



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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North Carolina textile workers win union recognition from J. P. Stevens, 1976-1980

Time period notes: *Workers at Stevens's Roanoke, N.C. plants had voted in 1974 to be represented by the union, but J. P. Stevens failed to negotiate a contract in good faith, so this campaign was launched in 1976. Settlement was negotiated in 1980 between the company and the union.*

1976

1980

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Roanoke Rapids, NC

Location Description: complex of seven textile plants, representing 3,600 workers

Goals:

primarily to force J. P. Stevens to negotiate a contract with the labor union representing workers at its Roanoke Rapids, NC plants; secondary goals included higher wages, safer working conditions, an end to sex discrimination and racial discrimination in employment, and an end to company interference in unionization efforts at this and other J. P. Stevens plants

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support › Princeton Univ. students send "open letter" to R. Manning Brown, chair of Exec. Comm. of Princeton's Board of Trustees, asking him to explain his seat on the Stevens board
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › boycott endorsed by the International Federation of Textile, Garment and Leather Workers (Brussels)
- 004. Signed public statements › Group of 14 clergy from North Carolina Council of Churches endorsed the boycott
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Don't Sleep with Stevens"
- 015. Group lobbying › Campaign supporters attended Stevens annual shareholders' meeting to speak against company practices
- 050. Teach-ins › at Princeton University
- 071. Consumers' boycott › ACTWU launched boycott of J. P. Stevens products
- 161. Nonviolent harassment › Princeton U. students and faculty chanted and carried signs outside home of R. Manning Brown, Chair of the Exec. Comm. of the Princeton Board of Trustees and a director at J. P. Stevens

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › boycott endorsed by various groups
- 004. Signed public statements › union leaders from New Zealand, Mexico, Japan, France, and Australia issue public statement supporting the boycott
- 006. Group or mass petitions › Stanford Univ. students petitioned the university to vote in favor of ACTWU-backed resolutions at 1977 stockholders meeting
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Don't Sleep with Stevens"

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › ACTWU issued at least a dozen different pamphlets that contained graphic images and stories about workers' injuries, illnesses, and mistreatment
- 015. Group lobbying › Campaign supporters attended Stevens annual shareholders' meeting to speak against company practices
- 016. Picketing › boycott supporters picketed outside Stevens annual shareholders' meeting
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks › NOW's NY chapter publicly burned Stevens sheets
- 050. Teach-ins › at New York Univ.
- 071. Consumers' boycott › ACTWU boycott of J. P. Stevens products

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support › Avon Products chairman David W. Mitchell resigned from the Stevens Board of Directors after receiving a rush of mail and telephone calls questioning his affiliation with J. P. Stevens
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › boycott endorsed by various groups
- 004. Signed public statements › Six Catholic bishops from southern dioceses issue a statement against J. P. Stevens
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Don't Sleep with Stevens"
- 015. Group lobbying › Campaign supporters attended Stevens annual shareholders' meeting to speak against company practices
- 016. Picketing › boycott supporters picketed outside Stevens annual shareholders' meeting
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › rallies supporting the boycott were held at Harvard Univ. and other sites
- 071. Consumers' boycott › ›ACTWU boycott of J. P. Stevens products
- 086. Withdrawal of bank deposits › Local 49 of BNAWU (see allies) withdrew \$6.4 million from Manufacturers Hanover Trust bank accounts to protest its ties with J. P. Stevens; also, Teamsters Joint Council 16 encouraged its members to withdraw personal accounts

Methods in 4th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › boycott endorsed by various groups
- 004. Signed public statements › A letter supporting the boycott was signed by three NY state senators and four assemblyman; support also expressed publicly by governors of several states, other state officials, and 56 members of the U.S. Congress
- 006. Group or mass petitions › Massachusetts Women's Committee for Justice for J.P. Stevens Workers held a drive to get Jordan Marsh credit-card holders to sign petitions opposing Jordan Marsh's selling and advertising of Stevens products
- 006. Group or mass petitions › Trinity College students and local residents presented local department store mgr with petition signed by 600 student favoring the boycott and asked that Stevens products be removed from the store
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Don't Sleep with Stevens"
- 015. Group lobbying › Campaign supporters attended Stevens annual shareholders' meeting to speak against company practices
- 038. Marches › Rallies/marches were held in 78 U.S. cities on "Justice for J. P. Stevens Workers Day," Nov. 30, 1978
- 038. Marches › Trinity College students marched to local department store to present store manager with petition supporting boycott and asked that Stevens products be removed
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Rallies/marches were held in 78 U.S. cities on "Justice for J. P. Stevens Workers Day," Nov. 30, 1978
- 071. Consumers' boycott › ›ACTWU boycott of J. P. Stevens products
- 175. Overloading of facilities › Campaign supporters announced intention to nominate two outsiders to run for New York Life Insurance Board of Directors against the company's slate unless it severed ties with Stevens; would cause the company time and money and set a precedent

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches › ACTWU organized national speaking tour for Crystal Lee Sutton, Stevens workers who was inspiration for the film "Norma Rae"
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › boycott endorsed by various groups
- 004. Signed public statements › the boycott was endorsed by Jane Fonda (actress); Myron Cope (sports commentator)
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Don't Sleep with Stevens"
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Supporters from most major labor unions in NYC set up a "human billboard" twelve blocks along Park Ave.; a similar demonstration was held along Broadway
- 015. Group lobbying › Campaign supporters attended Stevens annual shareholders' meeting to speak against company practices
- 071. Consumers' boycott › ›ACTWU boycott of J. P. Stevens products

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches › ACTWU organized a nationwide speaking tour for Crystal Lee Sutton, the textile worker who was the inspiration for the film "Norma Rae"
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › boycott endorsed by various groups
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Don't Sleep with Stevens"
- 015. Group lobbying › Campaign supporters attended Stevens annual shareholders' meeting to speak against company practices
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Several hundred campaign supporters marched into the Sperry company shareholders' meeting, led by Crystal Lee Sutton, to protest the membership of the CEO of Stevens (Finely) on the Sperry Board of Directors
- 071. Consumers' boycott › ›ACTWU boycott of J. P. Stevens products

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 011. Records, radio, and television › ACTWU produced and distributed a film, "Testimony," about the mistreatment of Stevens workers

Notes on Methods:

Additional details on the campaign (such as the exact timing of the entry of some allies and of some methods) can be found in the ACTWU Papers, held at the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- textile workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union)

Murray Finley, president of the ACTWU

Jacob Sheinkman, secretary-general of the ACTWU

Ray Rogers, director of ACTWU's corporate campaign against J. P. Stevens

Partners:

American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Southerners for Economic Justice (formed by ACTWU; headed by Julian Bond (Georgia state senator), John Lewis (former SNCC chair), Maynard Jackson (mayor of Atlanta); Ruby Hurley (NAACP Southern Director))

External allies:

American Jewish Congress

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Boston College students

Cambridge, Mass. City Council

Catholic Bishops of the Diocese of Richmond and the Province of Atlanta

Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Columbia University students

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

Cornell University students

Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

Franciscan Justice and Peace Office of Washington, D.C.

Harvard University students

Institute of Christian Doctrine

Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility

International Federation of Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

Interreligious Conference for Justice at J.P. Stevens (umbrella group that included Church Women United, the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation, Catholic Committee of Appalachia, United Church of Christ, Catholic Clergy, United Methodist Church, American Jewish Congress, United Presbyterian Women, Disciples of Christ, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church)

Local 40 of the Beltmakers', Novelty and Allied Workers' Union (BNAWU)(New York)

Los Angeles Board of Public Works

Methodist Federation for Social Action

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

National Black Caucus

National Council of Churches

National Organization for Women (NOW)

National Coalition of American Nuns

National Council of Catholic Women

National Women's Committee to Support J.P. Stevens Workers (umbrella group that included Coalition of Labor Union Women, NOW, National Assembly of Women Religious, National Council of Catholic Women, National Consumer League, National Council of Jewish Women)

New York University students

New York City Council

Princeton University students

Rutgers University students

Stanford University students

Synagogue Council of America

Teamsters Joint Council 16 (New York)

Trinity College students

United Methodist Church

United Auto Workers (UAW)

United Methodist Church, Women's Division

United Methodist Church of Iowa

United Presbyterian Church

United Church of Christ

University of Illinois students

University of Pennsylvania students

Zensen Domie (Japanese textile union)

Involvement of social elites:

Bayard Rustin (civil rights leader)

56 members of the U. S. House of Representatives

7 New York state legislators (3 senators and 4 assemblymen; names not known)

3 Secretaries of states (names and states not known)

Michael Harrington (author)

Myron Cope (sports commentator)

Jane Fonda (actress)

John Kenneth Galbraith (economist)

Gov. Bob Straub (Ore.)

Gov. Hugh Carey (NY)

Gov. Ella Grasso (Conn.)

Gov. Wendell Anderson (Minn.)

Governor of Rhode Island (name not known)

Gov. William Milliken (Mich.)

Gov. Michael Dukakis (Mass.)

Governor of Maine (name not known)

Group of union leaders from abroad (New Zealand, Mexico, Japan, France, Australia)

Four lieutenant governors (names not known)

Conn. State Senator Joseph Lieberman

Coretta Scott King (widow of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Group of 14 Clergy from North Carolina Council of Churches

Catholic Bishops from six southern U.S. dioceses

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- AFL-CIO
- Group of 14 clergy from North Carolina Council of Churches
- Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility
- Intl. Federation of Textile Garment and Leather Workers
- Princeton U. students
- Southerners for Economic Justice

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Bayard Rustin

- Cambridge Mass. City Council
- Church groups
- Coretta Scott King
- Group of union leaders from abroad
- Intl. Confederation of Free Trade Unions
- John Kenneth Galbraith
- NOW
- Zensen Domie
- college/univ. students

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- 4 state govts. and 3 lieutenant govts.
- 6 Catholic Bishops
- Boston Coll. studen
- CORE
- Church groups
- Local 40 of the BNAWU
- NAACP
- NY City Council
- Natl. Women's Comm. to Support J.P. Stevens Workers
- Teamsters Joint Council 16
- natl./state legislators

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Connecticut State Senator Joseph Lieberman
- New York Governor Hugh L. Carey
- Oregon Governor Bob Straub
- United Presbyterian Church

Groups in 5th Segment:

- American Jewish Congress
- Interreligious Conference for Justice at J.P. Stevens
- Jane Fonda
- Myron Cope
- Natl. Black Caucus
- Natl. Council of Black Churches
- UAW

Groups in 6th Segment:

- ACLU

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Church groups in 2nd segment: United Methodist Church, Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, Franciscan Justice and Peace Office of Washington D.C., Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Natl. Coalition of American Nuns, Catholic Bishops from the Dioceses of Richmond and the Province of Atlanta, Institute of Christian Doctrine, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Methodist Federation for Social Action

Students in 2nd segment: Stanford U., Trinity College, New York U., Harvard U.

Church groups in 3rd segment: National Council of Catholic Women, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Women's Division, Synagogue Council of America, United Methodist Church of Iowa

National and state legislators in 3rd segment: 4 NY state assemblymen, 3 NY state senators, 56 members of the U.S. House of Representatives

State governors in 3rd segment: Gov. Michael Dukakis (Mass.), Gov. Ella Grasso (Conn.), Governor of Rhode Island (name not known),

Gov. Wendell Anderson (Minn.)

Timing of joining not known for: Jane Fonda, Michael Harrington, John Kenneth Galbraith, Myron Cope

Timing of joining for Methodist Federation for Social Action and Central Conference of American Rabbis was 1977 (month not known)

Timing of joining for Coretta Scott King and Bayard Rustin was March 1977 or earlier

Timing of joining for United Auto Workers, National Council of Churches, and National Black Caucus was November 1979 or earlier

Timing of joining for NAACP and CORE was 1978 or earlier

Segment Length: 9 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

J. P. Stevens

Roanoke Rapids Employee Education Committee (formed by anti-union textile workers at J. P. Stevens in fall 1976)

Stevens People and Friends for Freedom (formed by anti-union workers)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Protest meetings (employees' group - see "opponents" above - held periodic meetings)

Public speeches (Stevens executives spoke publicly in defense of the company and against the ACTWU)

009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books. 1977 - company distributed pamphlet entitled "Straightening Things Out"

Mass mailings

Supporters signed cards

public speeches

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:

In 1981, the Daily News Record, a textile industry newspaper quoted J.P. Stevens vice president Hal Addis as stating, "Of the three major tactics employed by ACTWU during its confrontation with Stevens, the Corporate Campaign, designed to cut Stevens off from the financial community was the most effective."

In 1974, workers at seven textile plants in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina owned by the J. P. Stevens company voted to be represented by the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA). However, the company refused to sign a contract with the new union. In 1976, the TWUA merged with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) to form the American Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (ACTWU). The new union immediately launched a campaign to pressure J. P. Stevens to sign a union contract. The hope was that once Stevens capitulated, the ACTWU would be able to unionize workers at the other large textile companies in the south. In addition, the ACTWU sought to publicize the company's practices of racial and sex discrimination in promotion and pay and to the unsafe working conditions in the plants.

The ACTWU's strategy was threefold: to conduct a nationwide consumer boycott of J. P. Stevens products; to pursue legal cases against the company, which had violated numerous labor laws; and to conduct a "corporate campaign" to use negative publicity to isolate the company from other corporations and banks. The union established boycott field offices states around the country. It created an organization headed by several prominent people, Southerners for Economic Justice, to promote the boycott in the southern states.

The boycott was quickly endorsed by religious groups, labor unions, women's organizations, student groups, municipal governments, and prominent individuals who included religious leaders, elected officials, civil rights leaders, authors, and celebrities. Boycott supporters engaged in nonviolent action to persuade and pressure stores to stop selling Stevens products. These included writing letters, circulating petitions, picketing outside stores, and meeting with store managers. Activists also publicized the boycott to other consumers through marches, rallies, distributing literature published by the ACTWU, and the like. College and university students conducted teach-ins and demanded that their schools stopped purchasing Stevens products. The ACTWU declared November 30, 1978 as Justice for J. P. Stevens Workers Day, and activists in seventy-four cities held rallies and marches.

In March 1978, thirty national women's organizations formed an umbrella group, the National Women's Committee to Support JP Stevens Workers. In October 1979, religious organizations similarly formed the Inter-Religious Conference on Justice at J.P. Stevens.

One aspect of the corporate campaign involved large numbers of activists attending J. P. Stevens's annual shareholders' meetings and speaking out publicly about the company's mistreatment of workers, as well as proposing related shareholder resolutions. Another was to pressure corporate officers from other companies to resign from the Stevens Board of Directors, and to pressure Stevens corporate officers to resign from the boards of other companies. This pressure was brought to bear by sending letters and making phone calls to the companies and to individual corporate officers, attending companies' shareholders' meetings and speaking out about J. P. Stevens's mistreatment of workers, and withdrawing funds from banks that did business with Stevens, and other actions. Several corporate officers did resign from corporate boards as a result of this pressure.

The pursuit of legal action against J. P. Stevens is not considered nonviolent action so is not discussed here.

In 1979, the film "Norma Rae" was released, starring Sally Fields, which was loosely based on the experiences of Crystal Lee Sutton, a textile worker who helped organize the union at the Roanoke Rapids plants. This helped publicize the campaign, and the ACTWU organized a nationwide speaking tour for Sutton.

In mid-1978, representatives from J. P. Stevens entered into secret negotiations with the ACTWU. In October 1980, a settlement was announced. Stevens agreed to enter into a contract with the union that included a retroactive pay raise; seniority protection for workers; a check-off provision that allowed union dues to be directly deducted from workers' paychecks; and a grievance procedure for workers that included independent arbitration. In return, the ACTWU agreed to end the boycott and the corporate campaign.

Research Notes

Influences:

1. The boycott was influenced by United Farm Workers' successful boycott against grape growers (1965-197) and by Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America's successful boycott against Farah Manufacturing Company (1972-1974).
2. The "corporate campaign" strategy, pioneered by Ray Rogers and used first in the Farah campaign and then in the J. P. Stevens campaign, was subsequently used extensively by labor and human rights groups in the U.S.

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