Campaigns, not movements

The cases in this database are campaigns, not movements. The difference is largely determined by specificity of goals. "The civil rights movement" is not for us a case, but the Montgomery Bus Boycott is a case, as is the Nashville Sit-in of 1960. The colonial Indian movement for independence from Britain is not a case, but the Salt Satyagraha of 1930-31 is a case.

Movements often require a number of campaigns to achieve large goals such as an end to U.S. white discrimination against blacks, or independence of India. Some movements don't use nonviolent direct campaigns to pursue their goals. The study of social movements is a field in itself, with its own concerns much broader than the focus of open conflict, which is the focus of this database.

The reader will find, therefore, that many questions of interest to social movement scholars are left out of this database, and a movement may have existed for years before it launches the campaign that becomes the subject of our case. Our dating of the case reflects our interest: it begins either with the first nonviolent action or with the intense preparation for action immediately preceding the "opening move" on the chessboard.

Campaigns usually have a concentrated period of intense activity; the period can range from less than a week to several years. The campaigners may suffer high casualties in a confrontation, pause to lick their wounds, and then launch another action months (or, rarely, years) later. It is sometimes a question of our researcher's judgment whether to consider this a new campaign or a continuation, after a pause, of the same campaign. The key criterion can be whether the campaigners continue to focus on the same target with the same specific goal. (It is the specificity that marks a campaign in contrast to a movement.)

Timing matters in strategy for winning campaigns, in both the change application and the defense application, so this database breaks down each campaign into six equal time segments so the reader can see what happened when and make comparisons among campaigns. When, for example, did important allies join the campaign? When were harder-hitting methods chosen by the campaigners? (For example, there may be a pattern in which Sharp's methods of protest are the earlier methods used with the campaigners reserving noncooperation and intervention for later phases of the campaign.)

The time dimension in third party nonviolent intervention can be very different from that of the change and defense applications. In change and defense campaigns, specific outcomes are sought (for example, a group's freedom of religious practice, or stopping the dumping of pollution into a lake). In third party nonviolent intervention the interveners have a process goal: reducing the violence even if the conflict continues. A particular third party nonviolent intervention may only take a few hours, for example preventing soldiers from shooting at a demonstration.

Even though third party nonviolent interventions do not fit neatly into the "campaign" framework, we include them because of their importance as a means through which people refuse to cooperate with prevailing norms of avoidance or complicity. Their assertive and risk-taking forms of nonviolent intervention can make a strategic difference in the outcome of the larger political conflict, and deserve further study.

For this database, we research campaigns that have reached their point of completion.

- George Lakey 10/08/2011

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