



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Taiwanese student sit-in for democratic reform (Wild Lily Movement) 1990

March 16

1990

to: March 22

1990

Country: Taiwan

Location City/State/Province: Memorial Park, Taipei

Goals:

1. Dissolve the National Assembly
2. Abolish the “Temporary Provisions Effective during the Period of the Communist Rebellion” (emergency legislation passed in 1948 that restricted many of the freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution and enacting martial law)
3. Hold a national conference to discuss constitutional changes
4. Set a timetable for political and economic reform

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Countrymen, how can we tolerate the oppression of 700 emperors?
- 019. Wearing of symbols › wild lilies
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Countrymen, how can we tolerate the oppression of 700 emperors?
- 019. Wearing of symbols › wild lilies
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 019. Wearing of symbols › wild lilies
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 019. Wearing of symbols › wild lilies
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 019. Wearing of symbols › wild lilies
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 019. Wearing of symbols › wild lilies
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Activists
- DPP members
- National Taiwan University students
- Progressive Womens Unions
- professors

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

National Taiwan University student leaders

Partners:

Democratic Progressives Party (DPP), Progressive Womens Union

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- National University of Taiwan students

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- DPP
- Progressive Women's Union

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- DPP (exit)
- National University of Taiwan students (exit)
- Progressive Women's Union (exit)

Segment Length: 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Lee Teng-Hui, Kuomintang government

Campaigner violence:

not known

Repressive Violence:

Military police forcibly removed protesters from the Progressive Women's Union, allegedly beating some of the women.

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:

President Lee Teng-Hui met with student representatives and promised a meeting of the National Affairs Committee that June or July to plan reforms. Six years later, President Lee was elected democratically.

Following Chiang Ching-kuo's death in 1988, Lee Teng-hui continued to implement reforms. He promoted Taiwanese nationalism, and also worked to suspend the Taiwan Provincial Government, among other actions. Nonetheless, Lee Teng-hui's actions proved to not be enough for the Taiwanese people. Frustrated with the outdated National Assembly and its members' attempts to gain more power and influence, Taiwanese university students began to demonstrate on 16 March 1990.

The first protesters were students from National Taiwan University or Taita. Their first action was a sit down in the center of Taipei, in front of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, carrying a banner that read, "Countrymen, how can we tolerate the oppression

of 700 emperors?” referring to the 700 members of the National Assembly. Soon after, students from across Taiwan traveled to Taipei to join the protest. Four days into the sit-in, the protesters numbered in the thousands. In order to ensure the peaceful nature of their demonstration, seven students formed a coordination center. They then released a statement to President Lee Teng-hui, asking for the dissolution of the National Assembly, the abolition of the “Temporary Provisions Effective during the Period of the Communist Rebellion,” the holding of a “national conference to discuss constitutional changes,” and the setting of a timetable for political and economic changes.

The students were not the only group interested in reform. The opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) also held a large demonstration at Liberty Square on 18 and 19 March 1990. However, the students refused to align with DPP to maintain their political independence throughout their campaign. The students ensured the safety of their fellow demonstrators, standing guard day and night and maintaining order in the square. Their dedication to the cause of democracy motivated a number of professors and thousands of onlookers to join the sit-in. Additionally, a supportive public donated food, drinks, sleeping bags, and money to the group at the square.

Lee Teng-hui’s first response to the demonstration came at 2 a.m. on 19 March. He sent Mao Kao-wen, his Minister of Education, to the square to deliver a letter to the students. In the letter, President Lee promised to continue to reform the Taiwanese political system, and called for the end of the protest and the return of the students to their classrooms. The letter made no reference to the students’ demands, and in response, ten students began a hunger strike on 19 March. The next day, the number of hunger strikers quadrupled to 40 protesters, and by the end of the day on 20 March, 62 students were fasting. Later that day, President Lee announced that the national conference on political reform that the students had requested was scheduled to take place after the upcoming presidential election.

The next day, 21 March, the students built a seven-meter tall sculpture of a wild lily on the square. A symbol of purity and strength, the wild lily became the symbol of the movement. Additionally, two professors from National Taiwan University had been in talks with the Ministry of Education, and on the 21st, they announced that 50 student representatives of the movement would meet with President Lee in his palace. The meeting took place later that same evening, and Lee Teng-hui confirmed the timing of the national conference for May 1990, after his inauguration. He announced the timing of the political and economic changes in his inaugural speech, and he declared that constitutional changes and reelection of the parliament would take place within two years. However, the president did not hold the power to dissolve the National Assembly, but he promised to bring up the issue at the national conference.

On 22 March, the Wild Lily demonstration ended. The student leaders of the movement decided to leave the square, given President Lee’s reply to their demands, and their worry that the protest could turn violent based on the large number (around 10,000) of demonstrators in the square. Moreover, there were reports that pro-KMT students and military advisers had joined the crowd to cause problems.

Though the campaign was short, the Wild Lily movement was incredibly effective. In a mere six days, the students gained the support of thousands of people, the attention of the president, and opened the door to extensive democratic reform in Taiwan. Six years after the protest, Lee Teng-hui was elected president democratically. The dissolution of the National Assembly followed in 2005.

Research Notes

Influences:

The Wild Lily Movement inspired the Wild Strawberry Movement in 2008 (see: Taiwanese student sit-in for human rights (The Wild Strawberry Movement), 2008) (2)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

This action occurred only one year after the June 4 student protests at Tiananmen Square (see: Chinese students campaign for democratic reform (Tiananmen Square), 1989) and contrasts sharply in the way the government responded to the protests.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Nancy Liu 27/11/2011, Caroline Dreyfuss 04/10/2015

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