Venezuelans seize service vehicles, force neighborhood upgrade in Caracas, 1981

19 December
1981
to: Late January
1982

Country: Venezuela

Location City/State/Province: 23 de Enero neighborhood in Caracas

Goals:
To force the city government to remove trash from 23 de Enero and renovate its aging infrastructure.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

• 171. Nonviolent interjection » Blocking truck until its driver gives it up.
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 2nd segment:

• 171. Nonviolent interjection » Blocking truck until its driver gives it up.
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 3rd segment:

• 171. Nonviolent interjection » Blocking truck until its driver gives it up.
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 4th segment:

• 171. Nonviolent interjection » Blocking truck until its driver gives it up.
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 5th segment:

• 171. Nonviolent interjection » Blocking truck until its driver gives it up.
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 6th segment:

• 171. Nonviolent interjection » Blocking truck until its driver gives it up.
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):
Classifications

Classification:
Change

Cluster:
Economic Justice
Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Guerrilla Veterans
- Women
- Youth

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Residents of 23 de Enero neighborhood

Partners:
Not known

External allies:
Not known

Involvement of social elites:
President Luis Herrera Campins

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:
- Guerrilla Veterans
- Youth
- Women

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: Approximately 6 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence
In 1981, a poorly coordinated attempt to privatize waste collection services left the neighborhood el 23 de Enero, the site of Venezuela’s largest public housing project, and other neighborhoods in Caracas without waste collection for weeks. El 23 de Enero was filled with piles of rotting trash that threatened a public health crisis.

On 19 December 1981, Earles Gutierrez, his brother, and two friends used nonviolent action to bring attention to the trash problem in 23 de Enero. They stopped a garbage truck driving through el 23 de Enero by stepping out into the street in front of it. Gutierrez then forcefully, but without threatening injurious force, took control of the vehicle and told the driver to go to the police station to report the hijacking.

Before the police arrived, the youths knocked on doors calling on neighbors to join their action. When the police arrived, they found a crowd of mostly women surrounding the garbage truck demanding that the city clean up the neighborhood.

A few hours later, Caracas waste management sent a crew of 35 workers to clean up the neighborhood. The residents maintained they would only return the truck, undamaged, after the neighborhood was completely cleaned.

Residents of the neighborhood, including youth, women, and ex-guerrillas, continued to take possession of garbage trucks driving through el 23 de Enero by staging nonviolent blockades and surrounding the trucks until the drivers agreed to give up their vehicles to the community. By 21 December, they had control over four trucks that they kept surrounded day and night for the next month so the city could not take them back.

They now demanded that the government clean up the neighborhood by Christmas and renovate the neighborhood’s aging infrastructure. The protests gained sympathetic front-page coverage from the national media. President Luis Herrera Campins supported the residents of 23 de Enero and ordered public service agencies to clean up the neighborhood on 23 December.

Other neighborhoods in Caracas that had also been denied waste collection began to threaten protest in the same manner as 23 de Enero.

After holding the trucks for a month, on 19 January 1982, community members—youth, guerrilla veterans, and stay-at-home women—met with high-level officials of various public service institutions in an elementary school to discuss the problem. At the end of the meeting, the officials had agreed to meet the residents’ demands and devote their resources to cleaning up the neighborhood.
Within days, public workers began removing tons of trash from the neighborhood, repaving roads, fixing elevators, rewiring power lines, and installing phone service. The successful campaign led to a shift in emphasis of public service in Venezuela politics.

Research Notes

Influences:

Guerrilla struggles in Venezuela influenced this campaign. (1)

Sources:


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

Jonathan White, 13/03/2013

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