Chinese residents force relocation of chemical plant in Xiamen, 2007

16 March
2007
to: 2 June
2007
Country: China
Location City/State/Province: Xiamen, Fujian Province
Location Description: Xiamen is located on the southeast coast of China. It is a large industrial city with approximately 3.5 million inhabitants in 2007.

Goals:
The relocation of the new Haicang chemical plant, especially the facilities manufacturing paraxylene (PX).

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

• 001. Public speeches › Zhao Yufen speaks against the plant at the annual session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.
• 002. Letters of opposition or support › 105 members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference submitted a document calling for the plant to be relocated.
• 010. Newspapers and journals › Online blogs and text messages speaking out against the plant are picked up by mainstream newspapers and journals in Hong Kong, elsewhere in the Fujian province, as well as the rest of mainland China.

Methods in 2nd segment:

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 010. Newspapers and journals › online blogs and text messages

Methods in 3rd segment:

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 010. Newspapers and journals › online blogs and text messages

Methods in 4th segment:

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 010. Newspapers and journals › online blogs and text messages

Methods in 5th segment:
Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 037. Singing
- At some point a number of protesters sang the Chinese national anthem.
- 038. Marches

Notes on Methods:
The text message (SMS) that first announced the plan for the June 1st March began circulating on March 25th.

Classifications

Classification:
Defense
Cluster:
Environment
Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Xiamen residents
- members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)
- scientists
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Zhao Yufen, professor at Xiamen University and member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Partners:
Lian Yue, local journalist for the Southern Weekend

External allies:
Newspapers in Hong Kong, the rest of the Fujian Province, and mainland China.

Bloggers

Involvement of social elites:
Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- CPPCC
Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**
Though Xiamen University students were active in spreading information, they largely were unable to participate in the marches on June 1st and June 2nd because university administrators locked campus gates.

**Segment Length:** Approximately 14 days

**Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

**Opponents:**
Haicang Chemical Plant, Xianglu Group, local government head He Lifeng

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**
Not known

**Campaigner violence:**
No known violence

**Repressive Violence:**
Broad censorship of public and social media, some physical arrests

**Success Outcome**

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**
6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**
1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**
3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**
Construction on the plant was postponed by May 30, 2007, cancelled by mid June 2007, and the chemical plant was moved sometime in 2008.

It was announced in November 2006 that a chemical plant producing paraxylene (PX) and teraphalic acid would be built in the Haicang District 7km from Xiamen, a city of about 3.5 million residents in southeastern Fujian Province China. The two companies constructing the plant, Dragon Aromatics and the Xianglu Group invested some 10.8 billion yaun in the facility and local estimates showed that the plant would bring 80 million yaun of Gross Domestic Product to the city of Xiamen.

Concern about the environmental impact of the plant began to grow in March 2007 when University of Xiamen professor Zhao
Yufen started to voice her concern with the environmental impact of the plant. The chemical PX was considered particularly carcinogenic, and current Chinese regulations demanded that plants producing similar chemicals had to be at least 10km away from residential areas.

On 16 March 2007 Zhao Yufen addressed the annual session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) concerning the environmental dangers of the proposed Haicang Plant. By the end of the conference some 105 political advisors submitted their suggestion that the plant be relocated.

Meanwhile, local journalist Lian Yue of the Southern Weekend began writing extensively on the environmental dangers of the plant. Local graffiti stencils stating “I love Xiamen, No PX” began to appear throughout the city. Bloggers at the University of Xiamen and throughout the region began to cover the story.

As censorship began to grow concerning the plant in Xiamen, outside newspapers became a valuable source of information for Xiamen residents, particularly the Hong Kong Sun. Newspapers and mainstream Chinese news began posting quotes from Xiamen blogs and texts (SMS) messages.

On March 25 and 26 a message began to circulate through Xiamen stating that if the plant was built it would be like “an atomic bomb” over Xiamen. The SMS called on residents to pass news on to their friends and family, and called on residents: “For our children and grandchildren act! Participate among 10,000 people, June 1 at 8am, opposite the municipal government building! Hand tie yellow ribbons! SMS all your Xiamen friends!” The original author of the SMS message is not known, though it did directly quote from public concerns voiced by Zhao Yufen and the CPPCC.

Local government in Xiamen was somewhat responsive to growing dissent over the project, and on the morning of May 30 the Xiamen city Executive Vice-mayor Ding Guoyan announced a temporary halt to the Haicang PX project. He also said that the city would create a new environmental impact assessment group to study the impact of the plant.

The gesture appeared to be too little too late, and residents proceeded with plans for demonstration on 1 June 2007.

At 8:00am on June 1st residents gathered in front of the Xiamen municipal building sporting yellow ribbons and signs calling for “PX out!” and other pro-Xiamen slogans. Around 9am protesters began to march around the city, without clear leaders. There were approximately 10,000 residents present, though estimates ranged throughout the day and peaked around noon when workers exited their businesses for lunch. Some live-blogs indicated that several local businesses encouraged workers to take to the streets.

Military police and local police officers were present at the scene, and alternated between blocking the protesters and standing on the peripheries. Though the temperature and energy was high, no known violence occurred. Several times protesters chanted, “Oppose any violence.” Some called for the local government head, He Lifeng, a vocal critic of CPPCC environmental concerns, to step down.

Live-blog reports indicate that throughout the march supporters on the sides provided water and encouragement to marchers. These live-blogs also indicate a sense of confusion as to the direction of the march, and a disconnect concerning who was leading the protesters.

Song was used throughout the march, and numerous accounts refer to protesters singing the national anthem and other regional identity songs.

The march turned toward the University of Xiamen in the afternoon. University officials as well as police were eager to keep students from joining the protest, and once marchers arrived, the gates to the main campus had been closed. Shortly after this, many protesters dispersed.

Though some sources disagree, it seems as though marching continued on 2 June 2007 with fewer numbers. Other than SMS messages, the organization of the marches remains unknown.
In mid-June sources indicate that construction of the Haicang plant was formally cancelled pending environmental and community review.

In December 2007 over 90% of a local environmental oversight commission voted for the plant to be moved from Xiamen.

In 2008 the plant was moved inland.

Research Notes

Influences:

Influences for this campaign are not currently known. This campaign was cited broadly in the 2011 protest against a similar PX plant in Dalian, China. (2)

Sources:


Additional Notes:
Some information for the on-the-ground details of the June 1st march were gathered from translated live blogs and images and was therefore considered carefully in conjunction with mainstream media reports following the event.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Pauline Blount, 20/11/2011

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