



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Brazilian priests intervene nonviolently to prevent violence, 1968

Time period notes: *The campaign lasted less than one day.*

Because of this all tactics and groups have been placed as entering in segment 1 and all tactics have been placed under additional tactics

June

1968

to: June

1968

Country: Brazil

Location City/State/Province: *Rio de Janeiro*

Goals:

To prevent violence between student protesters and police

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 171. Nonviolent interjection › Human chain between the two sides

Classifications

Classification:

Third-party nonviolent intervention

Cluster:

Peace

Group characterization:

- 130 priests

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Dom Helder Camara (the archbishop of Recife and Olinda), Heráclito Fontoura Sobral Pinto (a Brazilian lawyer and devout Catholic).

Partners:

Catholic Church

External allies:

Latin American Catholic Churches

Involvement of social elites:

The campaigners, being priests, were in a way social elites themselves

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Dom Helder
- Heráclito Fonoura Sobral Pinto
- Priests

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Not Known*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Brazilian military police

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

Not Known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The priests were able to prevent violence between the two groups using their chain tactic.

The priests survived to see the goal achieved.

The team of interveners grew to 130 priests.

Dom Helder Camara was a Roman Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife and an activist, who famously said “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist.” He was also the primary leader in the nonviolent intervention between a student protest and the Brazilian military in June 1968. In 1968, Dom Helder executed his campaign “Action, Justice, and Peace”, which was based on the movements conducted by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. The Roman Catholic Church played a major role in preventing a major outbreak in violence between the growing student movement and the Brazilian Military Police in 1968.

One of the major figures that brought the student movement and the Catholic Church together in Brazil was Heráclito Fontoura Sobral Pinto, a devout Catholic and Brazilian lawyer famous for his human rights activism. Sobral helped get the student movement started when he provided support to students in Rio de Janeiro, who were angry with Governor Negrao de Lima because of the terrible treatment that a student restaurant was receiving. In late March, the students’ anger boiled over and the Frente Unida dos Estudantes do Calabouco set out to organize more protests. On March 28, 1968, soldiers in the Guanabara Military Police shot and killed Edson Luis de Lima Souto, an eighteen year old, and wounded others in an attempt to discourage a parade of hundreds of students protesting. Students then responded by bringing the corpse of the teenager to the state legislature and conducted speeches in front of the building throughout the day and night.

There were demonstrations throughout Brazil and the funeral procession attracted tens of thousands in Rio on March 29, 1968. The procession featured conflicts between students and men in uniform, who claimed they were trying to prevent problems. On April 1, 1968, Negrao de Lima, the Governor of Rio de Janeiro, prohibited any rallies or protests; however, the students took to the streets anyway, many with clubs and stones and even some with revolvers. Over the course of the demonstration, 230 arrests were made as the state Military Police used force to control the situation, in which shops were looted, vehicles were damaged, and many civilians and police were wounded.

At this juncture the enraged students were becoming bolder and bolder and they stated that their goal was to overthrow the capitalist structure of society. Sobral recognized the need for the Catholic Church to get involved. In mid-1968, the Latin American Church, led by Dom Helder, formed a proposition, which became known as the Medellín statement, for a nonviolent social transformation in Latin America. This statement triggered a reaction throughout the churches across the region, in which priests, nuns, and lay volunteers became activists that protested against authoritarianism and supporters of the poor. As Don Helder always emphasized, the statement was committed to nonviolence; however, Brazilian military officers criticized the document saying that it could be used by Communist revolutionaries.

With the building animosity between the students and the Military Police, the Catholic Church came to the defense of the student movement during a student protest in June 1968, in which students demonstrating against the capitalist system were confronted by the Brazilian Military Police in Rio de Janeiro. With the previous incidents of violence between the two opponents, Dom Helder realized that the Catholic Church would need to act to prevent violence between student protesters and police. He organized a third party intervention in which the Archbishop and 130 additional priests intervened to prevent a deadly clash. The priests formed a living chain of 130 priests to prevent the violence between the two groups. The intervention was successful as the priests were able to prevent the violence between the two groups during this particular conflict. The third party nonviolent intervention was an interposition in which the priests moved into a battle between two forces acting as a third force to intervene nonviolently to prevent violence.

Research Notes

Influences:

Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s nonviolent movements (1)

Sources:

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Camara, Dom Helder. *Revolution Through Peace*. New York: Harper& Row, Publishers, 1971.

Dulles, John W. *Resisting Brazil's Military Regime*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.

Hall, Mary. *The Spirituality of Dom Helder Camara*. New York: Orbis Books, 1979.

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