



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Malawians bring down 30-year dictator, 1992-1993

- African Democracy Campaigns (early 1990s)

March

1992

to: June

1993

Country: Malawi

Goals:

1. To legalize political parties, end single-party rule, and instate multiparty politics.
2. To get political prisoners released, particularly Chikufwa Chihana.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 089. Severance of funds and credit
- 105. Establishment strike
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 4th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 5th segment:

- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 6th segment:

- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Activists
- Catholic bishops
- foreign aid donors
- members of the UN
- other church leaders and members
- students
- teachers
- unemployed youth
- workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Malawi's 8 Catholic bishops began the campaign, though many diverse groups collaborated in causing the multiparty referendum. In October, the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) was created specifically to campaign nonviolently to end Banda's regime.

Partners:

The Livingstonia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), the Christian Council of Malawi (CCM), the Ecumenical Council of Malawi, the Muslim community, other independent churches, and University students in Zomba, Blantyre, and other areas.

External allies:

Foreign aid donors, United Front for Multiparty Democracy (UFMD), workers at David Whitehead's Textile factory, other workers, the UN, the Church of Scotland, Amnesty International.

Involvement of social elites:

Pope John Paul II talked to the bishops and encouraged them to advocate for change.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Foreign aid donors
- United Front for Multiparty Democracy
- University Students
- workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- AFORD
- Other independent churches
- The Livingstonia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP)
- the Christian Council of Malawi (CCM)
- the Ecumenical Council of Malawi
- the Muslim community

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- United Nations

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Amnesty International, the Church of Scotland: Not known.

Segment Length: *Approximately 2.5 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) government.

Campaigner violence:

Students “battled” with police during demonstrations once the police had fired on protestors. During May protests, 38 people were killed. Furthermore, the workers march in May devolved into property destruction, vandalism, and looting.

Repressive Violence:

In protests immediately following the pastoral letter, police in Zomba fired at the crowds to “disperse riots”. Also, the government leaders discussed assassinating the bishops. Furthermore, the police fired at workers during their strike. Finally, a militant group of youths called the Young Pioneers violently attacked pro-democracy activists and AFORD members.

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:

A multiparty system was attained and many political prisoners were released, including Chihana.

By the early 1990s, President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) had been president of Malawi for thirty years, ever since the country transitioned out of colonial rule. At the time, Malawi was a single-party state in which political parties were illegal.

Pope John Paul II had a significant part in starting the campaign for multiparty politics. He went to Malawi in 1989 to urge the bishops to do something to alter Malawi's poor political and human rights conditions. When the bishops did nothing, the Pope met with them in Rome to insist again on action. Upon returning from Rome, the bishops began the new campaign.

On March 8, 1992, Malawi's eight Catholic bishops wrote a pastoral letter called Living in Our Faith, which was read in churches throughout Malawi. The letter denounced the government's rigid censorship of mass media, infringement on education, and frequently illegal imprisonment of hundreds of Malawians. Two days later, the Bishops were arrested by the government, and detained and interrogated for eight hours. Inspired by the letter, university students in Zomba began demonstrations that spread to other areas of Malawi. Police fired at the demonstrators and the students, who were reported to have "battled" with police.

Junior army officers protected the students from the police and encouraged them to protest. A month later, senior and middle ranking army officials told President Banda that they would not take part in any suppression of Malawians who wanted multipartyism.

From March 20 to March 23, 80 exiled opposition activists met in Zambia, meeting as the United Front for Multiparty Democracy. Following the conference, Chikufwa Chihana returned from exile and was arrested that day after making a speech calling for multiparty politics. Upon his arrest, pro-democracy campaigners held more demonstrations.

Meanwhile, tapes were discovered in which government members discussed the possibility of assassinating the bishops, which led to more demonstrations. Throughout all this, the army firmly continued to remain neutral.

When President Banda asked for foreign aid from the Consultative Group of the World Bank, who were meeting in Paris on May 11, his request for \$800 million was denied. The aid donors told Banda that aid would remain suspended until the human rights and political conditions in his country changed. In the meantime, the donors only sent humanitarian aid. Due to pressure from aid donors, Banda had already released 88 political prisoners.

On May 4, David Whitehead's 3000 textile factory workers went on strike. They demanded that Chihana be released from prison and that Malawi become a multiparty state. Because the factory boss was in business with Banda, the strike was equivalent to a direct challenge of Banda. The strike was disbanded that same day, but the workers returned on May 6 to march to the city center. They were joined by unemployed youth, students, and other workers. Police fired with live ammunition at the protestors, which led to violence on the side of the campaigners. The situation devolved into looting of shops, destruction of property, and vandalism. 38 people died during the events.

In August more churches joined the push for multipartyism. Initially, the Livingstonia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) created a committee to press for a referendum on multiparty politics. Then an open letter was sent out by the Christian Council of Malawi (CCM) with the approval of its churches. The Ecumenical Council of Malawi, the Muslim community, and other churches also supported the campaign.

In October, the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) formed with the intention of stopping Banda's dictatorship. AFORD embodied a nonviolent ideology, claiming it would "campaign openly through peaceful and lawful means" (Ihonvbere 230).

Throughout this period of time, the Young Pioneers (a militant youth group created by Banda) constantly flogged and

intimidated protestors. They even attacked Chihana's lawyer by throwing stones.

On October 18, 1992, President Banda announced that a referendum would be held regarding multiparty politics. Meanwhile, in December, Chihana was sentenced to two years in prison, which caused more demonstrations. On December 31, 1992, Banda decreed that the referendum would be held on March 15, 1993. Members of the opposition complained that the date was too soon and would not allow them sufficient time to campaign. Finally, the United Nations sent Banda a letter, which convinced him to move the referendum to June 15, 1993 so that the United Nations could be there to monitor the proceedings. On June 14, Chihana was released from prison and the next day the referendum occurred. Of the total number of registered voters, 67% voted that day, and of those voters 63.5% voted for multiparty politics.

In response to the referendum's outcome, a 14-person committee was set up to determine what sections of the constitution needed to be edited so that multiparty politics would become legal. Parliament officially amended the constitution on June 29, 1993, turning Malawi into a country with multiparty politics where political parties were legal.

At this time, the army, which had remained neutral, disbanded the Young Pioneers.

The next election was set for May 1994. The main three competing parties were the MCP, the United Democratic Front (UDF), and AFORD. UDF candidate Bakili Muluzi was elected president and Banda relinquished his position as president.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Ihonybere, Julius O. "From Despotism to Democracy: the Rise of Multiparty Politics in Malawi." Third World Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 2 (June 1997), pp. 225-227.

Newell, Jonathan. "'A Moment of Truth'? The Church and Political Change in Malawi, 1992." The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2 (June 1995), pp. 243-262.

Additional Notes:

The army remained neutral throughout the campaign, protecting students during their protests. This may be an instance of third party nonviolent intervention. Furthermore, army officials told the president they would not be used to repress Malawians urging multiparty politics.

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

Lindsay Carpenter, 2/8/2011

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