Peace People march against violence in Northern Ireland, 1976

11 August 1976 to: December 1976

Country: Northern Ireland
Country: England
Country: Ireland

Location City/State/Province: Belfast, Antrim, Newry, Ballymena, Birmingham, Downpatrick, Dungannon, Glasgow, Leeds, Cardiff, Craigavon, Dublin, Enniskillen, Manchester, New Castle, Bristol, Edinburgh, Omagh, Boyne, London

Location Description: Most rallies took place in the streets in both urban and rural Northern Ireland.

Goals:
In general, the Peace People's goals were the dissolution of the IRA and an end to violence in Northern Ireland. The implicit goals of the Peace People rallies were delegitimization of violence, increasing solidarity, and gaining momentum for peace.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches > 10,000 person march
- 038. Marches > 50 person march, women with baby carriages

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books > The Price of Peace, book by Ciaran McKeown, expansion of the declaration
- 038. Marches > Location: Antrim, Ireland
- 038. Marches > Newry, Ireland

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 010. Newspapers and journals > Peace by Peace Newsletter
- 038. Marches > Location: Ballymena, Ireland
- 038. Marches > Location: Birmingham, Ireland
- 038. Marches > Location: Downpatrick, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Dungannon, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Glasgow, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Leeds, Ireland

Methods in 4th segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 010. Newspapers and journals › Peace by Peace Newsletter
• 038. Marches › British rallies of solidarity
• 038. Marches › Location: Cardiff, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Craigavon, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Enniskillen, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Falls, Belfast
• 038. Marches › Location: Manchester, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: New Castle, Ireland

Methods in 5th segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 004. Signed public statements › Peace Weekend: over 105,000 people signed to support
• 010. Newspapers and journals › Peace by Peace Newsletter
• 038. Marches › Location: Bristol, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: East Belfast, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Edinburgh, Ireland
• 038. Marches › Location: Omagh, Ireland

Methods in 6th segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 010. Newspapers and journals › Peace by Peace Newsletter
• 037. Singing
• 038. Marches › Location: Boyne, Drogheda
• 038. Marches › Location: London

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

• 063. Social disobedience

Classifications

Classification:
Third-party nonviolent intervention

Cluster:
Human Rights
Peace

Group characterization:

• common people from
• mostly women
• nuns
Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**
Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Betty Williams, and Ciaran McKeown

**Partners:**
Not known

**External allies:**
Glencree Centre of Reconciliation (Dublin)

**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 2.5 weeks

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**
Irish Republican Army (IRA), IRA supporters, Sinn Fein supporters

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**
Not known

**Campaigner violence:**
Not known

**Repressive Violence:**
IRA supporters threw bottles and stones at protesters during the marches.

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 violence did not fully subside until 1998, Ireland saw in 1976 one of its most dramatic decreases in violence.
In the 1960s, Northern Ireland began a period of ethno-political conflict called the Troubles. Through a series of social and political injustices, Northern Ireland had become a religiously divided society between historically mainland Protestants and Irish Catholics. Furthermore, the Irish people had become a fragmented body over a range of issues, identities, circumstances and loyalties. The conflict between Protestants and Catholics spilled over into violence, marked by riots and targeted killings between the groups beginning in 1968. In addition, paramilitary groups, including the prominent Irish Republican Army (IRA), launched terrorist attacks to advance their political agendas.

The violence continued to escalate. On 10 August 1976, Anne Maguire and her children were walking along Finaghy Road North in Belfast. Suddenly, a Ford Cortina slammed into them. The car was being driven by Danny Lennon, who moments before had been shot dead by pursuing soldiers. The mother was the only survivor. The collision killed three of her four children, Joanne (8 years), John (2 years), and Andrew (6 months). Joanne and Andrew died instantly; John was injured critically.

The next day, immediately following John’s death, fifty women from the Republican neighborhoods of Andersontown and Stewartstown protested Republican violence by marching with baby carriages. That evening, Mairead Corrigan, Anne Maguire’s sister, appeared on television pleading for an end to the violence. She became the first leader of the Peace People to speak publicly.

However, she was not the only one to initiate action. As soon as she heard Mairead speak on the television, Betty Williams began petitioning door-to-door for an end to sectarian violence. She garnered 6,000 signatures of support within a few days. This support led directly into the first unofficial action of the Peace People. On 14 August, only four days after the incident, 10,000 women, both Protestant and Catholic, marched with banners along Finaghy Road North, the place of the children's death, to Milltown cemetery, their burial site. This march mostly included women along with a few public figures and men. The marchers proceeded in almost utter silence, only broken by short bouts of singing from the nuns in the crowd and verbal and physical attacks by Republican opposition.

The following day, the three who became leaders of the Peace People – Mairead Corrigan, Betty Williams, and journalist Ciaran McKeown – came together for their first official meeting. During these initial meetings they established the ideological basis of nonviolence and goals for the campaign. The essential goals for the movement were the dissolution of the IRA and an end to the violence in Northern Ireland. The goals of the campaign implicit in their declaration were awareness, solidarity, and momentum. ?Peace People’s declaration:

"We have a simple message to the world from this movement for Peace. We want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society. We want for our children, as we want for ourselves, our lives at home, at work, and at play to be lives of joy and Peace. We recognise that to build such a society demands dedication, hard work, and courage. We recognise that there are many problems in our society which are a source of conflict and violence. We recognise that every bullet fired and every exploding bomb make that work more difficult. We reject the use of the bomb and the bullet and all the techniques of violence. We dedicate ourselves to working with our neighbours, near and far, day in and day out, to build that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning."

During the four-month campaign, Peace People and partners organized and participated in 26 marches in Northern Ireland, Britain, and the Republic of Ireland. In order to organize these marches effectively they established their main headquarters in Belfast.

After the initial Finaghy Road March, the Peace People, both Protestants and Catholics, rallied in Ormeau Park on 21 August. The official Declaration of the Peace People was first read at this rally, the largest rally of the entire campaign. The group numbered over 50,000. The rally even included some activists from Southern Ireland, most notably Judy Hayes from the Glencree Centre of Reconciliation near Dublin. After the rally, she and her colleagues returned to the south to organize solidarity demonstrations.

In the few days before the next march, the organization “Women Together” requested Peace People to call off the march,
disapproving of Catholics and Protestants participating in a joint march. The Peace People were not dissuaded. The next Saturday, 27,000 people marched along Shankill Road, the loyalist/Protestant neighborhood.

In the next three months, Peace People organized and participated in a rally every Saturday; some weeks even had two. Some of the most notable marches include the Derry/Londonderry double-march, the Falls march, the London march, and the Boyne march.

The Saturday following the Shankill march marked the Derry/Londonderry double-march. At this march, Catholics marched on one side of the river Foyle and Protestants on the other. The groups met on the Craigavon Bridge. Simultaneously, 50,000 people marched in solidarity in Dublin.

On 23 October, marchers met in the Falls, Belfast, in the pouring rain on the same Northumberland street corner where the Shankill March had started. The Falls Road rally was memorable for the fear and violence that ensued. During this rally Sinn Fein supporters threw stones and bottles at the marchers. The attackers escalated the violence as the marchers neared Falls Park. The marchers were informed by others that more attackers awaited them at the entrance to the park, inciting fear within the body of the rally. The leaders decided that this was an important moment of conflict in the rally and that they must push on. They continued verbally encouraging the marchers through the cloud of bottles, bricks, and stones.

The leaders planned to escalate the campaign momentum for the last two major symbolic rallies in London and Boyne, Drogheda. A week before the rallies, on 20-21 November, they planned a membership drive. Over 105,000 people signed within two days.

The symbolic week of the culminating rallies began on 27 November at the glamorous London Rally. They began to march at Hyde Park, cut through Westminster Abbey, and ended at Trafalgar Square. Some groups sang “Troops Out” and others resounded with civil rights songs.

On 5 December, Peace People held its final march of the campaign, along the River Boyne. The Northern and Southern Ireland contingents met at the Peace Bridge. This was an important point in the legacy of the Peace People movement. Now that the enthusiastic rallies were over, the people were responsible for the tedious local work and continuing the momentum and solidarity that the rallies had inspired. The shape of the Peace People was changing.

After the planned marches were over, the rally portion of the campaign faded and the Peace People took a new shape. Corrigan, Williams, and McKeown stopped planning marches, but continued to be involved in action that took the form of conferences and traveling overseas. However, the leaders began doing more separated work. Ciaran McKeown increased his focus on radical political restructuring.

In 1977, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan received the Nobel Peace Prize. Issues regarding the use of the monetary award impacted the two leaders’ relationships in an irreconcilable manner.

Due to the fact that many people, unlike McKeown, were less interested in the political side of the equation, the People continued actions along the lines of rallies and social work. Actions continued through the People’s initiative in the form of Peace Committees that each did separate work in local areas.

The Peace People made a substantial impact. They helped to de-legitimize violence, increase solidarity across sectarian lines, and develop momentum for peace. Although the violence did not fully subside until 1998 with the negotiation of political change, Ireland saw in 1976 one of its most dramatic decreases in political violence, accompanying the Peace People’s marches and rallies. The campaign dramatized how tired the people were of bloodshed, their desperate desire for peace, and the clear possibility of alternatives.
Research Notes

Sources:


1976d, August 30. “Mr. Rees Would Like Mrs. Drumm to be ‘Locked up’.” The London Times, 3.


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Hannah Lehmann, 08/10/2011

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