

This week in history: December 16-21

15 December 2024

25 years ago: Portugal returns Macau to China

On December 20, 1999, the territory of Macau, located in southeastern China on the western edge of the Pearl River delta, was officially incorporated into the People's Republic of China. The transfer ended 442 years of Portuguese colonial rule.

The 16-minute official ceremony was attended by the president and prime minister of Portugal and high ranking Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members and dignitaries, including President Jiang Zemin and the widow of Deng Xiaoping. The CCP proclaimed a public holiday while the Chinese media inundated the population with non-stop news coverage. The Chinese military also quickly established a military outpost.

Compared to Hong Kong—another territory controlled by a colonial and imperialist power, the United Kingdom, until 1998—Macau did not have great strategic and economic importance. Macau's GDP was one-twentieth of Hong Kong's, totaling \$7.8 billion. Rather than industry and trade as the major source of economic growth, Macau was known for its gambling industry, gangs, and as a vacation spot for the ultra-wealthy. Known as the "Las Vegas of the East," the territory housed the only legal casinos on the South China Sea. Gambling accounted for one-third of Macau's GDP and 60 to 70 percent of all government tax revenue.

Following the CCP's "one country, two system"" arrangement, the 430,000 citizens of Macau elected a local authority to govern the territory for 50 years until its complete transfer to Beijing. Macau gambling kingpin Stanley Ho expressed confidence that the reunification with China placed no limitation on the amount of money making for the local elite, saying, "The incoming Macau government will say 'Stanley Ho, please carry on' and I will."

With Macau and Hong Kong now handed back over to China, the Stalinists in the CCP continued their nationalist agitation and patriotic exhortations to divert attention from the growing social inequality and economic uncertainties in China.

During the ceremony, Zemin laid out the future plans of the CCP. He declared:

The Chinese government has, in accordance with the great concept of 'one country, two systems' initiated by Deng Xiaoping, successfully resolved the questions of Hong Kong and Macau. The implementation of the concept of 'one country, two systems' in Hong Kong and Macau has played and will continue to play an important exemplary role for our eventual settlement of the Taiwan

question. The Chinese government and people are confident and capable of an early settlement of the Taiwan question and the complete national reunification.

50 years ago: Seymour Hersh exposé of CIA spying against American citizens

On December 22, 1974, journalist Seymour Hersh wrote an exposé in the *New York Times* of an illegal Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spying operation against American citizens, which is illegal under the terms of the 1947 National Security Act.

Hersh revealed that the CIA had conducted spying operations on over 10,000 American citizens who were participants in anti-war, civil rights, and left-wing political organizations. The CIA authorized agents "to follow and photograph participants in antiwar and other demonstrations." It further "set up a network of informants who were ordered to penetrate antiwar groups." In addition to antiwar and left-wing groups, the spying also targeted political opponents of Nixon including several anti-war congressmen. Hersh found evidence that CIA spying on Americans stretched as far back as the 1950s, and had long included "break-ins, wiretapping and the surreptitious inspection of mail."

The recently retired and current heads of the CIA refused to comment on Hersh's report: Richard Helms who was the director of the CIA from 1966 until 1973 during the bulk of the illegal spying operations; and William Colby, CIA director in 1974. But sources within the CIA did speak with Hersh on condition of anonymity and reported that in the aftermath of Watergate the agency attempted to cover up and destroy evidence of its illegal activities including "widespread paper shredding."

The collecting information and surveillance of American citizens is a duty reserved for the FBI.

Hersh had first become well known as a journalist in 1969 for exposing the My Lai massacre of hundreds of civilians committed by American forces in Vietnam, and the massacre's cover up.

75 years ago: Stalin and Mao meet to discuss Soviet-China relations

On December 16, 1949, Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin met in

Moscow for the first time to hold a discussion on the relations between the USSR and the newly formed People's Republic of China (PRC). The meeting came two months after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power, through its defeat of the Kuomintang (KMT), a reactionary party of the bourgeoisie and the feudal elite, after a years-long civil war.

The primary purpose of the meeting, held in the Kremlin, was to reassess the 1945 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, which Stalin had signed with Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT.

Mao was pushing for a new treaty which superseded the one signed with the KMT. Stalin on the other hand initially suggested that the 1945 treaty remain in place, since it was ratified with the agreement of the major imperialist powers. Any changes, he stated, could provide leverage to the United States to challenge Soviet territorial gains as a result of World War II, such as the Kurile Islands northeast of Japan. Stalin proposed formally retaining the existing treaty with the KMT in writing, while altering it in practice.

In a telegram sent on December 18 to Liu Shaoqi, one of the vice chairmen of the Central People's Government, Mao described Stalin as having a "sincere" attitude. On the disagreements regarding the treaty, Mao wrote that "public opinion in China believes that since the old treaty was signed by the [KMT], it has lost its ground with the [KMT's] downfall. [Stalin] replied that the old treaty needs to be revised and that the revision is necessarily substantial, but it will not come until two years from now."

Stalin's hesitancy to end the formal alliance followed decades after his ordering the CCP to subordinate itself to Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalist KMT. This collaboration had disastrous consequences, particularly throughout the revolutionary upheaval in China from 1925-1927, in which the KMT murdered thousands of Chinese workers and communists. Despite this betrayal, Mao continued to follow the Stalinist nationalist policy and sought repeatedly to form a coalition government with Chiang Kai-shek. Only as a result of the KMT's refusal to enter into serious negotiations for a coalition government did the CCP turn to a fight for power, harnessing a mass movement of millions of peasants.

Despite Stalin's reservations and continued refusals of a number of other requests from Mao, the end of his two-month stay in Moscow produced a new Sino-Soviet treaty between the USSR and the PRC, eventually signed on February 14, 1950. While that agreement solidified ties between the two states, the jockeying underscored the unprincipled and nationalist politics of both Stalin and Mao. These also confirmed warnings, made over a decade earlier by Trotsky, of the prospect of clashes between bureaucratic regimes, each claiming to represent "socialism in one country," in opposition to the internationalism that is a central tenet of genuine Marxism.

100 years ago: Hitler released from prison in Bavaria

On December 20, 1924, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was released

from Landsberg Prison by order of the Bavarian Supreme Court. He had served 13 months of a five-year sentence for his attempted putsch in Munich in November 1923.

The putsch, which had mobilized hundreds of Nazis, had been conducted with support from elements of the right-wing Bavarian state, under conditions where a revolutionary storm had been brewing in Germany. Hitler and his co-conspirators, including the former chief of staff of the German army, Erich von Ludendorff, seized a beer hall and detained several politicians. Sixteen Nazis and four policemen were killed. Hitler was convicted of treason during his trial.

His stay in prison was comfortable. According to one historian: "Hitler enjoyed a wide variety of privileges. His 'cell' was a large, airy, comfortably furnished room with an expansive view. In addition to the hearty food cooked by the prison kitchen, Hitler constantly received care packages; his quarters reminded some visitors of a 'delicatessen.'"

While there, Hitler received visits from political co-thinkers and earned the praise of the prison's warden in a report. He was surrounded by some of his closest supporters, who had also been sentenced for their roles in the putsch, including Rudolf Hess.

Most significantly, his stay in Landsberg allowed him the leisure to write his political diatribe, *Mein Kampf*, which provided the ideological justification for the war of extermination against the Soviet Union and the Holocaust of six million Jews.

On his release, Hitler began to rebuild the Nazi party and sought to emphasize an electoral strategy backed by militarized gangs.



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