



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Anti-war activists march to Moscow for peace, 1960-1961

December 1,
1960

to: October
1961

Country: International

Country: United States

Location Description: *March throughout the United States and Europe*

Goals:

To educate the masses about the dangers of nuclear testing, and to convince governments throughout the world to demilitarize.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 041. Pilgrimages
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils

- 037. Singing
- 041. Pilgrimages
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 041. Pilgrimages
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 013. Deputations
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 033. Fraternalization
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 041. Pilgrimages
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils

- 037. Singing
- 041. Pilgrimages
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 004. Signed public statements
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 013. Deputations
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 041. Pilgrimages
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 038. Marches

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Peace

Group characterization:

- Anti-war activists (largely from the U.S.)

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Committee for Nonviolent Action, led by AJ Muste and Bayard Rustin. March led by Brad Lyttle.

Partners:

Direct Action Committee (Britain's version of the CNVA)

External allies:

Anti-War groups throughout the world, including the War Resisters League, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, American Friends Service Committee, and others

Involvement of social elites:

America's social elites were largely absent (with the exception of a meeting with Arthur Schlesinger. Social elites were supportive in Belgium, and most oppressive in East Germany. Marchers were able to meet with Nina Khrushchev, the Premier's wife.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- CNVA
- other American antiwar groups

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- DAC
- other international antiwar groups

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 8 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Russian and American governments and the governments of all nations that the march passed through and that supported nuclear testing

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

There were some American bystanders that viewed the march as unpatriotic and occasionally roughed up a marcher or two.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaigners gained significant media coverage and provided subsequent education, but accomplished few specific goals.

The group survived through the end of the march.

The campaign included thousands of local marchers and demonstrators at rallies in areas that the march passed through

On December 1, 1960, just after a rally in San Francisco, ten members of the Committee for Non-Violent Action marched out of the city, intent on marching across the country, all the way to Moscow in the Soviet Union. Their chances for success were slim. Despite the backing of the (admittedly small) CNVA, marching most of the way around the world is a monumental task. Even if the distance were not an issue, the Soviet Union was notoriously unsympathetic to peace groups or protest action in general. Breaching the Iron Curtain would not be easy.

The CNVA was a small protest group formed in 1957 to protest US nuclear weapons testing. Led by major figures in the nonviolent action network like AJ Muste and Bayard Rustin, the group immediately gained credibility. It first made news when Albert Bigelow attempted to sail his boat, the Golden Rule, into the US nuclear test site near the Marshall Islands. Though Bigelow was not successful, the group was well known by the time they decided to embark on such a challenging protest campaign.

Critics of the CNVA had often told the group to “tell it to the Russians”. Their complaint echoed a common sentiment in America that the US could not stop building up its nuclear arsenal, or the Soviet Union would be able to attack and win a war. Brad Lytle, the leader of the march, realized that the CNVA should do exactly that. Though it was likely that the Soviet Union would stop them from entering their territory, Lytle noted that “by the time we reached the border of a Communist country, millions of people would know about us. They would be wondering what would happen to us in Russia. Communists claim to be champions of peace... What explanation could they give for not letting us in?”

Their goals were simple. The CNVA called on the governments of the world (particularly those that they marched through) to disarm, train citizens in nonviolent resistance, and settle international disputes through negotiation and compromise. They urged citizens of all countries to refuse to serve in their militaries, or to have anything to do with military industry. Marchers were only allowed to join in the march if they were committed to unilateral disarmament and nonviolent civil disobedience if the situation called for it.

For the next six months, these activists marched across the United States. Though their number rarely rose above forty, the march tended to attract the local media as they walked through cities. The reception was mixed and many times they were threatened with violence. In each city, the marchers handed out CNVA leaflets advocating disarmament.

The marchers entered Chicago on March 29, 1961, and took part in a two-day peace walk organized by the American Friends Service Committee. Lytle addressed a gathering of more than 2,000 peace activists at the end of the event.

They arrived in Washington DC on May 13, held a vigil at the Pentagon, and met with presidential aide Arthur Schlesinger. Hundreds of people joined the march as they walked through New York on May 28 and demonstrated at the United Nations building. After nearly 4,000 miles, the CNVA selected its 15 best, most committed activists and put them on a plane to London.

Britain welcomed the protesters with enthusiasm. 6,000 people welcomed them into Trafalgar Square and marchers from Britain and nearby Scandinavian countries added an international flavor to the campaign.

As the marchers closed in on the Iron Curtain line, observers and supporters began to speculate in earnest about their chances of entering Communist territory. Many anti-war activists feared that if the marchers were turned back, the Cold War would only intensify in the West – refusal to allow the marchers might be interpreted by the US as a signal the Russia was committed to significant additional militarization. However, the march continued, as Muste and others recognized that the only thing holding the group together was the common drive towards Moscow. Any hesitation would lead to disillusionment and despair among the marchers and all their accumulated momentum would be lost. Muste and others wrote directly to Soviet Premier Khrushchev emphasizing the nonviolent nature of the march and requesting permission to enter Communist territory.

In the meantime, marchers encountered opposition in France. Due to their war with Algeria, the French government had cracked down on political dissent and would not allow the marchers to land their ships on French soil. When some jumped off their boats and swam towards shore (with roughly 1,500 French supporters), they were picked up by French police and deported back to

England. After attempting to land in France on three separate occasions, the marchers moved on to Belgium, which was far more sympathetic to the protests.

The march entered West Germany in July. Though the police there were friendly and supportive of the march, they were under orders to stop any overt political activities. Thus leafleting was prohibited and police occasionally arrested marchers as they demonstrated in front of German government buildings.

As the marchers crossed Western Europe, progress had been made with Khrushchev. He had eventually realized that the Communist position essentially required that he allow the marchers into his territory. The march crossed into East Germany on August 7, 1961. However, they were not allowed free reign to leaflet and demonstrate. They were placed under constant surveillance and all media coverage ignored every part of their campaign that did not agree with Soviet policy. Though they were not allowed anywhere near East Berlin (and indeed had a tense encounter with an East German official when they demanded to be allowed into the city), they were able to distribute 15,000 leaflets, and were allowed to continue through Eastern Europe as long as they agreed not to engage in civil disobedience.

The march was welcomed in Poland and suffered no governmental resistance of any kind during their time in the country outside of occasional media censorship. The marchers entered Russia on September 15 and marched to Moscow in 18 days. While there, they met with the wife of Khrushchev and convinced her to relay a message about the dangers of nuclear testing to her husband.

The marchers distributed 100,000 leaflets in Russia, spoke at an incredible number of public events, and were the first group to engage in significant political agitation in the Soviet Union. One reporter described the march as “the most important expression of intellectual freedom [he] had seen in the Soviet Union.” The marchers returned home to America in mid-October after more than 6,000 miles of walking nearly halfway around the world. Though they did not manage to convince any government to demilitarize, their march educated millions of people about the dangers of nuclear testing and stared down the Soviet censorship machine. Their march served as notice to the rest of the world that even Russia could be challenged by a few people who simply wanted to walk across the border.

Research Notes

Sources:

Lyttle, Brad. *You Come with Naked Hands: the story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*. Raymond, NH: Greenleaf Books, 1966.

Wernicke, Gunter, and Lawrence Wittner. "Lifting the Iron Curtain: The Peace March to Moscow of 1960-1961." *International History Review*. 21.4 (1999): 900-917.

Additional Notes:

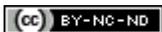
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Kelly Schoolmeester, 26/04/2010

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