



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Bermudian hotel workers walkout to demand compensation for tips, 1994

February 22,

1994

to: May 28,

1994

Country: Bermuda

Goals:

For hotel workers to be paid the over \$1 million dollars they believed they were owed in tips collected from hotel customers.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

- 106. Industry strike

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Hotel Workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU) – general trade union that represented the hotel workers

Ottiwell Simmons—president of BIU, oversaw the actions of the campaign and represented the union in public and to the media.

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Benjamin Hooks—former executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who voiced support for the hotel workers' right to strike

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Bermuda Industrial Union
- Ottiwell Simmons

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Benjamin Hooks

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 2 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Hotel Employers of Bermuda (HEB)

Bermuda Hotels Association (BHA)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

Not Known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was completely unsuccessful in achieving its goal. Three hearings ruled against the union in favor of the hoteliers and a court injunction ended the workers' strike, which was almost a last resort action.

The BIU was relentless in attempting to achieve its goal. Despite three rulings in favor of the hoteliers, the BIU remained active and continued to demand compensation for its workers.

The campaign experienced considerable growth. As the campaign progressed, more workers supported the union. Meeting attendance increased by from 200 to 300 and eventually, 1,500 workers from 20 major hotels participated in the strike, however, the campaign did not gain only one known ally: Benjamin Hooks

On January 14 1993, the Essential Industries Dispute Settlement Board (EIDSB) agreed to a ruling regarding a dispute between Bermudian hotel workers and hoteliers. Hotel workers, represented by the Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU), claimed that they were owed over \$1 million in tips from the hoteliers. The hoteliers, members of the Hotel Employers of Bermuda (HEB), argued that the hotel workers hadn't properly requested compensation for the tips. The EIDSB's initial ruling was characterized by ambiguous wording and as a result, both parties interpreted the ruling to be in their favor. Consequently, the government called for another board to examine the dispute.

The new board declared a ruling in August. The new ruling, like the initial ruling, possessed very ambiguous language, but despite the ambiguous language, the HEB hailed the ruling as a victory for the hoteliers. The HEB's reaction to the ruling would provoke an equally passionate reaction from the BIU.

The BIU immediately decided to pursue a third appeal regarding their dispute. The BIU president, Ottiwell Simmons, maintained that the hoteliers had collected gratuities from their customers from February 25, 1992, until February 24, 1993, and kept the money for themselves. On February 22 1994, 30 hotel workers marched to the HEB headquarters in order to present a petition to the HEB executive director, John Harvey. A week later, on the 1st of March, Simmons called a three-hour meeting at

the union headquarters and during the meeting, 80 hotel workers left and marched over to the Labour Ministry to present Labour Minister John Irving Pearman with the same petition that was presented to the HEB. The petition, which had 1,000 signatures, restated their claim to the gratuity money. The BIU also threatened to hold a strike vote on the 15th of March, if the dispute hadn't been resolved by then.

Two days after receiving the petition, Pearman told the media that another hearing would likely be held in April. Upon hearing the news, the HEB responded in outrage. HEB lawyer Alan Dunch issued a letter to Pearman, lambasting him for reacting to the BIU's threats with a call for a third hearing.

As promised, the BIU held a strike vote via secret ballot on the 15th of March and an overwhelming majority of the 200 members in attendance voted in favor of a potential strike. Simmons was ecstatic after the vote and told media, "This was one of the largest and best meetings we have ever had." Simmons then added that the strike would not happen if the April hearing were to happen as planned, without interruption from the HEB and its lawyer. Later that month, Simmons met with the former executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Dr. Benjamin Hooks, and he supported the hotel workers' right to strike, telling the media that he "[didn't] know of anything that takes away the right of a worker to strike..."

On the 19th of April, a third hearing was held with a new board consisting of an American arbitrator, a former hotel chief, and the president of the Bermudian Senate. The day before, the BIU met and decided that it would follow through with its threat of a strike if conditions were not met. The new board eventually echoed the ruling of the previous board, ruling in favor of the HEB. The decision left members of the BIU infuriated and according to Simmons, "They wanted a strike, but we had to restrain ourselves."

Simmons' comments would not quiet the abundance of rumors regarding a potential strike. Officials from the Bermuda Hotels Association (BHA) were especially concerned about a potential work stoppage and met with Labour Minister Pearman on May 22nd to express their concerns. Four days later the BIU held a strike vote and 299 of 300 members in attendance voted in favor of the strike.

The next day at 5:30 a.m., on the 27th of May, 1,500 workers from 20 major hotels commenced an indefinite strike. Many hotel workers also established picket lines in front of 12 of the 20 hotels. The strike occurred on the eve of Memorial Day in the United States and many experts expected the holiday weekend to be a busy one for the hotel industry. Bellboys, maids, and other essential hotel staff participated in the strike. The strike affected an estimated 4,000 tourists, the majority of which were from the United States. There were many reports of cancellations and of guests leaving earlier than expected. Before the situation could escalate out of control, the Bermudian government took steps to put an end to the strike.

Later in the evening, Bermuda's supreme court ordered an injunction, which effectively ruled the strike illegal and mandated its end. News of the injunction, however, did not reach the workers until the next day. Picketers left their posts at 10 a.m. the next morning to attend what would end up being a six and a half hour meeting that detailed the findings of the court and ordered the workers to return to work. The end of the meeting at 4:30 p.m. also marked the end of a rather unsuccessful campaign for the hotel workers; the workers never received any gratuity money, the strike damaged Bermuda's image in the United States, and the HEB looked into changing the labour laws to prevent something similar from happening again.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not Known

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Additional Notes:

There was no indication that the BIU acquired any strong allies, but some may view the Labour Minister, John Irving Pearman, as an ally because he allowed for a third hearing to take place, even after the first two hearings ruled in favor of the HEB.

M.R. Changes (05/04/2011): "Protest Meetings" added to segments 1 and 2 for BIU meetings about strike and action, "Declarations of Intention" added to segment 5 for repeated declaration of strike, "Declaration by organizations" added for support by NAACP former leader, Growth score lowered from 3 to 2 because of lack of support from allies or partners.

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

Julio Alicea 12/12/2010

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