



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Cook Islands churchgoers protest Sunday flights, 2008-2010

Time period notes: *The ending date is unclear. There was no media regarding protests after December 2009. They might have occurred during this time period, however. Additionally, it is also possible that small-scale protests might have occurred after the election in November 2010 although they were not publicized if so.*

June
2008
to: November
2010

Country: Cook Islands

Location City/State/Province: Aitutaki

Location Description: Aitutaki Airport

Goals:

The protesters' goal was to suspend all Sunday flights in Aitutaki and to hold a referendum to vote on the matter.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › at the airport

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › at the airport

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › at the airport

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › at the airport

Methods in 5th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › at the airport

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Notes on Methods:

Protests in the 6th segment are undocumented.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- churchgoers in the Cook Islands

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Reverend Tuvaine Glassie (Cook Islands Christian Church); Tunui Mati (an airport employee)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Te Kura O Te Au (political party)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Reverend Tuvaine Glassie (Cook Islands Christian Church)
- Tunui Mati (an airport employee)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Te Kura O Te Au (political party)

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Reverends from other churches led some of the protests as well but were not mentioned in the press.

Segment Length: 5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Theresa Manarangi Trott (Chamber of Commerce President); Sir Terepai Maoate (finance minister); Tai Herman (Mayor of Aitutaki); Tangata Vavia (cabinet minister)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

The police arrested two campaigners at the airport

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The original goal was to suspend Sunday flights and hold a referendum voting on the matter. Neither of these occurred despite constant protests. The protesters did effect the amount of citizens willing to fly on Sundays. Also, only one Air Rarotonga flight lands in Aitutaki on Sundays.

The churchgoers retained their organization.

The campaigners gained the attention and support of a political party.

For approximately two years, beginning in June 2008 and ending in 2010, churchgoers in the Cook Islands protested airplane flights taking place on Sundays. The protesters viewed Sunday as the day of rest but many local businesses retorted, saying that Sunday flights were crucial for the economy. The protesters' ultimate goal was to ban all flights from taking off and landing (specifically on the island of Aitutaki) on Sundays. The churchgoers gained the attention and support of a new political party on the island. The leaders of the campaign were Reverend Tuvaine Glassie (Cook Islands Christian Church), Tunui Mati (an airport worker), and other anonymous citizens. The opposition was mainly politicians, including Theresa Manarangi Trott (Cook Island Chamber of Commerce President), Sir Terepai Maoate (Cook Island finance minister), Tai Herman (Mayor of Aitutaki), and Tangata Vavia (cabinet minister), amongst others.

Flights commenced on Sunday due to a drop in tourist numbers, and therefore a downturn in the Cook Island economy. The government proposed a 6-month trial period for Sunday flights, which would end with a referendum voting on its permanency.

On Sunday June 22, 2008, an airplane flew to the island of Aitutaki for the first time on a Sunday since 1995. Churchgoers protested at the Aitutaki airport, carrying and planting various signs in opposition of Sunday flights. Additionally, approximately 900 people signed a petition against flights held on Sundays on the island. In anticipation of the protests, police and airport security staff arrived in Aitutaki (from the main island of Rarotonga) for safety purposes. The police arrested two protesters after they attempted to run onto the runway in protest.

By March 2009, the government had still not ordered a referendum. Citizens continued to protest at the airport most Sundays and demanded a referendum.

In October 2009, protests persisted, and the opposition verbally denounced the protesters on multiple occasions. The finance minister, Terepai Maoate, admitted that the protests were affecting flights in and out of the island: many people refused to travel on Sundays following the constant protests. Additionally, the government refused to hold a referendum, saying that it was too expensive.

In December 2009, about 1,300 people signed the petition against flights in Aitutaki. People continued protesting as well, holding signs that read "No Sunday Flights: Government Ignores Peoples' Voice". The airport employers fired one of the protest leaders, Tunui Mati (who had worked at the airport up until this point).

The protests gained the attention of the political party Te Kura O Te Au, putting the protesters' demands into a legitimate political voice. Te Kura O Te Au's agenda included immediately suspending all Sunday flights and holding a referendum regarding the matter. Te Kura O Te Au did not, however, win the 2010 elections. The Cook Islands Party (one of the main parties) won the election instead. After the elections, the protests appeared to dwindle down, although it is unclear how many protests occurred after the elections.

Today, only one flight with Air Rarotonga (the Cook Islands' airport service) lands in Aitutaki on Sundays. Flights to Rarotonga (the main island) from other airlines (especially Air New Zealand) still occur on Sundays. The protests occurred solely in Aitutaki, however, and did not target flights landing in Rarotonga.

Research Notes

Influences:

The campaigners were influenced by churchgoers' protesting Sunday flights in 1995. (1)

Sources:

ONE News. "Islanders Want Sunday Flights Banned." TVNZ. 25 June 2008. Web.

McMahon, Barbara. "Sunday Flights Disturb Paradise Islands." Guardian.co.uk. 30 June 2008. Web. 19 Mar. 2011.

"New Party Wants No Sunday Flights." Wwww.cinews.co.ck. Web. 19 Mar. 2011.

"Cook Islands Deputy PM Says Sunday Flights Protests Must Stop." Pacific Business Online. 3 Oct. 2009. Web. 19 Mar. 2011.

"Cook Islands Protesters over Aitutaki Flights Stand Firm." Radio New Zealand International. 9 Mar. 2009. Web. 19 Mar. 2011.

Additional Notes:

It is important to note that it is very unclear when the nonviolent campaign truly ended.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Samantha Bennett, 19/03/2011

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