



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Indians campaign for full independence (Quit India Campaign), 1942-1943

July

1942

to: March

1943

Country: India

Goals:

To bring an end to British colonial rule in India

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 062. Student strike
- 097. Protest strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 097. Protest strike
- 171. Nonviolent interjection › lying on railroad tracks to stop rail traffic

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television

- 020. Prayer and worship
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 048. Protest meetings
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 180. Alternative communication system
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Notes on Methods:

It is likely that most methods were continued throughout all segments, but the exact timing is not known after early on in the second segment.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- The general Indian public (ranging from workers to students to others)

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

All India Congress Committee (AICC) – The central decision-making assembly of the Indian National Congress (INC);
Mahatma Gandhi

Many underground workers, from fear at the prospect of prosecution for illegal activities, destroyed all their private papers related to their activities, resulting in a scarcity of unpublished documentary evidence.

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

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:

Joining order not known

Segment Length: *Approximately 1.5 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

British colonial rule in India

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Despite Gandhi's call to non-violent direct action, campaigner violence was frequent. See narrative for more information.

Repressive Violence:

Repressive violence by the British colonial government and police force was frequent. See narrative for more information.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

In March 1942, the British Parliament sent a delegation to India under Sir Stafford Cripps, a Labor Party Politician, in order to negotiate with the Indian National Congress a constitution that would secure Indian support of World War II. The Indian National Congress (INC) found the proposal for the new constitution unsatisfactory, since the draft declaration promised India domination status—but not complete independence—in return for its total cooperation during the war. Furthermore, the talks touched on progressive devolution and distribution of power, but failed to address a time frame toward self-government. Leaders of Congress and the Muslim league rejected the proposal. As the leader of the INC, Mohandas Gandhi campaigned against the war and increasingly called for Indian independence.

After the 'Cripps Mission,' Gandhi believed the time had come to take action. He wrote a series of articles in Harijan, his newspaper, promoting direct action and urging people to rise up. In order to give effect to his views, the INC adopted the 'Quit India' Resolution on July 14, 1942. The resolution stated, "The immediate ending of the British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of United Nations," and demanded complete independence from the British government. The draft also threatened Britain with massive civil disobedience in the case of its failure to accede to the demands.

On August 8, 1942, the All India Congress Committee (AICC)—the central decision-making assembly of the INC—met in a session in Bombay and voted unanimously to pass the resolution. In a stirring speech at Gowalia Tank, Bombay, Gandhi told his supporters "There is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You imprint it on your heart and let every breath of yours give an

expression to it. The mantra is ‘do or die.’” He urged the masses to act as an independent nation, and to follow nonviolent civil disobedience. Police used tear gas and a lathi charge (a military-style rush using a long metal-tipped stick) to disperse the crowd that had gathered.

The next morning, on August 9, British forces responded by arresting eminent Congress leaders Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and Azad. Most of Gandhi’s fellow leaders, including all the members of the Party’s Working Committee, were arrested and imprisoned within 24 hours. Following the arrest of major leaders, the young Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the AICC session and hoisted the Indian flag. Although Gandhi specified that the campaign should only use non-violent means, there was nobody to guide the popular agitation.

In the three to four days after Gandhi’s arrest, the Indian National Congress (INC) was declared an unlawful organization. The action, however, created sympathy for the cause among the population, and large-scale processions and demonstrations took place. Strikes were called and many workers remained absent en masse. In Ahmedabad, Puna, and Bombay, strikers shut down cotton mills and factories. In Ahmedabad, eight thousand mill workers left their jobs. In cities and towns across the country, students stopped attending school to join the workers in their marches. In a minor uprising in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh, locals established their own independent rule after overthrowing the district administration, breaking open the jail, and releasing incarcerated Congress leaders. All across the country, crowds severed electricity and telephone wires, and uprooted train tracks.

However, not all demonstrations were peaceful. While Satyagraha, or peaceful civil resistance, and nonviolence were tactics of earlier Indian National Campaigns (such as The Non-Cooperation Campaign and The Civil Disobedience Campaign), the Quit India campaign ultimately lacked organization. On the day of the arrests, at least nine people died in clashes with police during protests in Bombay. Protests then began in Ahmedabad and Poona. Twenty-four hours later uprisings had spread to Delhi, the UP, and Bihar. In the first two days of street fights, police opened fire and killed twenty-four people. The fighting continued to escalate as police and army shootings led to the deaths of hundreds of resisters and innocent people. At times, the British used violence to respond to non-violent tactics. In mid-August of 1942, protestors used nonviolent tactics to cut off railway traffic to and from Bihar. British Air Force planes machine-gunned the unarmed Indian satyagrahis lying down across the tracks.

Tensions related to fears of violence escalated when the public raided government and municipal buildings, and when arson occurred at post offices, railway stations, and police stations. When agitated mobs attempted to capture court buildings, troops fired. In September, mobs in Madhya Pradesh, Bombay, and Uttar Pradesh threw bombs on police. Although the back of the revolt had mostly been broken by the end of September, by the end of 1942, many railway stations had been attacked, and over a hundred police stations had been burned to the ground.

As actions escalated and tensions grew, the British responded with mass detentions. Nationwide arrests of Indian protesters numbered over 100,000. Some demonstrators were subjected to public beatings and even killed. The government also took recourse to repressive measures and banned public processions, meetings and assemblies.

Since many of the top leaders of Congress were under arrest, many women took on independent roles as leaders by going into hiding and organizing and directing activities from underground. They printed and organized the distribution of leaflets, collected money and weapons, and even provided safe houses to Congress leaders working from the underground. Women also organized prayer meetings and marches, and hoisted nationalist flags.

In one village in Assam, a 15-year-old girl organized a procession of 500 men that marched to the police station determined to plant a flag. When the police ordered her back, she continued forward, and was shot in the chest. Nevertheless, someone in the crowd succeeded in hoisting the flag.

Some national leaders went underground, carrying on the struggle by distributing pamphlets, establishing parallel governments, and broadcasting messages over secret radio stations. The Congress Radio began its first broadcast on August 14. Located ‘somewhere in Bombay,’ and frequently moving around, it broadcast stories of underground activity and directed the Indian people in their struggle against British imperialism. The operation lasted until November 12, when police cut off transmission

during a raid. Dr. Usha Mehta, a female student in Bombay, was the brain behind the pirate radio project.

By March 1943, the campaign had largely petered out. Although the “Quit India” campaign failed to bring an end to British colonial rule in India, with many of the country’s leaders behind bars, it intensified the opposition of India’s population’s to the British. It also showed the British that no new effort on their part could establish British rule on a solid footing, and it was only a matter of time before the British government would have to announce unconditional and time-bound withdrawal from the country.

British officers released Mahatma Gandhi from prison in May 1944, due to poor health, while many of his followers and fellow leaders remained behind bars.

Indian independence would be granted in 1947.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

Although prior to the Quit India campaign, Gandhi had insisted on making specific, limited demands, the chaos of the time prompted him to propose the more visionary goal of complete Indian independence from Britain. Furthermore, the campaign took place at a critical period during World War II when Japanese troops had already passed into Burma and Bengal, and stood poised to invade the rest of India.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (24/06/2011)

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