



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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New Zealanders protest against Springbok rugby tour, 1981

July

1981

to: September

1981

Country: New Zealand

Location Description: *generally near rugby pitches*

Goals:

To prevent rugby games involving the Springboks from taking place, and to gain publicity for the anti-Apartheid cause.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 061. Boycott of social affairs
- 170. Nonviolent invasion
- 177. Speak-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 061. Boycott of social affairs

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 061. Boycott of social affairs

Methods in 4th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 061. Boycott of social affairs

Methods in 5th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 061. Boycott of social affairs

Methods in 6th segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 061. Boycott of social affairs
- 169. Nonviolent air raids

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 038. Marches
- 170. Nonviolent invasion
- 195. Seeking imprisonment

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Anti-Apartheid activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Halt All Racist Tours (HART) led by John Minto, Trevor Richards, Tom Newnham

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

ANC, Australian government (Malcolm Fraser), New Zealand Labour Party

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- HART

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

New Zealand government, New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU), Stop Politics in Rugby (SPIR)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Public speeches (1), Wearing symbols (19), Assemblies of Protest (47)

Campaigner violence:

Mostly third-party actors joining into the protests to make a scene

Repressive Violence:

Throwing bottles, concrete, shoes, other objects at protesters. Police control through violent use of clubs.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaigners disrupted some matches and increased awareness of apartheid. The campaign grew from a few leaders to more than 5000 protesters at many protests

Halt All Racist Tours (HART) was organized in New Zealand in 1969 to protest rugby tours to and from South Africa. Their first protest, in 1970, was intended to prevent the All Blacks, New Zealand's flagship rugby squad, from playing in South Africa, unless the Apartheid regime would accept a mixed-race team. South Africa relented, and an integrated All Black team toured the country.

Two years later, the Springboks arranged a tour of New Zealand. HART held intensive planning meetings, and, after laying out their nonviolent protest strategies to the New Zealand security director, he was forced to recommend to the government that the Springboks not be allowed in the country. Prime Minister Kirk, though he had promised not to interfere with the tour during his election campaign, canceled the Springbok's visit, citing what he predicted would be the "greatest eruption of violence this country has ever known."

HART remained active in the anti-apartheid community, continuing to protest the Springboks, and helping to organize a boycott of the 1976 Montreal Olympics. The International Olympic Committee had not banned New Zealand after the All Blacks had toured South Africa, and many African countries saw this failure as a tacit endorsement of Apartheid. In 1980, New Zealand again attempted to bring the Springboks to New Zealand.

The Springboks arrived on July 19, 1981. Though they were officially welcomed by the New Zealand government, there was a sense of dread and anticipation that surrounded their arrival – perhaps, some thought, the 1981 tour should have been cancelled

like the tour in 1972 was. The government officials could not anticipate, however, that the country was about to fall into “near-civil war.” In response to HART, pro-rugby groups like Stop Politics in Rugby (SPIR) organized in an effort to help the Springbok’s tour succeed. Both sides tended to be easily identified by armbands that made their affiliation clear. In particular, HART activists wore their armbands for the entire length of the tour, subjecting themselves to constant ridicule and the threat of violence, despite their commitment to nonviolent protest only.

The Springboks played their first game on July 22 in Gisborne. An anti-Springbok rally took place that day, near the rugby pitch. When the campaigners arrived at the arena, they were confronted by pro-rugby demonstrators. Because Gisborne, like most cities in New Zealand, was close-knit, demonstrators on both sides knew each other, and were not afraid to call each other out for supporting the wrong side, whichever they believed that was. The pro-rugby demonstrators did not restrict themselves to words, even throwing stones at the other side. The anti-Springbok protesters could not stop the match that day. Though they were able to break through the perimeter fence, and engage the pro-tour demonstrators face to face, they were prevented from occupying the field. Though both sides reported that they were uneasy with the clashes between fellow New Zealanders, neither side was easily swayed.

Three days later, the Springboks were scheduled to play in Hamilton. Anti-Springbok planners had circulated a strategy that would hopefully allow them to tear down the fence, invade the field, and disrupt the match. Protesters had also secured more than 200 official tickets to the match, to make sure that their presence was felt, even in the event that they could not storm the pitch. Despite the presence of more than 500 police officers and a sizable pro-rugby contingent, the anti-Springbok march would prove unstoppable. 5000 anti-Springbok protesters descended upon the Hamilton pitch, and more than 300 made it onto the field, forcing a match cancellation. Protesters chanted that the whole world was watching. Many of the demonstrators were arrested, and those on the pitch endured a constant bombardment of bottles and other objects from rugby fans in the stands. This entire situation was captured on live TV and shown around the world.

With tensions in New Zealand reaching astronomical proportions, the Springboks were next scheduled to play four days later, on July 29. The anti-Springbok protesters were largely absent from the match, but had instead planned a march on the South African consulate in Wellington, New Zealand. Despite police declaring that a march was not permitted, the protesters marched right up to the police line on Molesworth Street. The police began to stop the marchers with their batons, violently forcing them away from the consulate building. The marchers, stunned and bloodied, turned towards the police station, chanting “Shame, shame, shame.” When they arrived, the accosted marchers pressed assault charges on the police that had attacked them. Though the charges were dismissed, the policing of the tour protests had taken a turn for the worse. From this point on, protesters were careful to carry shields and wear crash helmets in order to protect themselves from attacks.

Protests would continue for the entire length of the Springbok’s stay in New Zealand. Only one more match was cancelled, in Timaru. However, there were a few more notable encounters. In Christchurch, on August 15, protesters failed to occupy the pitch in time for the game to be cancelled. The police cordon around the arena held, and several observers believe that the police saved the lives of many protesters. The attacks of rugby supporters were growing more and more violent, The Christchurch incident was characterized by flying blocks of cement and full beer bottles. Had the anti-Bok protesters succeeded in reaching the field, the attacks would certainly have been even more dangerous.

The final match of the tour was in Auckland on September 12. Not only was the match important as a final chance for protesters to demonstrate their opposition to the Springboks, it was the deciding third meeting between the Springboks and the All Blacks. Doug Rollerson of the 1981 All Blacks recalled that it seemed very important for the All Blacks to win the match, to show that a mixed team was superior to the segregated Springbok side. When the All Blacks won, the sense of victory in New Zealand was similar to the US victory over the Soviet Union in 1980 – the triumph of righteousness over the evil empire. However, for most observers around the world, the off-field events were far more important. Though the protesters were generally non-violent, there were many others that joined in the marches – HART characterized them as opportunists that simply wanted to fight with police. Though eruptions of violence had taken place throughout the campaign, they were largely viewed by the protesters as third-party actions, and HART consistently distanced themselves from violent attacks. More memorably, Max Jones and Grant Cole commandeered a prop plane, and proceeded to drop flares and flour bombs on the pitch during play in an attempt to stop

the game. Though the game continued, the actions of the protesters were again the primary news story in New Zealand and throughout the world.

Though the anti-Springbok protests were largely unsuccessful in that the vast majority of the planned contests took place, they were able to raise an incredible amount of awareness for the anti-Apartheid movement. Nelson Mandela recalled that when the game in Hamilton was cancelled, it was "as if the sun had come out." HART would continue protesting until the fall of the Apartheid regime.

Research Notes

Influences:

Influenced and influenced by anti-Springbok protests in other countries like Australia, Britain (see "Australians campaign against South African rugby tour in protest of apartheid, 1971" and "British Citizens Protest South African Sports Tours (Stop the Seventy Tour), 1969-1970") (1,2).

This campaign was also influenced by the New Zealand Waterfront Strike (1951) (1).

Sources:

Richards, Trevor. *Dancing on our Bones*. Bridget Williams Books, 1999.

'The 1981 Springbok rugby tour', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/1981-springbok-tour>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 15-Jul-2011

Additional Notes:

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Source URL (retrieved on 09/19/2019 - 02:43): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/new-zealanders-protest-against-springbok-rugby-tour-1981>