



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Togolese citizens campaign for democracy, 1991

- African Democracy Campaigns (early 1990s)

Time period notes: *Although the general strike did not begin until June 6, the organizers announced it around June 2, so this was taken as the beginning of the campaign. This campaign was separate from protests and riots earlier in the spring because its goals focused more on a national conference and it had different leadership. The 6th segment is only 1 day long (June 12). All others are 2 days long*

June 2

1991

to: June 12

1991

Country: Togo

Location City/State/Province: Lome and Other cities

Goals:

The formation of a national conference to organize a transition government and free elections.

The resignation of President Eyadema.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 117. General strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 013. Deputations
- 117. General strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 013. Deputations
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 117. General strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 117. General strike

Notes on Methods:

Slogans against Eyadema had been used in previous protests and were probably used in this one as well, but they were not mentioned in sources.

Citizens destroyed public statues of President Eyadema in protest. This was not included as "destruction of own property" because it was property of the government.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- opposition politicians
- shop owners
- workers in public and private sectors

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

The Democratic Opposition Front (FOD)- a coalition of 11 opposition political parties

Partners:

Public and Private sector workers in Lome and cities throughout Togo

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Politicians that had previously served in Eyadema's government

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- FOD
- politicians that previously served in Eyadema's government

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Public and Private Sector workers in Lome

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Workers from cities throughout Togo including Kpalime

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

It is unclear how many workers in other cities outside of Lome joined the strike and if they began on June 6 or later.

Segment Length: 2 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The Eyadema Regime

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Some young protesters threw stones at security forces on June 11. It is not clear if this was in response to repression or if it caused a violent response from security forces. Protesters also held stones, but did not throw them, when they met President Eyadema on the second day of the strike

Repressive Violence:

Pro-Eyadema groups attacked pro-democracy strikers after the rally in Lome on June 10. Security forces killed at least one person and injured at least 50 others in Togo throughout the campaign. The instances of this repression was not clear.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Campaigners successfully achieved the formation of a national conference, which was their main goal. President Eyadema did not resign, however, and this conference did not succeed in great democratic reforms and Eyadema remained in power until his death in 2005. The FOD survived throughout the campaign and afterward. The strike campaign grew to include FOD members, citizens in Lome, and citizens throughout the country.

The Togolese President Gnassingbé Eyadema came to power in 1967 after he led the army in a bloodless coup to take over the previously multi-party government. By 1990, Eyadema had been president for 23 years and had banned all political parties except for his Rally of the Togolese People. President Eyadema had been able to keep the country's economy relatively stable at the same time as he put many of his Kabye tribe members into top government and military posts. Nearly 70% of all members of the military were from the Kabye tribe, despite the fact that the Ewe tribe represented much of the population in the south of the

country.

By 1990, many protests and strikes throughout western Africa and in neighboring Benin had forced dictators like Eyadema to allow political reforms. In the end of 1990, Eyadema allowed for independent parliamentary elections in which his party did not put forth any formal candidates. However, other political parties were still banned. After a public opinion poll taken by the government showed that the majority of Togolese people did not want a full multi-party democracy, Eyadema continued to maintain his 23-year single-party rule.

Nonetheless as early as October 1990 some Togolese were beginning to protest and demand a multi-party democracy. At the beginning of 1991 Eyadema had announced that he would hold a referendum to decide the political fate of the country at the end of that year. In March, students at the University of Benin, in Togo's capital city of Lome, began a student strike calling for both better education and a national conference for political reforms. These students, who joined forces with lawyers and businessmen to form the Front of Associations for Renewal, were able to pressure Eyadema into announcing that he would make political changes. This came after students had held many demonstrations and there were several clashes in which students threw rocks and police attacked demonstrators with live ammunition and tear gas. Even after this announcement and several meetings between the strikers and Eyadema, however, pro-democracy supporters continued to hold scattered protests through April. At one point armed citizens had even taken over parts of Lome and by April citizens were announcing plans for an armed rebellion in the streets. Eyadema finally announced the official legalization of political parties in mid-April 1991.

Shortly after this, a group of 11 newly legalized opposition political parties formed a coalition called the Democratic Opposition Front (FOD). Despite the end of the ban on political parties, Eyadema and his party still controlled the majority, if not all, of the political space in Togo. Therefore, in June 1991, the FOD called for an indefinite general strike to begin on Thursday June 6 and to last until President Eyadema resigned and an open national conference was formed to implement a transition government.

On June 6, most of Lome supported the general strike, which included citizens from other cities in Togo as well. Workers in both the public and private sectors stayed away from work on that day. In Lome, streets were basically empty of traffic and most shops throughout the city were closed. The FOD had urged people to stay home during the strike to avoid the police repression that had accompanied the pro-democracy protests earlier in the spring. Nonetheless, there was no noticeable security force presence in the streets.

The next day, the Togolese citizens remained on strike. Some strikers had emptied garbage cans into the streets to prevent those who were not on strike from traveling to work. When President Eyadema returned from a trip to Nigeria on that day, 20,000 people met him in Lome, some of whom were carrying stones. Togolese soldiers fired several warning shots into the air to prevent demonstrators from throwing these stones at Eyadema's motorcade. There was no violence on that day.

By June 9, workers in cities around Togo had joined the strike. In the city of Kpalime, to the west of Lome, protesters destroyed a statue of Eyadema. In Lome, protestors attempted to stone another statue of Eyadema that stood before his party headquarters. Soldiers dismantled this statue before protestors could fully destroy it. The strikers had shut down Lome to such an extent that little was functioning except for electricity and the international airport. In other parts of the country, security forces had killed at least one striker, but the extent of violence from either side is unclear.

Meanwhile, the FOD distributed leaflets calling for a pro-democracy rally at the stadium in Lome for the next day. The FOD, which contained both radical politicians and moderate politicians that had served in Eyadema's government previously, was somewhat divided as to whether they wanted Eyadema to step down or if they wanted just political reforms through a national conference. It is unclear how large this division of demands was during the campaign. At this point, however, the FOD began to focus more on the demand for a conference and less on Eyadema's resignation. The night before the rally, FOD members met with Eyadema, but President Eyadema still refused to resign or hold a national conference.

30,000 pro-democracy supporters attended the FOD rally on June 10. As they left the stadium where the rally was held, a large group of pro-Eyadema supporters were waiting with knives, clubs, and arrows. This pro-Eyadema group attacked the pro-

democracy supporters, wounding at least two people and damaging many of the opposition groups' vehicles. There was no known retaliation from the pro-democracy group.

The next day, as the strike continued, there were reports of some confrontations between young strikers and security forces in which youth threw stones and security forces used tear gas and clubs. The extent of this violence from either side was not clear from sources. During the strike, security forces killed at least one person and injured at least 50 more.

On June 12, after many Togolese people had been on strike for seven days, President Eyadema agreed to hold a national conference to establish a transition government and organize free elections. The strikers and protesters gathered and danced in the streets in celebration throughout the day. Soldiers shot at a group of people who were attempting to break into the Togolese Planning Minister's home. After Eyadema's announcement of the national conference, the FOD called off the general strike and workers returned to work the following day. Eyadema also announced that the government would pay the salaries of all civil service workers for the strike period despite regulations prohibiting it.

The national conference was scheduled to begin on June 24, but was delayed until the middle of July, when opposition leaders and Eyadema had reached an agreement on the specifics of the proceedings. Television stations broadcast the entire conference live to ensure fair and transparent proceedings. Despite Eyadema's agreement to the conference as a source to establish fair elections, all of the delegates representing his government walked out on the second day of the conference after the conference declared itself sovereign and asserted its right to assign an interim government until fair elections were held. These delegates did not participate for the rest of the conference and the army, which was pro-Eyadema, refused to send any delegates to the conference.

After the conference nominated an interim Prime Minister, Kokou Koffigoh, Eyadema ordered the end of the conference and security forces surrounded the building where the conference was taking place. Nonetheless, the delegates continued their conference and stripped Eyadema of nearly all his control, including his formal control of the military, giving those duties to the Prime Minister. The conference scheduled elections for June 1992 and banned Eyadema's party from participating. In response the army attempted a coup and briefly took over the television and radio stations, but retreated after only one day.

Throughout the conference, the military attempted several coups and even kidnapped the Prime Minister for a short period. Despite the attempts to make changes through this conference and the organization of elections, President Eyadema remained in power until his death in 2005, after which his son became president. Pro-democracy groups continued protests and general strikes in 1992 and 1993 and protested the apparently fraudulent elections of Eyadema in following years. The general strike in June 1991 had successfully organized a national conference, but had not forced the resignation of Eyadema.

Research Notes

Influences:

Student and opposition groups protests in Lome earlier in 1990 and 1991 (1). The successful democracy campaign in Benin in 1990 (1). The campaign influenced further pro-democracy general strikes and protests over the next 2 years in Togo (2).

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