Jones' lawsuit, and eight of the 11 "impeachable offenses" involved this suit, which had been dismissed as groundless.

The other three "impeachable offenses" involved Clinton's legal maneuvers with the Starr investigation itself. These charges were in many ways the most fantastic and reactionary, since they amounted to the claim that any effort by Clinton to defend himself was itself a criminal offense.

Starr claimed that Clinton abused his constitutional authority by his conduct between January and August 1998, because he denied his relationship to Monica Lewinsky and fought a series of delaying actions in the courts seeking to block subpoenas of White House aides, attorneys and Secret Service agents.

Clinton's own paralysis and political cowardice in the face of Starr and his political and media allies, and the prostration of the Democratic Party as a whole, underscored the central lesson of the political crisis: that the defense of democratic rights could not be based on liberalism, the bankruptcy of which Clinton was the foremost representative.

50 years ago: Likud party founded in Israel

On September 13, 1973, the Likud party was founded in Israel. Meaning "consolidation" in Hebrew, Likud was an alliance of several major right-wing parties formed to control the Knesset (parliament) which had been dominated by the Labor Party since the founding of Israel.

The formation of Likud signaled a sharp turn to the right by the Israeli ruling class (paralleling similar political trajectories in the United States and Western Europe later in the 1970s.) The two largest factions involved in founding Likud were the Herut, a far-right Zionist party headed by Menachem Begin, and the Liberal Party led by General Ariel Sharon. These two groups had formed an earlier electoral alliance in 1965 called Gahal. Likud added a number of smaller parties, including the Free Centre, the National List, the Movement for a Greater Israel, and several religious zealot parties.

The Liberal Party had been officially founded in 1961. Billing itself as a "centrist Zionist" party, it represented elements of Israeli capital that favored a secular government based on the unfettered domination of economic life by corporate interests. Initially opposed to the right-wing religious parties, in joining Likud the Liberal leadership made peace with the religious parties whose support was needed to secure control of the Knesset.

Herut was a fascistic party that emerged out of the Zionist terrorist organization, the Irgun. Founded in the 1930s, Irgun carried out armed attacks on the British colonial government in Palestine and massacres against Arabs. Irgun had called for the establishment of an Israeli state that included all of Palestine and Jordan. In 1948 it agreed to join the Israeli provisional government and dissolve its militias into the regular army, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). After the formal establishment of the State of Israel, Herut was the political vehicle of the leaders of Irgun.

Following the Six-Day War in 1967 the Gahal alliance had entered the Labor Alignment government of Levi Eshkol, securing for Begin a cabinet position as a minister without portfolio. In the 1969 Knesset election Gahal took 26 seats, well short of the 61 seats needed to form a government, and leaving it nominally aligned with the Labor government of Golda Meir. But in 1970 Begin and the Gahal formation left the government, demanding a more aggressive prosecution of the ongoing conflict with Egypt over the Suez Canal.

Electoral support for Likud's more militaristic Zionism grew after the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, which saw Israel's regional military dominance called into question. In the December 1973 election the new Likud formation jumped to 39 seats, up from the 26 won by Gahal in 1969. Likud's support grew throughout the 1970s. In 1977 it would win 43 seats in the Knesset, giving it enough of a presence to form a coalition government with the National Religious Party, with Begin serving as prime minister.

75 years ago: Indian army secures control of princely Hyderabad

On September 13, 1948, the Indian army launched a violent invasion and occupation of Hyderabad. The incursion was directed against the refusal of the princely leader of Hyderabad to join the new Indian state which had been established the year before.

The army operation was one of a series of bloody events stemming from the British-orchestrated partition of the Indian subcontinent, following the end of its formal colonial rule in 1947. During its centuries-long domination over the subcontinent, the British had relied upon a host of reactionary and feudalistic forces who continued to rule nominally independent principalities.

By the time of the Hyderabad invasion, almost all of the principalities had agreed to incorporation into either India or the Muslim-majority Pakistani state. The leader of Hyderabad, the last in a dynasty of princes, was titled Mir Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII. He was hostile to integration, for fear of losing control over the resources of Hyderabad, the wealthiest state in India. A decade earlier, *Time* magazine had estimated that he was likely the richest man in the world.

Hyderabad maintained an irregular army. It was able to hold out for almost a year, while the attentions of the Indian army were principally directed towards conflict with Pakistan. By mid-1948, however, the dominant sections of the Indian ruling elite had decided to take action. They launched an economic blockade of the princely state.

The regime in Hyderabad was beset by internal social opposition and instability. It faced two rebellions, one from a Maoist-inspired peasant movement and another from a radical Muslim militia movement.

The Indian army's intervention in September resulted in massive violence, including communal conflicts. While Hyderabad was a Hindu-majority state, it was ruled by a Muslim dynasty. This was exploited by the Indian government to whip up a violent and pogromist atmosphere. Estimates of the death toll during the five-day operation vary from 30,000 to 200,000.

100 years ago: Primo de Rivera seizes power in Spain

On September 13, 1923. Captain General Miguel Primo de Rivera overthrew the Liberal government of Manuel García Prieto with military support in Barcelona. He issued a manifesto that stated, "Our aim is to open a brief parenthesis in the constitutional life of Spain and to re-establish it as soon as the country offers us men uncontaminated with the vices of political organization," and claimed his takeover was only temporary.

The general immediately established a directorate of eight military officers, making himself president, and declared martial law. The next day, at his request, King Alfonso XIII dismissed the Cortes (parliament), made Primo de Rivera prime minister, and declared martial law.

Primo de Rivera came from an aristocratic family, and, like many professional Spanish soldiers of his era had fought in the brutal colonial Rif War in Morocco against Berber peoples led by Abd el-Krim.

While he would continue the war as dictator, in 1923 Primo de Rivera saw that it was tearing at the social fabric of Spain. In August, Spanish soldiers refused to board the ships that were to take them to Morocco, and Barcelona saw mass anti-war demonstrations. Primo de Rivera realized that not only did the working class and peasantry need to be suppressed, but also that the war had to either be stopped or severely modified.

He withdrew Spanish troops from scores of forts in the colony and sought French assistance in the war. At home he sought to regulate the class struggle and incorporated the social-democratic trade unions and socialist party (PSOE) into employer-labor committees that he set up in imitation of the corporatist structures created by Benito Mussolini in Italy. He illegalized the anarchist trade unions (CNT), which would not cooperate with him.

Marxists, nevertheless, did not characterize his dictatorship as fascist. In response to those that did, Leon Trotsky remarked:

"Primo de Rivera was an aristocrat. He occupied a high military and bureaucratic post and was chief governor of Catalonia. He accomplished his overthrow with the aid of state and military forces. The dictatorships of Spain and Italy are two totally different forms of dictatorship. It is necessary to distinguish between them. Mussolini had difficulty in reconciling many old military institutions with the fascist militia. This problem did not exist for Primo de Rivera."



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact