

This week in history: May 4-10

4 May 2015

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: Greyhound bus strike enters third month

As the bitter nationwide Greyhound bus drivers' strike entered its third month, the company presented an offer that was worse than the one originally rejected by the 6,300 drivers. Calling for a four-year wage freeze and the elimination of 4,500 union jobs, the proposal was considered an insult by the strikers.

Two days later, Greyhound Chairman Fred Curry issued a statement from the company's Dallas headquarters declaring a victory for management. With the use of scab drivers, Curry claimed that buses were running in the cities that brought in 98 percent of Greyhound's revenues the previous year.

The strike, which had begun on March 2, caused \$56 million in losses for Greyhound in the first quarter. Tensions increased at bus stations across the US as company-hired scab drivers confronted picket lines. Injunctions were passed by local governments limiting the number of pickets in order to weaken the strike. The strike was marked by violence. Union driver Robert Waterhouse was killed by a scab driver in California on the second day of the strike and driver Roger Cawthra faced trumped-up charges in Connecticut.

The company's offer expressed its determination to keep the replacement drivers hired to break the strike. A striker in the Twin Cities expressed the feelings of the membership: "It's do or die over the scabs. They either have to leave or go to the bottom of the seniority list. If he would get rid of the scabs, maybe we could talk, but I think it's clear he wants us gone."

Workers felt frustration at the inaction of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). Pittsburgh striker James Walker sent a letter to the union demanding that they pull out the Teamster baggage handlers who were continuing to work, that they provide promised health benefits to the strikers, and that they call a nationwide strike of all ATU bus drivers, including at least rotating strikes of municipal bus lines in major cities.

Walker said, "We are not getting real representation from the union leadership. They don't even want to bail you out of jail. It is a highly ridiculous situation. Guys are finding jobs now. That is why the pickets are going down."

[top]

50 years ago: US Congress in near-unanimous vote to fund Vietnam War

In votes of 408-7 and 88-3, the US House of Representatives and Senate voted on May 5, 1965 and May 6, 1965 respectively, to approve a special \$700 million funding request to drastically increase US military operations in Vietnam, on top of \$1.5 billion already officially allocated for fiscal year 1965.

President Lyndon Johnson had made the request to fight "communist aggression" only two days earlier, on May 4, and he signed the bill into law on May 7. The *New York Times* hailed the bill as "a display of bipartisanship and unusual speed."

The three lone senators voting against the measure were liberal Democrats Wayne Morse (Oregon), Ernest Gruening (Alaska), and Gaylord Nelson (Wisconsin).

Liberal senators voting for the measure included both Kennedys (Robert, New York, and Edward, Massachusetts), both of Minnesota's senators (Eugene McCarthy and Walter Mondale), as well

as George McGovern (South Dakota), William Fulbright (Arkansas), Fred Harris (Oklahoma), Daniel Inouye (Hawaii), Frank Church (Idaho), Vance Hartke (Indiana), Al Gore Sr. (Tennessee), Paul Douglas (Illinois), and Edmund Muskie (Maine).

Outside of Congress, opposition to the war grew. On May 4, a State Department "truth team" was shouted down by professors at the University of Iowa, its first stop on a propaganda tour of campuses. Three days later the State Department representatives were heckled by students at the University of Wisconsin. On May 4, nearly 70 professors at Princeton held a "teach-in" on Vietnam. On May 5, about 40 University of California students publicly burnt their draft cards at Berkeley. On May 7, protesters at Columbia University forced the cancellation of a campus Navy ceremony. On May 8, 48 University of Michigan professors defied Michigan governor George Romney and held a teach-in. The same day, the Greater Boston Faculty Committee on Vietnam, which represented 770 faculty members at 13 colleges and universities, called on the Johnson administration to reach a negotiated settlement, and at least 1,000 students demonstrated at Washington Square in New York City.

Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia the US stepped up its bombing campaign against North Vietnam. On May 5, 1,200 paratroopers were dropped in to guard the air base at Bienhoa. On May 9, 240 jets and bombers attacked military and civilian targets in North Vietnam, including an airfield at Vinh. On May 7, 12,000 Marines were landed south of Danang to secure the area for another air

base. On May 10, the South Vietnamese regime suffered over 300 casualties in an attempt to retake territory 25 miles northwest of Saigon from the National Liberation Front. On May 11, NLF fighters overran a South Vietnamese military base at Songbe, south of Saigon, killing five US soldiers and taking armored cars that they then used to destroy a nearby airstrip.

[top]

75 years ago: Nazi Germany invades Western Europe

On May 10, 1940 German imperialism launched its invasion of Western Europe with a blitzkrieg assault on Holland, Belgium and northern France that split the armies of the imperialist Allies and forced them into a retreat. The offensive ordered by Hitler put an end to nearly eight months of “phony war” between German and French imperialism, following the Nazi invasion of Poland.

In Holland, German airborne units parachuted onto the outskirts of Rotterdam, while armored forces attacked frontier defenses, breaking through the southern flank and causing disruption and alarm among the Dutch troops. Widespread bombing by the Luftwaffe (German air force) added to the confusion. Holland surrendered within four days. German airborne units parachuting into Belgium managed to neutralize a major fort near the frontier and to secure key bridges that allowed German armored units to cross canals and break through the thin Belgian lines of defense. The Belgian troops sounded a retreat just as French and British forces were arriving to support them, and soon surrendered.

The Nazi offensive in Holland and Belgium served to divert the most mobile Allied forces away from the strategic point of the German offensive, further south, in Luxembourg, where German forces targeted the gap at the end of the uncompleted Maginot line, hoping to drive through it all the way to the English Channel, splitting the Allied forces in half.

On the eve of Hitler’s invasion, crisis infected the Allied imperialist governments from top to bottom.

In the wake of the debacle in Norway, overrun by German forces the previous month, there were rancorous disputes in the British Parliament. Chamberlain was made the scapegoat as Churchill assumed the position of prime minister on May 10. On May 9, French Prime Minister Reynaud delivered a two-hour indictment of Gamelin, the chief of the French military, over the Norwegian fiasco. A row ensued and the government was on the verge of resigning when the Nazi invasion came.

[top]

100 years ago: German torpedo sinks RMS Lusitania

On May 7, 1915, a torpedo fired by a German U-boat struck the RMS Lusitania, a major British cruise liner owned by Cunard, sinking the ship in the Atlantic off the coast of Ireland. All told

1,198 passengers and crew members died. The tragedy was seized upon by Britain, and proponents of American intervention into the world war, to promote the Allied war effort. One hundred and thirty-eight American passengers had been among those who perished.

The ship reportedly received two torpedoes to its port side without warning, and sank within 15 minutes. According to one survivor, “Within five minutes after the torpedo struck, the Lusitania had listed so much to port that it was impossible to launch lifeboats on that side.” Around 750 people were picked up by rescue craft.

The capitalist press in Britain and the US issued calls for “revenge” against Germany, and US entry into the world war that had broken out in August 1914. However, US Secretary of State William Bryan Jennings, outlining the dominant position within the American political establishment for continued neutrality, declared, “everybody understands this is no time to rock the boat.”

Although the sinking of the Lusitania would later be presented as an act of war against the US, Bryan admitted, “We cannot overlook the fact that the Lusitania was a British ship, flying the British flag, and a subject at any time to be put into actual naval service of the government. Indeed, it is said that at the time she was carrying military reservists to England, for military service in the British Army.” He further pointed out that Americans on board the ship had known the risks, which were similar to being in a besieged city during wartime.

For its part, representatives of the German government claimed that the ship had been carrying ammunition, and denounced the hypocrisy of British imperialism, which had imposed a blockade of German ports aimed at starving the population.

[top]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact