



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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US Students Campaign to Stop Dow Chemical Company From Manufacturing Napalm (1967-1969)

Time period notes: Dow Chemical stopped manufacturing napalm around June 1969, however it remains unclear if student demonstrations against campus recruitment continued after this date.

February

1967

to: June

1969

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Madison, Wisconsin; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Boston, Massachusetts; Mansfield, Connecticut; etc.*

Location Description: *Campaign coordinated across major US college campuses.*

Goals:

Initially the campaign targeted Dow Chemical in a bid to get the company to stop manufacturing Napalm. This later morphed into a demand for Universities to rid campus of Dow recruiters and their connections to the military industrial complex in general.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support › Students initiated campaign with op-eds in opposition to Dow at Berkeley and U. Wisconsin.
- 038. Marches › On October 10th, 1966, first action of campaign takes place with a march against Dow at UC Berkeley

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches › Activists organized a speaking event at a Dow board meeting to convince them of the harm Napalm was causing.
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Leaflets recruit students for actions against Dow, including board speeches.

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 050. Teach-ins › Students took over Dow recruitment location and staged teach-in
- 162. Sit-in › Students staged a series of sit-ins at the recruitment center for Dow at U. Wisconsin-Madison in 1967

Methods in 4th segment:

- 032. Taunting officials › Protesters at several campuses targeted Dow recruiters by blockading them into offices; tactic also used against administrators.

Methods in 5th segment:

- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance › Later on in the campaign, attempts were made at drawing connections across the activist left and including intersectionality by advocating resistance for other protest groups.

Methods in 6th segment:

- 089. Severance of funds and credit › The last stage of the campaign involved advocating for University divestment from Dow and other companies engaged in the military-industrial complex

Notes on Methods:

While generally nonviolent and dedicated to civil disobedience, the second sit in of a Dow recruitment center at U Wisconsin marked the first case of violence in the student movement against the Vietnam war, in which protesters retaliated to police violence with rock-throwing, spitting and name calling.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Peace

Group characterization:

- Undergraduate and graduate students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Students for a Democratic Society, Student Peace Union

Partners:

The National Committee of Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam

External allies:

Some University faculty members

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Student Peace Union

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Students for a Democratic Society

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- The National Committee of Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Students for a Democratic Society (Exit)

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: Campaign length: 2 years. Segment length: 4 months.

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Dow Chemical Company, University Administrators, local police

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Public relations campaign by Dow to counter news reports and statements issued by protesters.

Campaigner violence:

Spontaneous and non-sanctioned violence, including rock throwing and spitting, in retaliation to violent police response at October 1967 sit-in at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Repressive Violence:

Beatings by police in response to October 1967 sit-in at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, first noted incidence of violence at a student protest against the Vietnam war.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

While the campaign failed to directly stop Dow from manufacturing Napalm or end recruitment on campuses, Dow lost their contract with the government in June 1969. The campaign effectively stigmatized the company, and whether or not they lost their contract for this reason remains unclear. Additionally, while the instrumental goals were not achieved, social change was insofar as intense national media coverage was focused on the campaign. While growth in such a national context is hard to measure, the campaign clearly spread to campuses across the US, indicating cohesive growth.

The United States first used Napalm as an incendiary device in Japan during WWII. It melted flesh and produced horrific wounds. Napalm once again took on a functional role for the US in Vietnam, and the government requested bids from chemical manufacturing companies to make Napalm in 1965. Dow Chemical, based out of Midland, Michigan, won the contract.

In January 1967, Rampart magazine published color photographs of mutilated Vietnamese napalm victims, cementing napalm's reputation as an

unethical tool in the arsenal of US military tactics. This was a culmination of images of brutal napalm effects that had been flooding into the US news stream during the previous year and a half.

Students for a Democratic Society launched the campaign to get DOW to stop manufacturing Napalm with a rally at the corporation's headquarters on 8 August 1966. Dow responded that they had no say in the execution of military orders and were only fulfilling their duty to country by signing the contract. In October 1966, Students at the University of California Berkeley held the first campus demonstrations in the form of a rally and march against Dow Chemical and its napalm production. This demonstration sparked a wave of national campaigns against Dow and its recruitment practices on college campuses. Movement leaders demanded that colleges divest from DOW and end its recruitment on campus. Initially, the campaign was organized by Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Peace Union.

In the fall of 1967, students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison launched a series of sit-ins at Dow recruitment offices on campus. At the second sit-in, in October 1967, administrators called in police, who beat demonstrators with clubs. Students returned the violence with stone throwing, spitting and name calling directed at the police. Seventy-five protesters and 10 police officers were injured in the first recorded incidence of violence at a campus protest against the Vietnam war. Elsewhere across the US, student and faculty organized teach-ins and blockades against Dow recruitment. Organizers at Harvard blockaded a Dow recruiter in an office for 7 hours, and similar such stories were commonplace on campuses across the US. In response to these tactics, Dow launched a public image campaign aimed at countering the narrative of the protesters and analyzed student organizing before sending recruiters to campuses.

Organizers with the Student Peace Union and the National Committee of Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam organized a lecture to the Dow Board on 6 May 1968, hoping that what they considered was a thoughtful demonstration of the effects of napalm would convince board members to discontinue their contract. Internal division among the organizers over tactics became apparent however during the planning process with students advocating for more coercive tactics of civil disobedience than persuasive ones. In the end, the board voted to renew the contract. As 1969 began, burnout and infighting in student groups across the country, including Students for a Democratic Society, is reported to have led to disarray and a loss of momentum.

In June 1969, Dow lost its bid to continue manufacturing napalm for the U.S. government, and ceased to produce the chemical. Despite this development, student protesters continued to target Dow for its manufacture of other devices used in the deployment of napalm and other weapons in Vietnam. Organizers shifted the campaign tone in a way that

aimed specifically at getting universities to sever ties with the military industrial complex as a whole by cutting off recruitment and selling endowment investments in Dow chemical. Neither demands were met, and Dow reported that its recruitment numbers remained stable throughout this period. While the campaign failed to meet its goals of divestment and an end to recruiting, Dow did lose its contract. The campaign against Dow continued past June 1969, merging with the larger Vietnam war protest movement aimed at severing university ties with companies engaged in the war effort.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not known

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