



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Toronto hippies campaign for street closure, Canada, 1967

17 August

1967

to: 24 August

1967

Country: Canada

Location City/State/Province: Toronto, Ontario

Location Description: Yorkville Village

Goals:

To close Yorkville Avenue in Toronto to motor vehicle traffic.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 177. Speak-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 138. Sitdown
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 4th segment:

- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Yorkville Village residents
- Youth
- community activists
- hippies

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

David DePoe, Brian Chapman, Don Riggan, Hans Wetzel, the Diggers

Partners:

The Yorkville Cultural Activities Committee

External allies:

Not known

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:

Segment Length: *Approximately 15 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Allan Lamport, Matthew Lawson, City Council

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Speak-in

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

In 1967 Yorkville Village, Toronto was a neighborhood inhabited by many aspiring artists, hippies, greasers, bikers, youth, and others looking to embrace the counter culture lifestyle. This lifestyle attracted many youth who travelled from all across Canada to experience the environment Yorkville offered. Due to the influx of youth to Yorkville during this time, many of whom were poor and actively avoided the mainstream idea of working for money, several resident hippies formed a community activist group called The Diggers (taking their name from a similar group in San Francisco and historically modeled on the 17th century Diggers, a group of Protestant English agrarian communists). The Diggers, lead by David DePoe, took care of Yorkville's youth living on the streets by providing them with food and shelter.

Many of the young residents and hippies who inhabited Yorkville Village (a triangle of approximately 25 city blocks) were viewed to be no more than drug addicts and vagrants by many of the middle-aged and upper and middle class residents of Toronto and by City and government institutions. Thus, in an effort to turn around public opinion, the Diggers held a Love-in at Queen's Park on 22 May 1967. The peaceful event attracted over 5,000 people. There were performances by the likes of Leonard Cohen and Buffy Sainte-Marie, dancing, and the formation of a human chain in an effort to link the young and old generations together. In this way the hippies were using the nonviolent method of establishing a new social pattern.

After the Love-in, Yorkville became even more of a public spectacle. Needless to say, this soon created traffic gridlock on the already congested, two-block, one way street of Yorkville Avenue. It also posed a danger for pedestrian foot traffic.

To the Diggers the solution was simple, close Yorkville Avenue to vehicle traffic and turn it into a pedestrian mall. Yorkville Avenue was already a parade of coffee shops and boutiques with a high volume of foot traffic. David DePoe took the idea to the then City of Toronto Controller and former Mayor, Allan Lamport. Allan Lamport, along with the city's Planning Commissioner, Matthew Lawson opposed the idea. However, Allan Lamport invited the Diggers to a Talk-in with Toronto City Council on 17 August 1967. Fifty-eight hippies attended the Talk-in. David DePoe did a poor job in leading the discussions which quickly lost the objective of discussing the closure of Yorkville Avenue to antagonizing the counter culture lifestyle of the Yorkville hippie residents by Allan Lamport.

In response to this, on 20 August 1967, the Diggers, again lead by David DePoe, staged a sit-in on Yorkville Avenue. At 3:00 a.m., 300 Yorkville Residents walked into the middle of the street and sat down, blocking all traffic. Approximately another 2,500 people stood and watched, creating an even greater traffic disruption. The demonstration was peaceful, however 50 people were arrested for refusing to move when police tried to break-up the protest. David DePoe was among those arrested and was charged with creating a disturbance and obstructing traffic.

Following the sit-in, those who had not been arrested gathered in Queen's Park to regroup and discuss their next move. A spontaneous Love-in broke out in Queen's Park the next day following the release of David DePoe and others from jail.

Pressing on, the Diggers organized their next protest. On 23 August 1967 more than 150 hippies conducted a sleep-in in front of City Hall. They had hoped to greet Mayor William Dennison and confront him on the issue of the Yorkville Avenue closure. They did not get an opportunity to have that discussion with the Mayor.

It is unclear as to when exactly the campaign ended. City Hall refused to seriously consider the proposed street closure and the street was never closed to vehicular traffic.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Knowlton, Nash (Host). September 4, 1967. Yorkville: Hippie Haven (CBC News Telecast). Canada: Toronto <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/society/youth/hippie-society-the-youth-rebellion/yorkville-hippie-haven.html>

Ransen, Mort (Director) (1968) Christopher's Movie Matinee. (Motion Picture) Canada: National Film Board of Canada. http://www.nfb.ca/film/christophers_movie_matinee/

Additional Notes:

Spry, Robin. Flowers on a One-way Street. National Film Board of Canada. 1967 (not viewed)

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

Candace Lepitre, 03/03/2013

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Source URL (retrieved on 07/10/2020 - 22:05): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/toronto-hippies-campaign-street-closure-canada-1967>