



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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English residents and environmentalists prevent Heathrow Airport expansion, 2002 – 2010

October

2002

to: September

2010

Country: England

Location City/State/Province: London

Location Description: Many actions took place at Heathrow Airport

Goals:

To prevent the intended expansion at London Heathrow Airport

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions › Online petition
- 028. Symbolic sounds › Playing airplane noises over loudspeakers
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 170. Nonviolent invasion
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects

- 030. Rude gestures
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 030. Rude gestures
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 186. Preclusive purchasing

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Politicians
- citizens
- environmental groups

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise ClearSkies (HACAN ClearSkies)

Partners:

No Third Runway Action Group (NoTRAG)

Airport Watch

Camp for Climate Action

Plane Stupid

Greenpeace

External allies:

Conservative Party

Liberal Democrats Party

Green Party

Involvement of social elites:

Ian Creshire –major business leader; spoke out against Heathrow expansion

Charles Dunstone – major business leader; spoke out against Heathrow expansion

Justin King – major business leader; spoke out against Heathrow expansion

James Murdoch – major business leader; spoke out against Heathrow expansion

Jeremy Darroch – major business leader; spoke out against Heathrow expansion

All four candidates for mayor of London - spoke out against Heathrow expansion

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Airport Watch
- Green Party
- Greenpeace
- NoTRAG

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- All candidates for mayor of London
- Camp for Climate Action
- Plane Stupid

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Charles Dunstone
- Climate Rush
- Ian Creshire
- James Murdoch
- Jeremy Darroch
- Justin King

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Conservative Party
- Liberal Democrats Party

Segment Length: *Approximately 1.5 years*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

British Airports Authority (BAA), Labour Party, Prime Minister Gordon Brown

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:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign, pioneered by HACAN ClearSkies, expanded exponentially into a massive coalition of local residents, several political parties, and numerous environmental groups that was able to successfully block the expansion of Heathrow Airport and its third runway.

The campaign grew and persevered for 8 years until its original goal was met.

The campaign officially began in 2002 with local community residents coming out and protesting the Labour Party's interest in the expansion of Heathrow Airport. Once the plans for expansion were announced, the campaign flourished into a giant coalition of residents, politicians, and activists.

The London Heathrow Airport was of the busiest airports in the world when the English government began to contemplate expansion in 2002. Considered to be one of the premier airports in the world, the English government wanted to preserve the airport's place among the best airports by improving its efficiency through expansion, including a third runway.

Several residents of the nearby community opposed the addition of a third runway as soon as they'd heard that the government was contemplating expansion. Estimates from the community suggested that 4,000 homes, three primary schools, and two churches would be demolished to make room for the runway. Those statistics left many residents angry that their community was being broken apart. On October 16, 2002, thousands of Heathrow residents gathered outside of Parliament in protest of the potential Heathrow expansion. Some held signs and others released a letter of protest to the office of the Prime Minister. Ten days later on the 26th of October, residents drove around in an open top bus, loudly playing the sounds of aircrafts to demonstrate how the expansion would increase noise throughout the community.

On December 16, 2003, despite community opposition, the government released a white paper (policy report) on the future of aviation, which included a proposal for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. The proposal did include stipulations regarding acceptable levels of aircraft noise and emissions. Many residents, politicians, and environmental groups did not believe that the stipulations would be met and so they began to take action and organize. Organizations like the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (HACAN) and ClearSkies had been established prior to the plans for Heathrow Airport expansion. The two organizations had merged in 2000 and became HACAN ClearSkies. Another local group emerged after the plans for the runway had been announced; local women and children founded the No Third Runway Action Group (NoTRAG). These two organizations, HACAN ClearSkies and NoTRAG, would be the only two that focused most of their efforts in Heathrow.

Once the plans for expansion were released, the far-reaching ramifications were obvious. With a third runway in place, the number of flights was going to increase from 480,000 to over 700,000 per year. The additional runway would also need 700 homes to be destroyed and would increase the number of people disturbed by aircraft noise to over one million. Also as a result of expansion, Heathrow would become the biggest source of CO₂ in the United Kingdom.

HACAN ClearSkies struggled in 2003 and 2004 to excite its membership. Recently, the group had attempted to ban the night flights at Heathrow, but failed. HACAN ClearSkies did manage to join Greenpeace, the Green Party, and other activist groups in creating a website against airport expansion. On this website, people could sign a personal pledge of opposition to airport expansion.

HACAN ClearSkies realized that it needed to learn from its past failures with the night flights. John Stewart, the chair of HACAN ClearSkies, created a strategy that would eventually lead the campaign to victory. Stewart believed that HACAN ClearSkies was too small to overcome expansion at Heathrow so he decided to build a coalition of everyone opposed to the third runway. Stewart also made it imperative that the campaign set the agenda and that it challenge the expansion with economic reasoning. Previously, the group had solely challenged aviation expansion with environmental reasoning.

First, HACAN ClearSkies was able to form a coalition of members of Parliament from several political parties. Then it lobbied the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, for support. HACAN ClearSkies also worked hard to secure the support of local authorities. It worked closely with NoTRAG to organize a rally that won the support of many key local authorities. Eventually the coalition took on a very diverse composition that included: NoTRAG, Greenpeace, Green Party, Plane Stupid, Airport Watch, Camp for Climate Action, and Climate Rush.

The campaign began to gain a lot of momentum in 2005. NoTRAG staged a mass meeting at a local school and was able to recruit over 1,000 people to attend. That same year, Plane Stupid was founded. Plane Stupid was designed as a network of activists looking to stop aviation expansion. Plane Stupid claimed no membership; instead it provided agency. What this meant was that it allowed groups to commit direct action and other acts of protest in the name of Plane Stupid. The following year, in 2006, Plane Stupid hosted a workshop about direct action. The workshop was a major success as many direct activists were recruited to take part in the campaign.

The years 2007 and 2008 saw the campaign advance even farther. Another group, the Camp for Climate Action, organized a massive camp-in that included over 2,000 activists. They were later able to nonviolently blockade the offices of the British Airport Authority (BAA) at Heathrow Airport. HACAN ClearSkies organized a flash mob in July of 2008 at the Department for Transport's headquarters. Over 600 protesters disrobed to reveal red shirts that had "No Airport Expansion" written on them. They then proceeded to throw paper airplanes at the headquarters. Also in July, Dan Glass, a Plane Stupid supporter, super-glued his hand to the coat sleeve of Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Once super-glued together, Glass told the Prime Minister, "We cannot shake away climate change like you can just shake away my arm." This protest occurred four months after four Greenpeace activists were arrested for climbing onto a stationary aircraft and wrapping a protest banner around the tail of it. 2008 also proved to be a telling year for the political direction of the campaign. HACAN ClearSkies was able to, by popularizing the issue, persuade all four candidates for mayor of London to oppose the expansion at Heathrow.

In January of 2009, the government released more detailed plans for the expansion at Heathrow. It had appeared that all the success the campaign had been experiencing would not be enough to prevent the addition of a third runway. Greenpeace responded with a preclusive purchasing of land that was set to be a part of the runway. Greenpeace pledged not to sell the land to the government or BAA. Leila Deen, a Plane Stupid member, won additional media coverage for the campaign when she poured green custard all over Secretary of State, Peter Mandelson. Deen was quoted later as saying, "The only thing green about Peter Mandelson is the slime coursing through his veins." The actions of Greenpeace and Plane Stupid kept the campaign in the headlines and in May of 2009, numerous big business leaders spoke out against the planned expansion of Heathrow.

One year later, following the general elections of 2010, the plans for expansion were terminated. A coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats took office and they stuck to the promise they had made during their campaigns for office; they put an end to the planned expansion at Heathrow. Plans for expansion were finally ended when ministers voted to block plans for 64 extra flights per day in September of 2010. HACAN ClearSkies, with its coalition of residents, politicians, political parties and environmental groups, successfully defeated plans for the expansion of the London Heathrow Airport.

Research Notes

Influences:

HACAN ClearSkies was influenced by its failed campaign to ban night flights. (1)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

HACAN ClearSkies was the leader of the campaign, but had much help from the coalition it was able to build. On a separate note, the campaign was very much about the environment, but the additional runway was also going to negatively affect the quality of life for residents and so that also motivated the campaign.

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

Julio Alicea, 03/10/2010

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