



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Vancouver activists campaign for national social housing strategy (Red Tent Campaign), 2010

15 February

2010

to: 28 February

2010

Country: Canada

Location City/State/Province: *Vancouver*

Location Description: *Downtown Eastside*

Goals:

The goals of this campaign included raising awareness of the lack of social housing in Vancouver, convincing the Conservative government to proceed with a National Social Housing Policy, and to raise awareness of the government's broken promises of an Olympic Housing legacy.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Red Tents
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 038. Marches
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Red Tents
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Red Tents
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Red Tents
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 5th segment:

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Red Tents
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Red Tents
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Wrapping the Canada Pavilion in red banners
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Social activists
- urban homeless

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Pivot Legal Society- executive director John Richardson, Am Johal- Spokesperson

Partners:

City Wide Housing Coalition

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Joseph Arvay - Lawyer

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:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Joining order not known

Segment Length: 2 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Vancouver City Council, Councillor Kerry Jang, Mayor Greg Robertson

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

During the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, with the entire world watching, the Pivot Legal Society and the City Wide Housing Coalition held a nonviolent campaign. This campaign was an attempt to put pressure on the federal government to establish a National Social Housing Policy, to raise awareness of the magnitude of homelessness in Vancouver and to expose the government's failure to keep their promise of an Olympic housing legacy.

The Province of British Columbia along with Olympic organizers (VANOC) made a plan before the Games to convert the temporary housing built specifically for the Olympics to 252 affordable rental apartments dispersed throughout the province for those at most risk for homelessness. Due to financial difficulties, the number of rental housing units was cut down to 156 and the project was delayed. Canada was the only member of the G8 that did not have a federal housing plan in place, and it showed through the estimated 300,000 homeless across Canada. The Pivot Legal Society reported that 1,448 units of social housing closed in Vancouver after winning the right to host the Olympics. The 2010 Games led to an increase in homelessness and a decrease in affordable and social housing due to gentrification (renovations causing living costs to rise) and 'cleaning out' neighborhoods in order to maintain a good image for the Games.

In order to attract attention to the magnitude of the homelessness problem in Vancouver and to put pressure on the government to establish a federal social housing plan, Pivot Legal Society spoke with the City of Vancouver in January 2010 about distributing 500 bright red tents to the Vancouver homeless. These red tents bore slogans like 'Housing is a Right!' and 'End

Homelessness Now!' These tents were also used in order to provide shelter for all those left homeless partially due to the neglect they faced by the government leading up to the Games.

Because a B.C Supreme Court ruling in 2008 ended the anti-camping bylaws that would not allow tent dwellings in public areas in the city, there was not much that the city of Vancouver could do to rid the streets of these red protesting camps, despite extensive efforts. Originally, the bylaw was put in place because the homelessness problem in B.C. was said to be going against Canada's 'right to life' and 'right to shelter'. The city's efforts to find a loophole in this bylaw that allowed for tent dwellings in public areas failed and were ineffective in stopping this campaign. The city councillor Kerry Jang did not express support of this campaign, blaming Pivot Legal Society for exploiting the homeless for their own self-gain through a Public Relations initiative.

Nonetheless, on February 15, 2010, hundreds of people came to Pigeon Park in a troubled Vancouver neighborhood. Elaine Derocher from 'Power of Women' spoke on solutions to homelessness while the group set up an 'Olympic Tent City' in the area for the homeless. Native elders then led a march through the neighborhood while beating their hand drums, arriving at the 'Olympic Tent City'.

The campaigners then distributed 500 tents throughout the Downtown Eastside. Their campaign also included handing out leaflets, activists sleeping alongside the homeless in Red Tents, concerts, street theatre, marches and hunger strikes. On February 21, 2010, hundreds of people showed up at the Vancouver Art Gallery with signs that read 'The People Say: Build Homes Now!', 'Homes Not Games' and 'End Poverty, it's not a Game'.

The last Red Tent Olympic action happened during the last weekend of February 2010, where hundreds of activists gathered at the Canada Pavilion to wrap it in 142 red banners announcing that housing is a right. Bill C-304, which called for a federal housing strategy, was not passed by the Conservative government. This campaign did not achieve their goal in seeing Bill C-304 being passed. However, awareness of the homeless problem in Canada was raised, and Liberal and NDP politicians began to grow their support of the bill.

The Red Tent Olympic campaign ended with the closing of the Olympics in Vancouver, as the efforts of the campaign was geared towards raising awareness on a global scale during the Olympics. However, the Red Tent advocates have now decided to continue in their struggle all across Canada, with smaller scale actions starting again after the closing of the Olympic campaign.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Source URL (retrieved on 09/15/2019 - 12:56): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/vancouver-activists-campaign-national-social-housing-strategy-red-tent-campaign-2010>

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