

This week in history: May 26-June 1

25 May 2025

25 years ago: Space Shuttle Atlantis successfully repairs the International Space Station

On May 29, 2000, Space Shuttle Atlantis reentered earth's atmosphere and landed at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Carrying a crew of six American astronauts and one Russian cosmonaut, Atlantis accomplished vital repairs to the International Space Station (ISS) over a 10-day journey.

Financial woes, manufacturing delays and a ruling elite prioritizing budget cuts plagued the construction of the ISS. Scientists pinpointed out-of-date equipment, a malfunctioning ventilation system and a shortage of fuel. The numerous problems and atmospheric drag produced a catastrophic scenario in which the ISS was slowly plunging back into earth.

The Atlantis crew docked for six days on the ISS to begin repairs. They replaced four \$252,000 nickel-cadmium batteries on the Russian-built power and communications module Zarya, fixed smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, boosted the ISS's orbit by approximately 27 miles and delivered 3,000 pounds of supplies. The crew installed construction cranes on the outside for future repairs and additions, and added a computer cable that enabled long-distance flight controls from collaborating Russian and American scientists in Moscow and at NASA.

The US Congress approved funds for the ISS in September 1988 in an attempt to keep pace with the Soviet Union's space program. The European Space Agency, Canada, Japan, and 16 additional nations financially supported the space venture. Estimated costs were expected to be \$60 billion, but production failures, pricing and cuts sent the price tag soaring. The plans projected the ISS to be as long as an American football field and rise seven stories in height. Its technical capabilities were premised on housing a long-term crew of six to seven, equipped with six trailer-sized labs, two habitation and two logistics modules.

The ISS drew on the successes, failures and technique of the Soviet/Russian space program.

In particular, the historic accomplishments of Mir—the first ever modular space station in orbit, constructed by the Soviet Union in 1986—gave the latter (and later, Russia) the head start in long-term space habitation. With this in mind, combined with economic and political reasons, NASA sought a partnership with Russia. Space hardware destined for an upgraded Mir 2 now moved to the ISS. All astronauts and

cosmonauts set to repair and live on the ISS conducted training at Star City, outside of Moscow.

50 years ago: Boston longshoremen strike to defend Guaranteed Income

On May 31, 1975, the port of Boston was shut down as longshoremen, members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), launched a strike, rejecting the latest offer from the Boston Shipping Association (BSA), representing the shipping companies. The dock workers, who had been laboring without a local contract since the previous year, had already struck once before. Their central demand was preservation of the Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI).

The GAI system was designed to provide a stable level of income for workers in industries, like longshore, where employment could be irregular and 40 hours of work per week was not always guaranteed. With the GAI, Boston longshoremen were guaranteed to be paid for a minimum of 2,080 hours per year (52 weeks times 40 hours), a necessity for workers during periods in which trade stalled.

Such a slump was well underway in 1975 from the combined impact of the recent OPEC oil embargo, the ensuing economic turmoil and the imperialist defeat in Vietnam. By the time of the Boston strike, less than 300 of the 1,500 union longshoremen were working steadily. The GAI acted as a crucial safety net for workers and their families.

ILA union officials had attempted to compromise with the BSA by offering to reduce the guaranteed hours to 1,500. However, the BSA adamantly rejected that, hoping to destroy the GAI entirely. The employers insisted on a system tying payments to the amount of tonnage moving through the port.

As the *Bulletin*, the US predecessor to the WSWS, noted in its June 3, 1975 edition, "Such a system would essentially destroy the GAI. As the port shipped less tonnage, creating larger unemployment, the shippers would be paying less into the fund. More and more dock workers would be forced to draw on the fund and it would rapidly become insolvent."

Summing up what was at stake in the strike, the *Bulletin* argued, "The slump in world trade is forcing the shippers to take back the GAI. The Boston locals must be

defended. The ships diverted to New York must not be worked. The East Coast and Canadian locals must join Boston and strike for the full 2,080 GAI. No strings attached.” The statement continued, “If the shippers claim bankruptcy, the docks must be nationalized.”

75 years ago: Israeli army expels 120 Palestinians, sentencing many to death in Wadi Araba desert

On May 31, 1950, the Israeli military expelled approximately 120 Palestinians into the Wadi Araba (Arabah) desert, an area in the Negev Desert, to make their way on foot to Jordan. The group had been assembled over the course of almost a year, having each been arbitrarily arrested at different points over that period of time. Some had been tried in court for so-called offenses, such as entering an Israeli village without a special permit or crossing the border from Jordan into Israel (often making their way back to their previous homes now in occupied Israeli territory). Most, however, were simply victims of extrajudicial persecution by the Israeli state.

By May 1950, these prisoners had been assembled at a prison camp in Qatra (modern-day Gedera) and handed over to the Israeli army. In what is known as the “Wadi Araba incident,” the prisoners were blindfolded, herded into trucks and driven 16 hours into the desert by Israeli soldiers. There they were told to run into the desert in groups of four, or else they would be shot.

Four days later, 28 of the group were found by Arab Legion officers 20 kilometers away from where they were left near the Jordanian border. The group showed signs of torture and abuse, including bruises from rifle butts, scars from whippings and cigarette burns. They were also exhausted, malnourished and dehydrated from their imprisonment and their days in the desert. In the following days, a total of 87 members of the original group made their way to Jordan in similar conditions.

At least 30 of those from the original group are estimated to have either died on their way to Jordan or were shot dead by Israeli soldiers shortly after being released in the desert.

The Wadi Araba incident was only one of many such examples of a systematic policy of ethnic cleansing enacted by the newly founded Israeli state. As a result of the Zionist military campaign of terror against the Palestinians, between 750,000 and one million people became refugees in nearby countries, such as Jordan and Syria and beyond.

100 years: Home Secretary bans foreign Communists from entry to the United Kingdom

On May 28, 1925, the British Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks, informed the House of Commons that the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin would ban the entry of foreign Communists into Britain to prevent them from attending a Communist Party conference in Glasgow.

Joynson-Hicks told the MPs present that visas would be refused to “any alien known to be engaged in subversive activities abroad” who was found entering a British port, and that he “would be refused leave to land by the immigration officers and deported if he did land,” according to the *New York Times*.

When a Labor MP asked if it were illegal to promote Communist principles in England, Joynson-Hicks replied that freedom of speech was permissible there only for British nationals.

Joynson-Hicks despised such democratic rights. Later in his career he sought to censor books on birth control, novels by D. H. Lawrence and even a translation of Giovanni Boccaccio’s 14th century Italian masterpiece, *The Decameron*. Historian Francis Thompson described Joynson-Hicks as “the most prudish, puritanical and protestant Home Secretary of the twentieth century.”

Joynson-Hicks was a virulent anti-Communist who played a central role in the October 1925 show trial of Communist leader Harry Pollitt under the Incitement to Mutiny Act 1797. Perhaps the most significant action he carried out, however, occurred during the 1926 General Strike in which, alongside Chancellor of the Exchequer [finance minister] Winston Churchill, Joynson-Hicks attempted to organize large-scale scabbing and greatly increased the number of police.

Leon Trotsky, in his analysis of the strike, remarked, “Fascism remains in reserve. But the capitalist politicians understand that matters do not end with the methods of democracy and in private Mr Joynson-Hicks is trying on Mussolini’s mask.”



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