



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Peace campaigners act for civil rights in Albany, GA, 1963-1964

- U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)

December 23,
1963

to: February 24,
1964

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Albany, Georgia

Goals:

To make progress towards racial equality and to demonstrate the power of nonviolent action by gaining permission to walk as an integrated group through the segregated section of Albany.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 038. Marches
- 066. Total personal noncooperation
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 066. Total personal noncooperation
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 013. Deputations
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations
- 034. Vigils
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 066. Total personal noncooperation
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations
- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 6th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 013. Deputations
- 034. Vigils
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Peace

Group characterization:

- Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA)
- a group of social activists fighting for civil liberties

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Brad Lyttle, walk leader for the CNVA

A.J. Muste and Dave Dellinger, two of the more well-known and influential members of the CNVA

Partners:

None. The CNVA had many allies, but no consistent partners from the outset.

External allies:

The Albany Herald, the Atlanta Constitution, the Atlanta Journal, the New York Times, and the Chicago Tribune covered the events unfolding in Albany

Many people and groups from major cities across the US sent letters of support to the walkers in jail

Norman Thomas, Norman Cousins, and New York Congressmen Ryan and Lindsay sent telegrams of support for the walkers to Albany city authorities

British House of Commons debated the issue as they were angered over the treatment of British walker John Papworth

British radical pacifist action group Committee of 100 picketed outside the US embassy in London and wired protests over Papworth's treatment to both Mayor of Albany Jimmy Davis and US President Lyndon B. Johnson

The London Times inquired about the incident

The Toronto Telegram voiced their anger over the arrest of three Canadians

US Department of Justice sent a representative to investigate the situation

The State Department (US), called Mayor Davis

Civil Liberties lawyers launched a suit against city for unconstitutional actions

The Florida State University Citizens for Peace Committee had ten students travel to provide support

The Albany Movement, a group that had voiced support for the CNVA but had not gotten involved, finally began publishing letters in Albany newspapers and scheduled a voter registration demonstration.

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), led by three Quakers (James Bristol, Cal Geiger, and Carl Zeitlow), negotiated with walk leaders, city officials, and influential white ministers

Involvement of social elites:

Norman Thomas, Norman Cousins, and New York Congressmen Ryan and Lindsay sent telegrams of support for the walkers to the Albany city authorities

British House of Commons

US Department of Justice sent a representative to investigate the situation

The State Department (US) called Mayor Davis

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- British House of Commons
- Committee of 100

- Local and National Newspapers
- London Times
- New York Congressmen Ryan and Lindsay
- Norman Cousins
- Norman Thomas
- Toronto Telegram

Groups in 5th Segment:

- AFSC
- Florida State University Citizens for Peace Committee

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 1.5 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Albany Police Chief Laurie Pritchett

Albany City Manager Stephen R. Roos

Albany Mayor Jimmy Davis

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Taunting hunger strikers by reading food menus allowed.

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

While in jail, the CNVA members were not allowed soap, towels, writing material, napkins, or eyeglasses. The cells were tiny and the male walkers were in ten foot by twelve foot cells with seventeen male inmates sharing six beds in constantly damp conditions.

Other tactics employed by the opposition included threatening a stop to medical attentions, singling out Brad Lyttle (a leader of the CNVA) and threatening transfer to infamously harsh jails, and secretly taping private walker team meetings.

The walkers faced violence in Lawrenceville, Griffin, and Macon, GA, however, besides some rough treatment in the jails, what made Chief Pritchett so tough to beat was that he understood that to combat nonviolence one cannot use open violence. For that reason, the walkers were not treated violently in the open once they arrived in Albany. Although Chief Pritchett emphasized his commitment to combating nonviolence with nonviolence, the city over time began to use acts of secrecy and intimidation, which revealed their growing weakness.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although the struggle required huge sacrifices by the walkers, who were seriously tested, they achieved their two principle goals of making progress towards racial equality and proving that nonviolence is effective even in Albany, GA, when they reached a compromise allowing them to march through the segregated city

The CNVA went from just a group of walkers to gaining the attention of the President of the United States, the British House of Commons, Canadian authorities, and widespread support from citizens

In 1963 a long-distance peace march demanding U.S. foreign policy change got caught in the wave of civil rights campaigns in the southern United States. Beginning on May 26, 1963, the Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA), a racially integrated group of social activists left Quebec City, Canada on their Quebec-Washington-Guantanamo Walk for Peace to protest the United States' policy toward Cuba.

They began their demonstrations with marches first at Griffin Air Force Base in Rome, New York, and then at various locations along the U.S. East Coast.

Upon reaching Georgia in October 1963, the CNVA walkers encountered their first incidents of violence and arrests. The walkers remained steadfast in their commitment to nonviolent discipline and began to emphasize the struggle for racial equality as a main goal.

The city of Albany, south of Atlanta, was particularly sensitive territory. In 1961-62 a major campaign to integrate the city initiated by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was defeated, even though joined by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Police Chief Laurie Pritchett had no intention of allowing CNVA to conduct a racially integrated march down Oglethorpe Avenue, Albany's main street, when that permission had been denied to the Albany Movement previously (See, "[The Albany Movement campaigns for full integration in Georgia \(Fall 1961- Summer 1962\)](#) [3]")

Despite efforts by the CNVA in December 1963 to negotiate safe passage on Oglethorpe, Chief Pritchett would only allow the walkers to use the "black side" of the segregated road. Chief Pritchett blamed traffic congestion, but the real motive stemmed from the fact that Oglethorpe Avenue was the dividing line between the black and white sections of the city, which had been drawn during the 1962 Albany Movement's campaign. Chief Pritchett refused to allow the integrated group of peace walkers to protest on the "white only" side of the street or north of Oglethorpe Avenue.

When the CNVA proceeded anyway on December 23, 1963, the Albany police responded by arresting thirteen members of the CNVA and one supporter. This sparked the beginning of a long process of nonviolent resistance as twelve of the fourteen walkers needed to be carried to jail as a result of noncooperation. Once in jail, the walkers refused bail, did not cooperate with jail rules, and began fasting. When time for their arraignment in court arrived, eight refused to cooperate and needed to be carried in to the court room. Once in front of the judge, the CNVA members would not sit in a segregated manner.

On January 8, 1964, the fourteen walkers were convicted of parading without a permit, congregating on sidewalks, and refusing to obey the lawful summons of policemen. They were all sentenced to 25 days in jail or a \$102 fine. Two walkers paid the fine, while eleven others remained imprisoned and continued fasting.

On January 14, 1964, all of the walkers were released and placed on 30 days probation. Nine walkers had fasted for 24 days, and as a result, three needed medical attention and all received vitamin injections.

Once released, the walkers set out to find a compromise and came up with eight alternative march routes, showing flexibility on dates and times. Each option was rejected by both Chief Pritchett and City Manager Stephen R. Roos.

The walkers took this as an outright challenge, so on January 27, 1964, they marched onto the forbidden streets, leading to the arrests of seventeen walkers.

At this point, as a result of terrible jail conditions and weakness from fasting, the walkers began to get very ill; however, they continued on with the noncooperation and fasting. The Albany city officials increased the punishment. While in jail, the CNVA members were not allowed soap, towels, writing material, napkins, or eyeglasses. The cells were tiny and the male walkers were in ten foot by twelve foot cells; seventeen male inmates shared six beds in constantly damp conditions. Jail authorities also read menus out loud to the fasting inmates, threatened a stop to medical attention, singled out Brad Lyttle (a leader of the CNVA) to threaten a transfer to infamously harsh jails, and secretly taped private walker team meetings.

In court Chief Pritchett often influenced the court proceedings significantly leading to favorable treatment for the city attorney prosecuting the walkers.

While the walkers were trapped inside the jail, other CNVA members outside attempted to support their comrades and combat the Albany city officials' tactics. Their actions included fasting and keeping a vigil on the steps of city hall, inquiring frequently of authorities concerning the status of the walkers inside the jail, and holding negotiations with city officials (carried out by two CNVA leaders who came to Albany from New York, A.J. Muste and Dave Dellinger). Throughout the conflict, the CNVA office in Atlanta publicized the incident and mailed information across Georgia.

As word spread about the suffering of the prisoners, allies showed their support for the walkers as well. The Albany Herald, the Atlanta Constitution, the Atlanta Journal, the New York Times, and the Chicago Tribune covered the events unfolding in Albany and published news stories and letters concerning the incidents. Many people and groups from major cities across the US sent letters of support to the walkers in jail. Norman Thomas, Norman Cousins, and New York Congressmen Ryan and Lindsay showed support for the walkers by communicating their concerns to Albany city authorities.

On the international front, the British House of Commons gave the issue attention as the body was angered over the treatment of British walker John Papworth. Also, the British radical pacifist group Committee of 100 protested at the US embassy in London and wired protests over Papworth's treatment to both Mayor of Albany Jimmy Davis and US President Lyndon B. Johnson. The London Times inquired about the incident and the Toronto Telegram, angry over arrest of three Canadians, sent a telegram to the US State Department. The U.S. federal government became involved when the US Department of Justice sent a representative to investigate the situation; the State Department called Mayor Davis.

In addition, civil liberties lawyers launched a lawsuit against the city while other groups got involved, such as the Florida State University Citizens for Peace Committee, which had ten students travel to provide support. There were support protests in New England, Minnesota, New York, California, and Quebec. Even some white Albany citizens voiced their interest in releasing the prisoners as they worried about the financial weight of paying for the walkers to remain in jail. The Albany Movement, a group that had voiced support for the CNVA, but had not been involved, finally began publishing letters in Albany newspapers and scheduled a voter registration demonstration.

In February, 1964, a turning point occurred when a team of three Quakers (James Bristol, Cal Geiger, and Carl Zeitlow) from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), negotiated with CNVA Walk leaders, city officials, and influential white ministers, exploring a possible compromise.

A loophole in the law was discovered. The compromise allowed the CNVA to walk along the parade route and for an integrated team of five to break off from the group at a certain point to do a four block loop handing out pamphlets in the downtown section. In return the CNVA agreed to halt demonstrations at the Turner Air Force Base and the arrested walkers would sign pleas to city charges. All the imprisoned walkers would be released on February 22, and the newly established walk would occur on February 24, 1964.

The terms of the compromise were accepted and the walkers were released. The Albany courts had issued 41 convictions from the initial arrests on December 23, 1963, onward. Some of the walkers had fasted for 51 days, with only eleven days between the first and second sessions of jail time.

On February 24, 1964, the walkers carried out their march and proved that they could outlast the Albany city officials through

their use of nonviolent action.

Research Notes

Influences:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s commitment to nonviolence greatly influenced the CNVA and encouraged them to continue their nonviolent resistance all the way up to their eventual success (1).

Sources:

Bruyn, Severyn T. and Paula M. Rayman. *Nonviolent Action and Social Change*. New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1979.

Deming, Barbara. *Prison Notes*. 1966, Grossman Publishers.

Additional Notes:

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