

# Australians block cricket and impede rugby tour of apartheid South Africa, 1971

- [an example of paradox of repression](#) [1]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [2]

## Timing

### Time period notes:

It is not clear exactly when the campaign began. Although the tour did not begin until June, organizers began distributing leaflets and holding public meetings against the tour before this. For that reason May 1971 is taken as the starting date here.

May

1971

to:

August

1971

## Location and Goals

### Country:

Australia

[View Location on Map](#)

### Goals:

Campaigners wanted to end the South African Springbok rugby tour and prevent the upcoming South African cricket tour from happening.

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 027. New signs and names
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 078. Workers' boycott
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 115. Selective strike

#### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 027. New signs and names
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 078. Workers' boycott
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 115. Selective strike

#### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 027. New signs and names
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 078. Workers' boycott
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 104. Professional strike ›by rugby players
- 115. Selective strike
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

#### Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 027. New signs and names
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 078. Workers' boycott
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 104. Professional strike ›by rugby players
- 115. Selective strike

- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 027. New signs and names
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 078. Workers' boycott
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 104. Professional strike ›by rugby players
- 115. Selective strike
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 027. New signs and names
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 078. Workers' boycott
- 080. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott
- 104. Professional strike ›by rugby players
- 115. Selective strike
- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Segment Length:

Approximately 3 weeks

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Activists
- clergy members
- students
- unionists

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Leaders of student groups and unions, priests, ministers

Partners:

Australia Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Members of clergy, Seven Professional Australian rugby players

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- ACTU
- Members of clergy
- Student groups

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Professional Australian rugby players

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

Approximately 3 weeks

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

South African rugby team, Australian government and police forces, South African government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Some campaigners fought back to violent police responses and arrests.

Repressive Violence:

Police arrested approximately 700 demonstrators and also attacked demonstrators at several points.

## Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign did not succeed in its primary goal of stopping the rugby tour, but it did greatly diminish the attendance of the rugby matches, increased the Australian disagreement to South African apartheid, and successfully prevented the cricket tour from going forward.

The campaigner groups survived throughout the campaign.

The support for the demonstrations and the number of demonstrators grew greatly during the campaign.

To South Africans and Australians alike, rugby is not just a sport, but a cultural symbol. In the 1960s and early 1970s, it was also a unifying force between apartheid South Africa and its “white neighbor by the sea”—Australia. At the time, Australia had in place many racist policies that discriminated against Aboriginal peoples and the Australian public was only beginning to gain an awareness of both the domestic and international issues of human rights at stake. It was this growing awareness that pushed many in Australia to try to cut both economic and cultural ties with South Africa.

Sports provided an opportunity. Pro-apartheid white South Africans valued highly the chance to field their sports teams in competition with others in the British Commonwealth of Nations. The 1971 Australian tour by the South African Springbok rugby team offered a prime opportunity to build anti-apartheid expression because rugby was South Africa’s most popular sport and Australia was one of its few competitors. The South African Prime Minister had told the Springboks that they represented not only their team, but also the apartheid South Africa way of life. Many Australians were keen to demonstrate that they disagreed with this way of life. Disrupting the six week tour would greatly anger white South Africans and provide a morale boost to anti-apartheid activists in South Africa.

Planning for the anti-Springbok campaign began in 1969 immediately after the tour was announced. Although an important goal for protesters was to disrupt and bring an end to the Springbok tour that ran from June to August in 1971, they knew this goal would be very difficult to accomplish. Firstly, when the tour began, it was supported by a vast majority of Australians, and was fully supported and aided by the Australian government. Protesters hoped to stop the tour both through convincing the public of the moral reasons against it and also through physically disrupting play.

However, stopping a rugby game is difficult because it is played in an enclosed arena and players are used to loud noises surrounding them. Shouting by protesters would not affect them much and police could easily keep protesters out of the arena. Because of this, anti-apartheid campaigners had a second goal: to prevent the South African cricket tour that was meant to follow the rugby tour.

Cricket fields are not enclosed, and so more difficult to police. Cricket players are also not used to a lot of noise, so it would be easier to break their concentration. This made cricket tours easier to physically disrupt. Also, cricket, like rugby, was a very important sport to both South Africans and Australians.

Campaign organizers began to rally protesters before the arrival of the South Africans through holding public meetings to raise awareness, handing out informational leaflets, and letter-writing to media and government sources. An anti-Springbok protester's handbook was passed out that specifically instructed protesters to engage only in non-violent actions. Organizers also gained the support and partnership of church groups and unionists. A series of vigils was held prior to the tour, and unions began making plans to boycott certain activities that would aid the Springboks in any way. The Australia Council of Trade Unions, ACTU, announced that, among other things, it would impose a ban on servicing to airplanes carrying Springboks. Union members would also refrain from supplying liquor to hotels that accommodated the team and the factory that made police batons would not produce any for the duration of the tour. As one union leader put it, if capitalists could choose where to invest their money, unions could certainly express their feelings through choosing where to invest their labor.

Immediately upon arrival in Australia, the Springboks were subject to the actions of protesters. Demonstrators sat-in at the motels accommodating the team, restaurants where they ate, and essentially followed the team motorcade wherever it went. Most of the demonstrations, however, were concentrated on the rugby matches. There were many student participants in the protests, but also many members of the clergy and the greater community. Protesters blew whistles, held up placards, and ran onto the field if possible. Some also saluted and yelled "Sieg Heil," in reference to the similarities between South Africa's apartheid and the Nazi regime.

The most difficult obstacle that protesters had to contend with was the oppressive police presence. In Queensland, the government declared a state of emergency, thus allowing police officers to take more extreme measures in trying to maintain control. In all provinces, however, reports of police brutality were common.

Over 700 demonstrators were arrested during the course of the tour, and were even charged with the 'crime of protesting'. There was some violence on the part of protesters, but most maintained a non-violent approach. In the end, though, the extreme and brutal measures taken by the government and by police backfired: word-of-mouth and media coverage of the repression caused a shift in public opinion. More and more people began to support the anti-apartheid activists.

Another drastic change in public opinion occurred when seven Australian rugby players decided to go on strike and join the anti-Springbok protest. Until that point, many Australians disagreed with the protests because they felt that sports should be separate from politics. That the country's top rugby players felt otherwise was very important in influencing public opinion. Awareness of apartheid grew among Australians, as well as an awareness of their domestic racial issues relating to Aboriginal people.

Although August came and the Springbok tour reached its end, the campaign still enjoyed many successes. Protesters managed to make the tour very difficult to run, and significantly disrupted many games. The tour was also not very profitable because attendance dropped sharply.

Furthermore, the campaign succeeded in achieving its second goal: preventing the upcoming South African cricket tour. The anti-Springbok campaign prompted both the Australian and South African leaders of their national cricket associations to speak out against policies that discriminated based on race. The huge importance of these announcements cannot be understated. Firstly, the leader of the Australian cricket organization could have easily explained his cancellation of the upcoming tour by stating that it would have cost too much and been too difficult to run it with the interference of the protesters. That in of itself would have been a victory for protesters because it would have meant that their disruptions were successful. But, instead, the leader decided to

base his explanation on the ethical reason for canceling the tour. As an important figure in Australia, his denouncement of apartheid carried a lot of weight. In addition, that the leader of the cricket association in South Africa would speak out against his own regime meant a lot to campaigners.

Along with preventing the upcoming cricket tour, the campaign raised awareness among the Australian public about the South African apartheid regime. Before the tour, only 7 percent of Australians opposed maintaining sporting ties with South Africa. At the end of the tour, more than one third opposed maintaining sporting ties. This opposition grew quickly and by the end of the year, the new government announced in its platform that it would implement a policy that would not allow sporting visas to be allocated to teams that discriminated based on race.

Despite the fact that the anti-apartheid protesters did not end the Springbok tour, the campaign is an important part of Australia's history. It boosted the morale of anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, and raised awareness of the issue among the Australian public. It also brought attention to Australia's own discriminatory policies against Aboriginal people and sparked activism and new policies aimed at creating equality domestically as well as abroad.

## Research Notes

Influences:

The anti-Springbok protest in Britain in 1969 influenced activists in this campaign (see "British Citizens Protest South African Sports Tours (Stop the Seventy Tour), 1969-1970")(1).

This campaign influenced the New Zealand Anti-Springbok Rugby Tour Protests, 1981 (2)

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Additional Notes:

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