

This week in history: August 1-7

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25 years ago: First site goes live on World Wide Web

On August 6, 1991, Tim Berners-Lee launched the first-ever web site, marking the public debut of the World Wide Web. The site included links to instructions for creating one's own web site. Berners-Lee developed and distributed the first web browser software and called it WorldWideWeb (later renamed Nexus to avoid confusing it with the network itself).

Berners-Lee developed and implemented the concept of the World Wide Web while working at CERN nuclear laboratories near Geneva, Switzerland. The Internet existed prior to this, using protocols such as telnet and newsgroups. Berners-Lee published a summary of the World Wide Web on the newsgroup alt.hypertext, simultaneously hosting his web site.

The core hyperlink technology was invented by Berners-Lee. Hyperlinks and hypertext markup language, or html, allow connecting to sites all over the world using complex universal resource locators (URLs), with a simple click of the mouse.

Berners-Lee's web site was published at the URL info.cern.ch. It was designed to provide Internet enthusiasts with the ability to add their own content to the World Wide Web. Berners-Lee's conception was to provide mass access to information hosted on sites all over the world without restricting it to just computer scientists.

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50 years ago: Army mutiny in Nigeria

On August 1, 1966, rebellious army detachments forced the handing of power to the army of chief of staff following the successful kidnapping and execution of Nigerian chief of state General Johnson T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi.

Ironsi, a member of the Ibo tribe, had taken power after a bloody military coup on January 15, 1966. The latest mutiny was sparked when Ironsi declared the abolition of the federal system under which the country was divided into regions,

dominated by locally based tribal groups. At least 300 people were killed in fighting motivated by tribal divisions in the northern region after Ironsi made the announcement.

Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a veteran of the imperialist-led military intervention in the former Belgian Congo, declared himself chief of state following the abduction of Ironsi. A member of a small northern tribe, he vowed to reverse the policies of his former commander. Ironsi's policies were opposed by leaders of the Hausa tribe in the north and the Yorubas in the west, who feared domination by the Ibos.

The new government in Lagos was immediately challenged by the military governor of the Ibo-dominated eastern region, who claimed that only northerners had been consulted. He charged that Gowon planned to dissolve the Nigerian federation into tribally-based states and order all southerners and northerners back to their respective home regions. Gowon announced the release of six political prisoners, all from the western region, including Chief Obafemi Wolowa, leader of the banned Opposition Action Group.

The threat of a tribally based civil war in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, exposed again the complete inability of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed former colonial countries to solve the most basic democratic questions.

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75 years ago: Roosevelt extends Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union

On August 2, 1941 the Democratic administration in Washington headed by President Roosevelt extended the policy of "Lend-Lease" to the Soviet Union. The policy officially known as "An act to promote the Defence of the United States", was initially enacted in March 1941 to provide food, oil and military assistance to allies of the US, i.e., the UK, Free French forces and China.

Initially at least Roosevelt was constrained by the US Neutrality Acts which limited sales of arms to "cash and carry" purchases by belligerents, but the Democrat president declared large amounts of US weapons and ammunition "surplus" and authorized their shipment to the UK.

By August 1941 with Operation Barbarossa in full swing, the

German army was advancing ever deeper into the Soviet Union. The Red Army was hampered by Stalin's betrayal of revolutionary struggles worldwide, by the Great Terror in the USSR and accompanying purges of the Red Army leadership, and by Stalin's refusal to believe Hitler would invade the Soviet Union and the subsequent lack of preparations against a Nazi invasion.

Roosevelt was concerned that without military assistance the Soviet Union might capitulate swiftly and thereby grant Hitler control over the bulk of the Eurasian land mass. Such an outcome would have been disastrous to the interests of British imperialism, especially in the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia.

Roosevelt wished to dismantle the British Empire so US capital could penetrate such territories freely, but he did not wish for Britain's empire to fall under the control instead of German imperialism. Conquest of the USSR would also have allowed Hitler to link up directly with his ally, Imperial Japan, then bogged down in a land war in China, but already preparing to challenge the US imperialism directly in the Pacific.

Roosevelt's terms of Lend-Lease to the British government had astonished them in their harshness. The US demanded an audit of all British assets, and insisted that there could be no subsidy until all foreign exchanges and gold reserves had first been used up. A US navy warship was sent to Cape Town to take the last British gold stockpiles there. British-owned companies located in the US, Courtaulds, Shell and Lever, had to be sold off at discount prices and then resold at great profit.

On July 28 a close confidant of Roosevelt's, Harry Hopkins, arrived in Moscow to ascertain what the Soviet Union required to continue resisting Operation Barbarossa and ultimately how Roosevelt could best leverage these needs into advantages for the United States. On his return to Washington Hopkins told Roosevelt that regardless of the pessimistic reports emanating from the US military attache in Moscow, the Red Army would not collapse and would fight on.

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100 years ago: American socialist leader Tom Mooney indicted

On August 2, 1916, a San Francisco jury indicted five prominent socialist leaders of the working class, including Tom Mooney, on dubious charges stemming from the Preparedness Day bombing on July 22. Along with Mooney, his wife Rena, Warren Billings, Israel Weinberg and Edward Nolan were also indicted.

Mooney was a well-known trade unionist and socialist who had been active in the San Francisco area for years, coming into conflict with the employers, their security agencies, the police

and the local union bureaucracy. In 1908, he had travelled with the "Red Special," the campaign train of socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs, as a speaker and fundraiser. He had been involved in numbers of workers' struggles, including the 1913 San Francisco shoe workers strike, in which the revolutionary-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) played a prominent role.

The Preparedness Day Parade had been organized by the Chamber of Commerce as a militaristic display of support for American entry into World War One. It was opposed by the Socialist Party, the IWW and even the conservative AFL labor councils in the Bay Area. A bomb exploded in the parade, killing 10 onlookers and wounding 40 more. The attack touched off a wave of lynch-mob hysteria, consciously whipped up by the corporate press and business interests, including a sinister "Law and Order Committee."

The five defendants were rounded up because of their radical views. Before the parade, Mooney had been warned of the plans of agent provocateurs. He had moved resolutions through a number of unions warning of their activities.

The prosecution sought to manufacture evidence and round up witnesses to testify against Mooney and the other defendants. The five defendants were described in one account as "a weird procession composed of a prostitute, two syphilitics, a psychopathic liar and a woman suffering from spiritualistic hallucinations." Mooney and Billings were both found guilty. Mooney was sentenced to death, which was later commuted to life in prison after protests around the world, including large demonstrations by workers in Russia. He served 22 years before being pardoned in 1939.

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