

This week in history, January 27-February 2

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

26 January 2025

25 years ago: Washington shifts toward India against Pakistan

On Monday, January 31, 2000, the US State Department announced that President Bill Clinton would travel to India, the first visit to New Delhi by a sitting president in over two decades. The aim was to cement a strategic partnership in the region directed against China, and adding to the pressure on Pakistan to bow to the dictates of the American government.

The immediate issue surrounded the Kashmir region of India, which had a Muslim-majority population and which was also claimed by Pakistan. Tilting toward India on the dispute, which had been a factor in previous wars between the two South Asian countries, the State Department made clear to the Pakistan military regime of General Pervez Musharraf that the possible connection between his government and the Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen—the Kashmiri separatist group blamed for the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814 in December—was “a matter of extreme concern to us.”

The US had declared the group a terrorist organization in 1997, under its previous name, Karkat-ul-Ansar. If Islamabad refused to comply with US demands to crack down on Kashmiri separatist groups, the State Department warned that it would designate Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism, thereby blocking access to IMF loans and foreign aid and isolating the country internationally.

As usual, Washington also invoked “human rights” as the pretext for its shift in policy to advance its political and economic interests in the region. The State Department cited the fact that military regime had required judges to swear oaths of loyalty, undercutting “the integrity and independence of the judiciary.” The junta aimed this move at preventing former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, from defending himself against state prosecution over trumped-up allegations that he had authorized a plane hijacking (a reference to his efforts to block the 1999 military coup that removed him from power).

US imperialism, however, could ill afford to fully cut political and economic aid to Pakistan, which would have had a destabilizing factor. The *New York Times* wrote, “[T]here was substantial resistance from the Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency to putting Pakistan on the [terrorist] list, in part because of past help that Pakistan gave the United States during the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan.”

Clinton's visit to India would nonetheless mark a qualitative change in the political landscape of the subcontinent. The Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), facing factional conflict and strikes by the powerful Indian working class, felt emboldened to pursue nationalist agitation and posture aggressively against its smaller regional rival Pakistan.

50 years ago: US Senate establishes committee to investigate illegal CIA and FBI activities

On January 27, 1975, the United States Senate voted to establish the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, chaired by Senator Frank Church of Idaho. Known as the Church Committee, the body was formed in the aftermath of journalist Seymour Hersh's damning December 1974 exposé in the *New York Times*, which revealed that the CIA had engaged in illegal domestic spying operations against American citizens.

According to the Senate resolution, the purpose of the Committee was to determine “the extent, if any, to which illegal, improper, or unethical activities were engaged in by any agency of the Federal Government.” Over the course of the next year the Committee held nearly 200 hearings that interviewed about 800 witnesses and studied over 100,000 documents.

The Church Committee's investigations revealed a wide-ranging pattern of illegality and misconduct by the CIA, FBI, NSA and other agencies, stretching back decades. One of its key findings was the extent to which the intelligence community had targeted left-wing organizations, civil rights groups, and anti-war activists. Programs such as the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) were used to surveil, infiltrate, and disrupt groups deemed “subversive.”

Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most prominent targets of COINTELPRO. The FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, conducted extensive surveillance on King, tapping his phones, bugging his hotel rooms, and monitoring his associates. Agents sought to discredit King by collecting personal information to undermine his public image, even sending him an anonymous letter urging him to commit suicide to avoid being 'exposed.'

The Black Panther Party was another key target of COINTELPRO. The FBI infiltrated the group with informants and encouraged inexperienced youth to carry out criminal activities to create a basis for their arrest. One of the most infamous operations was the assassination of Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader in Chicago in 1969. Hampton was shot in his bed after being drugged to sleep.

The Committee also published details of the CIA's covert assassination plots against foreign leaders. These included plans to assassinate Fidel Castro of Cuba, Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Many of these operations involved collaboration with organized crime.

A major revelation of the Church Committee's reports was that since 1940 the FBI and CIA had been continually spying on the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The SWP was the leading Trotskyist party in the United States until it split from the International Committee of the Fourth

International in 1963, leading to the foundation of the Workers League, the US predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, in 1966.

The report stated, "The FBI has investigated the SWP from 1940 to the present day on the basis of that Party's revolutionary rhetoric and alleged international links. Nevertheless, FBI officials testified that the SWP has not been responsible for any violent acts nor has it urged actions constituting an indictable incitement to violence.'

The report referenced that members of the SWP were subject to as many as 92 break-ins in by the FBI between the years 1960 and 1966. Other actions against the SWP included the infiltration of the organization by government agents and efforts to sabotage campaigns for public office.

75 years ago: Truman orders development of the H-bomb

On January 31, 1950, US President Harry Truman officially ordered the development of thermonuclear weapons, also known as hydrogen bombs. Truman was the only world leader ever to authorize the use of nuclear weapons in war, with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, killing more than a quarter of a million Japanese.

In a public statement released that day, Truman stated, "It is part of my responsibility as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces to see to it that our country is able to defend itself against any possible aggressor. Accordingly, I have directed the Atomic Energy Commission to continue its work on all forms of atomic weapons, including the so-called hydrogen or superbomb."

The initial concept of a hydrogen bomb came from scientists working on the Manhattan Project, which created the atomic bomb. A successful fission reaction, using uranium or plutonium, would create the enormous energy level required to trigger a fusion reaction of heavy hydrogen isotopes like deuterium and tritium, producing an even vaster release of energy. Such a weapon would have a destructive capability orders of magnitude greater than that of an atomic bomb, which relied on the fission reaction alone.

The United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) held hearings in October 1949 to discuss the potential development of a hydrogen bomb in response to the knowledge that the Soviet Union possessed nuclear weapons of its own. Among the contributions to the hearing were from scientists, including J. Robert Oppenheimer, who warned that the hydrogen bomb could "become a weapon of genocide," that "the extreme dangers to mankind inherent in the proposal wholly outweigh any military advantage that could come from this development" and thus concluded that such a weapon "should never be produced."

But for Truman and the American ruling class as a whole, the primary consideration in developing the hydrogen bomb, as it was for using the atomic bombs against Japan, remained the need to ensure and demonstrate the unrivalled power of the US military to advance its interests, particularly against the Soviet Union. The Truman administration was unwilling to tolerate any constraints on expanding the destructive capacity of the American military, underscored by the decision to begin development of the hydrogen bomb. That decision led, almost three years later, to the first of many tests of such a weapon.

100 years ago: Dogsleds deliver antitoxins for diphtheria outbreak in Nome, Alaska

On February 2, 1925, at 5:30 a.m., musher (dogsled driver) Gunnar

Kaasen delivered the first batch of antitoxin to treat a deadly outbreak of diphtheria to downtown Nome, Alaska. Kassen was a part of two relay-teams of 20 mushers and 150 dogs that had driven over 674 miles (1,085 km), in temperatures often ?50 F (?46 C), from Nenana in central Alaska, where the railhead of the Alaskan Railway was located, to Nome, the westernmost town in Alaska, just below the Arctic Circle.

Diphtheria is a bacterial airborne disease which may prove deadly, especially in children, when it causes a membrane to grow over airways. By 1913 an antitoxin had been developed, and viable vaccine was produced by the 1920s.

The diphtheria outbreak in Nome was first reported by the town's only doctor, Curtis Welch, in mid-January. His facility, the small Maynard Columbus Hospital, had seen several child deaths but had not diagnosed them with the disease. As soon as Welch confirmed the diagnosis, the town immediately declared a quarantine and notified neighboring settlements of the epidemic. The hospital's supply of antitoxins had expired. At least seven people, mostly children, would die in the outbreak.

It was impossible to send the medicine to Nome by airplane. Alaska at the time had only three airplanes, which had been disassembled for the winter, and few airplanes from further away were equipped to fly in the brutal conditions of an Arctic winter. The shipping routes to Nome were also inaccessible because of ice.

The only alternative was to ship the medicine by dogsled, as was much of the mail in the interior of Alaska at the time. Many of the mushers worked for the postal service. The effort was truly heroic. Mushers suffered from frostbite, had their sleighs overturned in high winds, drove through whiteout conditions, and lost dogs in some of the most adverse conditions on the planet. Nevertheless, the first batch of the serum reached Nome in a record 127 hours.

The delivery, known as the Great Race of Mercy or the 1925 Serum Run, was closely covered in the world press and demonstrated the strenuous effort that people could collectively take for public health. Not only did the serum have to be transported through central Alaska, but the US Public Health Service scoured West Coast hospitals for the antitoxins and shipped them by rail to Alaska. The mushers were justly celebrated for their efforts, as were their dogs. A statue to one of these animals, Balto, stands in New York City's Central Park.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact