

This week in history: April 22-28

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.

21 April 2024

25 years ago: Thousands rally in Philadelphia for political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal

On April 24, 1999, tens of thousands of demonstrators rallied outside Philadelphia City Hall and marched through the streets to demand a new trial and freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the death row political prisoner framed up more than 17 years prior in connection with the shooting death of a police officer. Demonstrations on the same day, marking Abu-Jamal's 45th birthday, were also held in San Francisco, Puerto Rico, Canada, Australia and Italy.

While the Philadelphia Police Department gave its estimate of the crowd as between 8,000 and 10,000, the throng packed around the city hall steps together with columns of marchers filling the streets easily numbered three times that amount.

The hostility of official Philadelphia to the demonstration and its determination to see the black activist put to death found expression the night before the demonstration at a \$100-a-ticket event for a police-backed group called "Justice for Police Officer Daniel Faulkner," dedicated to seeing Mumia Abu-Jamal executed. Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, US Senator Allen Specter, Pennsylvania state Attorney General Mike Fisher, Lt. Gov. Mark Schweiker and other officials all attended the banquet. Philadelphia Police Commissioner John Timoney was the master of ceremonies.

Timoney issued a threat of repression on the eve of the march, announcing that 300 jail cells had been cleared out in the police headquarters to accommodate demonstrators, and that the building's cafeteria was being turned into a makeshift court to summarily prosecute anyone arrested during the protest. In the end, however, there were no confrontations between demonstrators and police.

Abu-Jamal's son, Mazi Jamal, addressed the rally. "I'm the little boy in the picture," he said, referring to a photograph widely reproduced on posters, T-shirts and buttons visible throughout the march. "I was only four years old then. The wheels of justice have been turning very slowly to free my

father. The time I have lost with my father was because of his beliefs," he continued, "because this country does not believe in the things my father does, like equality of all people."

50 years ago: Coup ousts fascistic dictatorship in Portugal

On April 25, 1974, a military coup ousted the Estado Novo regime, founded by longtime dictator Antonio Salazar that had controlled Portugal since 1926. The organizers of the coup, known as the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), set up a seven-man junta and selected General António de Spínola to serve as president.

The coup was followed immediately by a major upsurge of the working class. Workers took over factories and peasants occupied large farm estates. On May 1, International Workers Day, half a million workers, over 8 percent of Portugal's population, marched through Lisbon.

The demonstration had an unquestionably revolutionary character. Soldiers and sailors marched alongside the workers carrying banners and calling for socialism.

Fearing that if allowed to develop independently the movement in the working class would develop a consciously revolutionary and socialist character, the military had intervened to remove the hated dictatorship while at the same time heading off a movement for the working class to take state power.

Aware that a direct assault on the working class could spark an uprising against the new and unstable Junta, the MFA rehabilitated both the reformist Socialist Party (PSP, Partido Socialista Português) and the Stalinist Portuguese Communist Party (PCP, Partido Comunista Português). Both parties had been made illegal by the Estado Novo dictatorship and operated underground or in exile for decades.

Quickly the MFA moved to form an alliance with the PSP and PCP to orient the working class away from revolutionary politics and trap it in a bourgeois parliamentary system that would defend the property and profit interests of Portugal's wealthy elite. On May 16, 1974, Spínola announced the formation of a Provisional Government made up of seven

members from the military and two representatives from each of the PSP, PCP, and the newly formed semi-fascist Popular Democratic Party (PPD).

Major class battles emerged with workers taking strike action demanding both improvements to their working conditions and that action be taken against the remnants of the dictatorship, who the MFA largely protected. The PCP played the leading role on behalf of the MFA to attack strikes and demand workers' obedience to the MFA military rule. The MFA passed anti-strike laws and used the army to break them up with the sanction of the PCP.

For more information, read the three-part series: [Thirty years since the Portuguese Revolution](#)

75 years ago: Lausanne Conference entrenches new Israeli state, Palestinian dispossession

On April 27, 1949, a conference convened in Lausanne, Switzerland, involving Israel, the Arab states and the major imperialist powers, including the US. Called by the United Nations (UN) Conciliation Commission for Palestine, its ostensible purpose was to discuss solutions to the refugee crisis created by the establishment of the Zionist state through the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

In reality, however, the conference formalized Israel's entry into the framework of US-dominated international relations. In the three months preceding the conference, the Arab states, including Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan, had signed armistice agreements following their defeat in the year-long Arab-Israeli war precipitated by the declaration of the new state. That move, together with their agreement to negotiations with Israel, was widely seen as a tacit acceptance of the new state.

Despite the gross inadequacy of the partition plan, it was bitterly opposed by Israel. So too was the right of refugees to return, under conditions in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians had been driven from their homes as a basis for the establishment of an exclusionary Jewish state.

The Israeli delegation would later claim that it had been coerced into signing the protocol, and that their signature had not indicated any agreement to even consider the partition plan. It became clear that Israeli participation was primarily aimed at ensuring its formal admission to the UN, which occurred in May, after which negotiations deteriorated precipitously.

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé would later write: "[T]he conference achieved its only success when the parties signed the Lausanne Protocol on the framework for a comprehensive peace, which included territories, refugees, and Jerusalem. Israel agreed in principle to allow the return of a number of Palestinian refugees. This Israeli agreement was made under pressure from the United States, and because the Israelis wanted United Nations membership, which required the settlement of the refugee problem. Once Israel was admitted to the UN, it retreated from the protocol it had signed, because it was completely satisfied with the status quo, and saw no need to make any concessions with regard to the refugees or on

boundary questions."

100 years ago: German chancellor backs Dawes Plan

On April 27, 1924, the German Chancellor, Wilhelm Marx, a leader of the Catholic Center Party, spoke in Düsseldorf, in the French-occupied Ruhr Valley, in favor of the Dawes Plan, an American-British inspired economic restructuring that was meant to stabilize the German economy and allow it to resume reparations payments to the allies for its role in World War I.

This was the first time a German Chancellor had spoken in the Ruhr Valley since the French occupation of the region began in 1923 to take reparations from Germany directly in industrial products. Marx was running for office in the May 1924 Reichstag elections, and the acceptance or rejection of the Dawes Plan was the focus of the election.

Marx warned the audience against far-right opposition to the plan, saying that Germany could not allow itself to be isolated from Europe, and made a conditional appeal for Germany to join the League of Nations, the imperialist organization that had been set up, along with the onerous reparations for Germany, at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. He chastised the far right for claiming that another war was inevitable.

The Dawes Plan was promoted by the Ramsey MacDonald Labour government in Britain and by the Coolidge Administration in the United States, which was not a member of the League of Nations. The plan (formulated by Charles Dawes, a former business executive, Army general, finance official in the Harding Administration, and soon to be Vice President in the second administration of Calvin Coolidge) stipulated a new, somewhat more flexible schedule of reparations payments by Germany, the reorganization of the German Reichsbank under the supervision of the Allied imperialist powers, and a massive infusion of American capital to revive German industry. France also agreed to withdraw its military from the Ruhr Valley.



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