



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Faculty win new industrial agreement with the College of the Bahamas, 2010-2011

11 January

2010

to: 13 January

2011

Country: Bahamas

Location City/State/Province: *Nassau*

Location Description: *The College of the Bahamas (COB), Oakes Field Campus*

Goals:

UTEB members hoped to sign an industrial agreement with the College of the Bahamas, which included increased salaries, representation in College decision-making, and other employee benefits

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 050. Teach-ins
- 104. Professional strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 104. Professional strike
- 110. Slowdown strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Notes on Methods:

Although no known methods were used for segments 3-6, the threat of action remained throughout the negotiations. For this reason, the campaign is here defined to have lasted until the agreement was signed.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Union of Tertiary Educators of The Bahamas (UTEB) members and leadership

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

UTEB President Jennifer Isaacs-Dotson and UTEB Vice-President Margo Blackwell

Partners:

Members of the Bahamas Public Services Union (BPSU)

External allies:

Robert Farquharson, Secretary of the National Congress of Trade Union (NCTU)

Involvement of social elites:

Archdeacon James Palacious, Dr. Earl Cash, representing the college, and Robert Farquharson, representing the union, assisted with negotiations

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Bahamas Public Services Union (BPSU)
- Robert Farquharson-Secretary of the National Congress of Trade Union (NCTU)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Archdeacon James Palacious
- Dr. Earl Cash

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 2 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

College of the Bahamas (COB) administration

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:

Success in achieving goals: 6. In conclusion of the campaign, the College of the Bahamas (COB) signed a new industrial agreement with the Union of Tertiary Educators of The Bahamas (UTEB), involving benefits for faculty like maternity benefits, adoption leave benefits, study leave, increased sick leave benefits and managerial and union relation clauses. The agreement was retroactive to July 1, 2008 and was set to expire on June 30, 2012. Little information can be found as to the particulars of the agreement or the feelings of UTEB afterward. One of the principle goals along with the industrial agreement, increased salaries, was not mentioned in any sources, but no comment can be found from UTEB suggesting the issue was not addressed. Additional research concerning the time directly following the agreement would be helpful to gauge how the agreement affected College employees.

Growth: 2. While little information can be found about general membership of the Union of Tertiary Educators of The Bahamas (UTEB), as opposed to its leadership, it seems commitment remained strong during the campaign. Reports suggest a stable line of communication between union president Isaacs-Dotson and union membership, indicating a readiness to take action if negotiations failed.

The College of the Bahamas (COB) is the national public institution of higher learning in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas with campuses throughout the archipelago. The main campus, Oakes Field, is located in the capital city of Nassau. The college is one of the largest employers in the Bahamas, employing hundreds of faculty and staff.

Late 2009, the Union of Tertiary Educators of The Bahamas (UTEB) was in the midst of negotiations with COB regarding salaries and demands for an industrial agreement. The Union had been without an agreement since June 2008, and according to Union President Jennifer Isaacs-Dotson, the union “[did] not have a representative sitting at the table” with COB.

Earlier in the year, UTEB engaged in ‘industrial action’ to get COB and the government’s attention, which ultimately prompted rounds of negotiations regarding salaries for faculty and an industrial agreement. The union hoped to arrive at an agreement before resorting to any strike action. They also asked for a forensic review of COB’s accounting for the sake of transparency, with no response.

By November 2009, UTEB members were becoming impatient with the negotiation process. Of the 220 members, 131 members voted to strike with only 19 opposed. According to Isaacs-Dotson, the nearly year-long negotiations yielded no results.

By January 2010, only one out of the 80 clauses in the proposed agreement had been signed. Isaacs-Dotson claimed that "UTEB was prepared to do whatever they had to do to get the industrial agreement signed."

On January 11, UTEB members took action. On the first day of classes at the College of the Bahamas, union members staged a sit-in at the college’s Oakes Field campus. Lecturers and teachers, instead of holding Monday classes, held a small rally and protest demonstration next to COB’s Chapter One Bookstore. Students were invited to join faculty outdoors to hear the Union’s grievances. With students missing class, Union president Mrs. Issacs-Dotson claimed the sit-in partly served to “educate the

students about the problems that [they were] experiencing with the college...We have not withdrawn our labour, we are not striking; we are just educating the students and asking them for their support in this process”

In response to the action, COB officials resumed negotiations with UTEB, which continued for the next several months. COB President Janyne Hodder told media at a press conference that the remaining clauses of the agreement "[spoke] directly to the institution's capacity to build, sustain and deliver on standards of academic excellence." UTEB announced that it would strike in April if a satisfactory industrial agreement was not reached by April 16th. COB administration called UTEB's strategy 'rushed' and claimed that they were making 'unclear and unrealistic financial demands.'

By the April deadline, no mutual agreement was reached. UTEB members staged a massive strike on April 19, the first day of final examinations, refusing to give exams until an industrial agreement was reached. Strikers picketed in front of the College's main entrance and wore placards that read, 'This is Not About Money,' 'It's a Matter of Trust,' and 'COB Needs to Bargain in Good Faith.'

The day of the strike, COB Office of Communications released a statement claiming that the financial demands of the UTEB would overstretch the College's budget.

Some claimed the strike was insensitive to students who needed to take their exams. Margo Blackwell, vice president of UTEB explained "that the strike [was] not just for an industrial agreement, but also to ensure that there [were] better opportunities for future faculty, staff and students." She expressed her desire to have students' grades in on time but claimed the ultimate decision rested with the college administration and Minister of Labour.

Other unions in the area showed solidarity with UTEB. Four hundred members of the Bahamas Public Services Union (BPSU) who were employed at the college refused to work overtime and worked on a 'go slow' basis. Robert Farquharson, Secretary of the National Congress of Trade Union (NCTU) also expressed his support of the UTEB strike.

The strike lasted nearly a week with no further response from COB. A new deadline for an industrial agreement was set for May 14. However, some reports indicate that if an agreement wasn't reached by then, the union couldn't strike because of conditions stipulated in a prior agreement with COB. Reports also indicate some union members received salary cuts in response to the April strike.

Sometime in May, Archdeacon James Palacious, Dr. Earl Cash, representing the college, and Robert Farquharson, representing the union, were appointed to assist with negotiations between COB and UTEB.

Meanwhile, COB officials were on the verge of appearing in court after several UTEB members filed lawsuits against the college for withholding wages. The college claimed it would not pay faculty for the hours they were striking. In the process, faculty who hadn't participated in the strike were also falsely penalized.

On August 4, after almost three months of negotiation, the arbitrators presented the union with a \$500 signing "bonus" and was told by them that, for the four-year period covered by the industrial agreement, there would be no salary increase whatsoever. By this time there were two remaining unsigned clauses in the proposed industrial agreement, according to president Issacs-Dotson. In a statement, UTEB members expressed their disapproval of the 'mere \$500 lump sum increase' for COB faculty and staff, stating that a more substantial salary increase was necessary.

Negotiation and arbitration continued. By November, reports indicate UTEB and COB were reaching a unanimous agreement. Officials said they have had 53 negotiation meetings and signed 52 clauses in the industrial agreement involving benefits for faculty like maternity benefits, adoption leave benefits, study leave, increased sick leave benefits and managerial and union relation clauses.

On January 13, 2011, COB signed a new industrial agreement with UTEB. The agreement was retroactive to July 1, 2008 and was set to expire on June 30, 2012. Little information can be found as to the particulars of the agreement or the feelings of

UTEB afterward. By the time the agreement was signed, UTEB president Issacs-Dotson had become the first female president of the National Congress of Trade Unions of the Bahamas (NCTUB), an umbrella union comprising over 20 of the country's largest unions.

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