



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Australian citizens force end to nation's military participation in Vietnam War through Vietnam Moratorium Campaign 1970-1971

Time period notes: *Australian citizens protested the Vietnam War prior to the dates of this case. This case focuses solely on the Vietnam Moratorium Campaign (VMC) and the change that occurred due to these mass anti-war mobilizations.*

The VMC was founded in November 1969. The chosen start and end dates are representative of the first and last moratorium marches of the campaign. The goals of the campaign were not completely fulfilled until December 1972, when the conscription act was suspended.

8 May

1970

to: 1 June

1971

Country: Australia

Location City/State/Province: Melbourne, Victoria and Sydney, New South Wales

Location Description: *Anti-war protests occurred throughout Australia, but the major moratorium marches occurred in Melbourne, Victoria and Sydney, New South Wales.*

Goals:

To withdraw Australian and foreign troops from Vietnam and repeal the National Service Act of 1964.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 023. Destruction of own property › Burning draft cards
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 036. Performances of plays and music › La Mama Theatre performance.
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

- 138. Sitdown
- 162. Sit-in
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 038. Marches
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 162. Sit-in
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 038. Marches
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 162. Sit-in
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Peace

Group characterization:

- Anti-War activists
- Australian citizens

- Parliamentary Opposition
- academics
- religious groups
- trade unionists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Victorian Committee for International Co-operation and Disarmament

Partners:

Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament, Campaign for Peace in Vietnam (SA), Queensland Peace Council for International Co-operation and Disarmament

External allies:

Not known.

Involvement of social elites:

Labor Party MP Dr. Jim Cairns, Graeme Blundell, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Dr. Jim Cairns
- Victorian Committee for International Co-operation and Disarmament

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 40 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Menzies Government, Gorton Government, McMahon Government, Whitlam Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

No nonviolent responses of opponent.

Campaigner violence:

Some campaigners argued with a uniformed Nazi in Brisbane. Punches were thrown, but this violence occurred in the heat of the moment and was not sanctioned by VMC.

Repressive Violence:

Police arrests during marches.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

While all Australian troops were withdrawn from Vietnam by 1972, foreign troops remained until Saigon was captured by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in April 1975. The National Service Act of 1974 was successfully suspended in December 1972.

Australian citizens offered little opposition to their country's early involvement in the Vietnam War. Opposition came from groups like Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC), founded in 1964, and [Save our Sons \(SOS\)](#) [2], founded in 1965. Other early dissenters included: trade unionists, religious groups, and those affected by the National Service Act.

Public discontent towards the war mounted after the Menzies Government passed the National Service Act in November 1964. The legislation required all Australian men to register with the Department of Labour and National Service (DLNS) when they turned twenty years old. In May 1965, the Menzies Government amended The Defence Act of 1903 to include national service overseas. The following May, Australia expanded its Vietnam task force, prompting the need for conscripts in the war. Between 1964 and 1972, over 800,000 men registered with DLNS.

Influenced by the 1969 Moratorium in the United States, the Victorian Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament (VICD) founded the Vietnam Moratorium Campaign (VMC) in November 1969. The campaign responded to the Mai Lai massacre in Vietnam and the defeat of the Australian Labor Party in the 1969 election. Labor Party Member of Parliament (MP), Dr. Jim Cairns, led the VMC, which was comprised of union, pacifist, and student groups.

VMC formed an interstate alliance with the Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament, the Campaign for Peace in Vietnam (SA), and the Queensland Peace Council for International Co-operation and Disarmament. The VMC aimed to withdraw Australian and foreign troops from Vietnam and repeal the National Service Act. Ken Mcleod, one of the VMC organizers, believed that success could only be attained if the campaign became "the biggest manifestation of anti-war feeling ever seen in this country."

The first action of the VMC occurred on 8 and 9 May 1970. The 8 May march happened four days after the Kent State University shooting in the United States, eliciting fear in many Australian protesters. Liz Jackson, a protester, later recalled that she and her boyfriend planned to "dress smartly in the youthfully naive hope that this might lessen the conservative antipathy to anti Vietnam War protesters." Students, public servants, unionists, children, and veterans participated in the VMC marches.

Over 200,000 Australians protested across the country and approximately 100,000 citizens participated in the Melbourne march. Nearly 1,000 police officers kept watch over the Melbourne protesters, but no arrests occurred. Jim Cairns delivered a speech at the Treasury Gardens and protesters marched through the streets displaying anti-war posters and chanting anti-Vietnam war slogans. Street plays also took place at various locations; for instance, La Mama Theatre performed in the Melbourne City Square in May. In opposition, pro war protesters from Adelaide threw burning Viet Cong flags into crowds of VMC marchers.

In some states, like Queensland, protest proved difficult because the government banned public demonstrations. In Sydney, more than 40,000 people demonstrated in front of Town Hall. Sit-down and sit-in demonstrations, in which people occupied the streets, occurred as part of the VMC. The initial marchers succeeded in gaining the attention of government officials and pro war supporters. Donald Horne, a prominent pro war supporter, described the Sydney march as a "sight that many of those present

expected to remember for the rest of their lives, a peaceful crowd of 25,000 sitting down in front of Sydney Town Hall.”

The other action of VMC occurred on 18 September 1970 and 1 June 1971. 50,000 people participated in the 18 September Melbourne march. The September Sydney march was smaller than the May march but ended with more repressive violence by the police, who arrested approximately 200 protesters. In response to the violence, Jim Cairns stated, “there must be freedom to break the law, when we know the law is bad. We must have freedom to express opinion contrary to the ruling opinion.”

Many major cities closed during the June marches, such as Melbourne where 100,000 people protested, often flying North Vietnamese and Viet Cong flags; some protesters observed conflict between pro-Vietnam and anti-Vietnam marchers. Marches took place across Australia and some demonstrators clashed with police and broke through blockades. For example, in Adelaide, demonstrators marched through Rundle Street to protest police and 38 arrests occurred. Violent and graphic news coverage of the war fueled anti-conscription sentiment in Australia and helped make the moratorium rallies the largest protests in Australian history.

In August 1971, the Australian Prime Minister, William McMahon, officially announced he would lead a campaign to withdraw all troops from Vietnam. McMahon followed through, and between November 1970 and December 1971, battalions that completed their tours were not replaced; however, a small advisory force remained in Vietnam.

The Whitlam Government suspended The National Service Act in December 1972. Most troops returned to Australia by December 1972. In 1973, America signed a peace agreement with North Vietnam, and by 1965, the United States withdrew all its troops. Of the men registered with DLNS, 60,000 served in the army and over 15,000 served in Vietnam. The VMC achieved its goals of Australian withdrawal from the Vietnam War and suspension of conscription.

Research Notes

Influences:

Australian citizens were influenced by the 1969 Moratoriums in the United States. (1)

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Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>

[2] <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/australian-women-protest-conscription-during-vietnam-war-save-our-sons-sos-1965-1972>