

1973: The Skylab 4 mutiny



A brief account of the 24-hour mutiny during the Skylab 4 mission in 1973/4 triggered by the astronauts' complaints of excessive workloads.

Class war in space - The Skylab 4 mutiny

Skylab 4 was the fourth Skylab mission and placed the third crew on board, consisting of Gerald Carr, commander, William Pogue, pilot and Edward Gibson, science pilot. It was each crew member's first space flight. During the mission a total of 6,051 astronaut-utilization hours were tallied performing scientific experiments in the areas of medical activities, solar observations, Earth resources, observation of the Comet Kohoutek and other experiments.

However, the all-rookie astronaut crew had problems adjusting to the same workload level as their predecessors when activating the workshop. One of their first tasks was to unload and stow within Skylab thousands of items needed for their lengthy mission. The schedule for the activation sequence dictated lengthy work periods with a large variety of tasks to be performed. The crew soon found themselves tired and behind schedule.

As the activation of Skylab progressed, the astronauts complained of being pushed too hard. Ground crews disagreed; they felt that the astronauts were not working long enough or hard enough, and insisted the crew work through their meal times as well as their rest days to catch up. During the course of the mission, this culminated in the crew announcing an unscheduled day off, mutinying against Mission Control by turning off the communications radio while getting some rest.

They reportedly spent their day off relaxing and taking in the panoramic views of Earth from orbit. Eventually their workload was reduced, although NASA ensured that none of the crew ever flew again.