



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Public servants and opposition supporters protest national budget in Dominica, 2002-2003

July

2002

to: April

2003

**Country:** Dominica

### **Goals:**

To prevent the enactment of a 4 percent stabilization levy and a 10 percent cut in public service salaries that were part of the 2002 budget

## Methods

### **Methods in 1st segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › protesters carried placards calling for no more taxes and for the prime minister's resignation
- 038. Marches › PSU workers marched from the union's headquarters on Valley Road to Government Headquarters.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 112. Reporting "sick." (sick-in) › many public servants participated in a sick-out

### **Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 030. Rude gestures › protesters utilized loud speakers to disrupt the proceedings of Parliament
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 112. Reporting "sick." (sick-in)

### **Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 048. Protest meetings

### **Methods in 4th segment:**

- 048. Protest meetings

### **Methods in 5th segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › The PSU issued the government an ultimatum and threatened further action

- 097. Protest strike

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 038. Marches › The PSU organized a march to protest the government's decision not to pay the workers who went on strike in February

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- opposition party supporters
- public servants

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Public Service Union (PSU)

**Partners:**

United Workers Party (UWP)

**External allies:**

Not known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Frankie "Krazy T" Bellot - Prominent Dominican businessman and owner of local radio station Kairi FM

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- PSU
- UWP

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Frankie Bellot

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 6 weeks*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Dominican Labor Party (DLP)

### Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

### Campaigner violence:

Not known.

### Repressive Violence:

Not known

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

Though the campaign executed several successful actions, the campaign's efforts resulted in few concessions from the government, other than the establishment of a joint task force to promote dialogue and compromise. Levies against Dominican workers were not reduced or rescinded and the eight-day strike resulted in additional pay cuts for workers.

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In July 2002, the Dominican government approved a new budget for 2002-2003. The Dominican economy had been experiencing difficulties and the government decided to carry out some austerity measures as a way to combat the difficult times. The terrorist attack on the United States in 2001 contributed to a global economic slow-down and the Dominican economy, which had already been on the decline, suffered additional hardship. The language of the budget was very controversial and the government saw strong opposition against the budget, specifically against a 4 percent stabilization levy that would affect all sections of the population.

The \$111.1 million budget was officially approved on July 3, 2002, by a 15-10 vote with one representative abstaining. Immediately the major opposition party, the United Workers Party (UWP), expressed dissatisfaction and several hundred citizens gathered outside the Parliament Building to march and protest the budget; some protesters carried placards with messages like "no more taxes" and "the prime minister and his cabinet must go." Amongst the crowd, a few former government ministers could be seen participating.

In the aftermath of the protest, the Public Service Union (PSU) had been meeting to discuss the ramifications of the new budget and to decide whether or not to act. The union decided that the 4 percent levy was too high of a tax and called for a protest on July 9. In the call to action, the PSU made it clear that workers in important services like hospitals and police departments should remain at work and not participate in the demonstration. Not only concerned with the budget, the PSU was also disturbed by calls from both the private sector of Dominica and the International Monetary Fund to cut funds and jobs in the public sector.

Consequently, many union members took to the streets to protest the budget, including workers from essential services; myriad police officers executed a sick-out, calling into work sick in protest of the budget. A report surfaced afterwards stating that the tires of six government vehicles had been slashed during the demonstration and some members of government speculated that police officers had been the perpetrators. The Dominican Association of Evangelical Churches (DAEC) used the opportunity to

call for peace and order. The DAEC criticized the protesters and labeled the actions of the striking police officers as “unprofessional and irresponsible.”

In September 2002, the campaign acquired an unlikely ally. On September 4, Frankie “Krazy T” Bellot, a successful businessman and owner of a local radio station, criticized the government’s proposed budget and announced that he would be organizing a protest later in the week. Bellot originally funded activities for the Dominican Labor Party (DLP), the party in control of the government, but became highly critical of the government once the new budget was proposed.

Bellot organized a protest assembly outside the parliament building with a number of participants. The UWP organized a similar demonstration four days after and loud speakers were used to disrupt the parliamentary proceedings taking place inside the parliament building. On the same day of the UWP’s demonstration, members of the PSU executed another sick-out, lasting two days, which affected customs, immigration services, and the fire departments. Government reports stated later that some protesters blocked the main exit of the parliamentary building, making it difficult for the representatives to leave and resulting in the damaging of one government vehicle. Despite several demonstrations opposing the levy bill, the government approved and passed the bill later that week.

In December 2002, reports surfaced that the government had plans to prosecute Bellot for organizing an illegal protest earlier in the year. Bellot’s demonstration, for which he did not receive governmental permission, resulted in a partial shutdown of the Dominican capital. In response, Bellot claimed that he had not actually staged a demonstration, telling the media, “I don’t know what law I broke, I went to the police to apply for permission to stage a protest. They said they could not grant permission for a protest, so I asked them to escort me and they did.” Adding to the dismay of the campaign, reports surfaced of death threats directed at both the leader of the PSU and Bellot.

In the months following the passing of the levy bill, the PSU continued to hold regular meetings and strategize. In February 2003, the PSU issued the government an ultimatum, threatening further action. The ultimatum was in response to a proposal by the government that would institute a monthly “two-day compulsory leave without pay” for public service workers. The PSU argued that such a proposal would result in an additional 10 per cent reduction in the salaries of public service workers, adding to the 4 percent reduction from 2002’s levy bill.

In response, the government did not meet the PSU’s stated deadline, stating that more time was needed to consider the PSU’s claims. That same day, public service workers began a protest strike and remained away from their jobs. The port authority and prison departments were especially impacted by the protest strike. Additionally, 80 per cent of workers at a Dominican airport did not report to work, causing the airport to shut down and incoming flights to be redirected. A week into the strike, the Customs Division of the port authority had shut down, state-run health services were operating with diminished staffs, and only one airport remained operational. The devastating strike ended shortly after, lasting a total of eight days.

On February 25, the PSU agreed to end the strike after proactive discussions with the government. The agreement called for all public service workers to return to work and for the establishment of a joint task force to work toward a compromise between the two parties. In March, the government announced that the public service workers who participated in February’s strike would not be compensated for the duration of the strike. Consequently, the PSU organized a protest march three weeks later to express discontent with the government’s decision. The march did provoke the paying of the workers in April, but it also provoked a reduction of pay for many of the workers.

Though the campaign executed several successful actions, the campaign’s efforts resulted in few concessions from the government. Levies against Dominican workers were not reduced or rescinded and the eight-day strike resulted in additional pay cuts for workers.

## **Research Notes**

**Influences:**

The PSU engaged in conversation the National Union of Public Workers in Barbados to discuss results of a similar campaign in Barbados (1)

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**A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.**

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