

This week in history: July 25-31

24 July 2022

25 years ago: Mahane Yehuda market bombing in Jerusalem

On July 30, 1997, two consecutive suicide bombings were carried out by Hamas militants at the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem. Sixteen people were killed and 178 were injured in the attack.

Following the suicide bombing, the Palestinian Authority (PA) joined with Israel's Shin Bet intelligence agency and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in forming a tripartite panel to coordinate repressive operations in the region. The first meeting of the body took place on August 17 under the supervision of the CIA station chief in Tel Aviv.

The arrangement, proposed by Washington and welcomed by Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat, was an indicator of the fraudulent character of the US-brokered Middle East "peace" and of the blind alley into which the bourgeois nationalist perspective of the PLO led the Palestinian people.

Major Palestinian towns like Hebron and Ramallah were sealed off by Israeli troops, their residents prevented from leaving, while Palestinians from other parts of the West Bank were barred from entering. The Gaza Strip was likewise blockaded. Tens of thousands of Palestinian workers who depended on jobs in Israel were turned back at the border.

The economic life of the territories, already stagnant, was brought to a standstill by the security measures. The Israeli government also cut off tax receipts collected from Palestinian workers and businesses, which were supposed to be turned over to the PA. The funds accounted for nearly two-thirds of the PA's operating budget.

For decades the PLO proclaimed its dedication to national liberation through the armed struggle against Zionism and imperialism. It won broad popular support from Palestinians and the sympathy of oppressed masses throughout the Middle East. But by the 1990s it had come to be reviled by the people it promised to liberate, as it now functioned as a police agency subordinate to both Washington and Tel Aviv, reinforcing the oppression of the Palestinians. The waning popularity of the PLO, and the demoralization it caused, created conditions for the growth of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement, whose terrorist attacks played directly into the hands of the Israeli state.

Four years after Israel and the PLO signed a peace agreement on the White House lawn, conditions for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were worse than under direct Israeli occupation. In reality, the occupation never ended. Israel's military forces maintained a stranglehold over the territories where

Arafat's PA was nominally in charge. The fictitious character of Palestinian "self-rule" was made clear again by the acts of collective punishment carried out by Israel in response to the Jerusalem bombing.

50 years ago: British Army begins major military operation in Northern Ireland

On July 31, 1972, the British Army launched Operation Motorman in Northern Ireland to retake areas that had been under the control of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The operation was the largest military mobilization of the British Army since the Suez Crisis in 1956.

Following the violence in 1969 that began the period of "The Troubles," Irish nationalists had organized defenses and built barricades in Catholic neighborhoods that resisted the British occupation soldiers and Ulster unionist paramilitaries. These "no-go areas" as they became known to the British Army included "Free" Derry and West Belfast and were the primary target of the Motorman operation.

In the days prior to the operation, thousands of soldiers and many tanks were transported into Northern Ireland from Britain. Totaling around 22,000, the rapid buildup of troops was impossible to hide. Both the Provisional and Official IRA factions had time to evacuate the no-go areas before the invasion began.

In the early morning of July 31, British tanks began breaking through the street barricades and thousands of troops, backed by many volunteers from the right-wing Ulster Defense Regiment, swarmed and occupied the Catholic neighborhoods. There was virtually no armed resistance to the invasion as the IRA groups had ordered a retreat in the face of the overwhelming numbers of the British Army.

In the course of the operations British Army soldiers shot four people in Derry, all unarmed teenaged boys, killing two. Later in the day the IRA Provisionals responded to the Motorman invasion by detonating three car bombs in Claudy, killing nine civilians.

Unable to match the British regulars of the British military in open combat, or their Unionist paramilitary deputies, the IRA turned increasingly to terrorism. This only played into the hands of British imperialism.

75 years ago: Truman signs National Security Act, creates the

CIA

On July 25, 1947, President Harry Truman signed the National Security Act into law, setting the institutional framework for the vast expansion of the US military-intelligence apparatus tasked with aggressively prosecuting the interests of American imperialism worldwide.

The Democratic president signed the legislation after it had passed both houses of Congress with bipartisan support. The new law created a powerful National Security Council, responsible for the formulation of longer-term strategic policy as well as more immediate military and state policy. Centered in the White House, the NSC was to include the president, the vice president, the secretary of defense and the secretary of state, as well as other intelligence and military chiefs. It would also be provided with a permanent staff.

The establishment of the new body marked a significant strengthening of a militarist executive. Concurrently, the Department of War and the Navy Department were merged, with the formation of a Department of Defense.

The Act also provided for the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, as a permanent foreign intelligence service carrying out continuous activities around the world. It replaced the Central Intelligence Group, founded in 1946. That body had emerged out of the Office of Strategic Services, established in 1942 after American entry into World War Two. Prior to the OSS and the CIA, foreign intelligence had been conducted by a patchwork of military and defense entities.

Unlike the Central Intelligence Group, the CIA was not only mandated to collect and collate information, but also to conduct wide-ranging covert operations.

Over the following years of his term, Truman would bolster the size of the military and the CIA, while passing further legislation strengthening the centralized national-security state.

The 1947 Act was passed amid the turn by the American ruling elite to a Cold War program of aggressively confronting the Soviet Union and asserting its hegemony everywhere, including in Europe. In the months before Truman signed the act into law, his administration had outlined several major foreign policy initiatives.

This included the unveiling of the Truman Doctrine, under which the US government took upon itself the right to intervene anywhere in the world, supposedly in defense of “freedom and democracy.” The first concrete manifestations of this policy were financial support to the fascistic counterrevolution in Greece and backing for the despotic Turkish regime, which Truman was seeking to cultivate as a bulwark against the Soviet Union. The US had also announced the Marshall Plan, involving sweeping economic intervention in Europe.

On July 31, 1922, the Socialist Party, anarcho-syndicalist groups and the trade unions called for a general strike to stop Fascist violence against left-wing trade unionists and elected officials. The Liberal government of Luigi Facta had resigned on July 19 after a vote of no confidence in the Italian parliament, and the goal of the strike was to pressure the incoming capitalist government to reject an alliance with the Fascists.

Fascist violence had escalated dramatically since 1921, with assassinations and attacks by *squadre d’azione* (action squads) of armed Fascists attacking trade unionists and left-wing leaders.

The Fascist violence was brutal. As one historian has noted, the Fascist gangs, “behaved like an occupation force which had to dominate and subjugate a hostile population … violence could not be applied just once. It had to be applied continuously.”

The government immediately mobilized troops against strikers but called on the Fascists to restrain themselves. Nevertheless, the Fascists attacked Communists in Genoa and occupied a streetcar garage in Milan to ensure that transit services continued to operate. Fascists killed a Socialist mayor near Cremona in northern Italy and Communist railway workers fired on police in Oderzo, south of Venice.

By August 4, Fascists had occupied municipal buildings in Milan and demanded the resignation of Socialist politicians. Five thousand Fascists assembled in Genoa and battled workers from a Communist defense organization.

By August 5, it was clear that the strike had begun to falter. Correspondents writing in the international press noted the increasing number of street cars operating in Rome and a return to normalcy. On August 15, over 50,000 railroad workers were disciplined for participating in the strike.

The failure of the strike was the result of the hostility of the official working class leadership to mobilizing the working class to seize power in the preceding months and years. The Socialist Party and trade union leaders had suffocated the mass occupation of factories in 1919-20, the “two red years” (*Biennio Rosso*) and lost credibility in the eyes of millions.

The stage was now set for the Fascist leader Benito Mussolini’s infamous March on Rome in October, 1922, the Fascist seizure of power.



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100 years ago: General strike in Italy against fascism