



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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New Mexico prisoners strike for increased rights, United States, 1971

6 October

1971

to: 7 October

1971

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Albuquerque, New Mexico*

Goals:

Increase prison reforms and inmate education programs, reduce restrictions on inmates' movement

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 102. Prisoners' strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 102. Prisoners' strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 102. Prisoners' strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 4th segment:

- 102. Prisoners' strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 5th segment:

- 032. Taunting officials
- 063. Social disobedience
- 102. Prisoners' strike

Methods in 6th segment:

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- prisoners

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Penitentiary of New Mexico inmates

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 8 hours*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Warden Felix Rodriguez, correctional officers, penitentiary administrators

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known; while the prisoners destroyed property they did not cause harm to other persons

Repressive Violence:

Correctional officers attacked inmates with clubs and tear gas

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

In August 1967, New Mexico governor David Cargo appointed J.E. Baker a reform-minded and rehabilitation-focused administrator, as the Penitentiary of New Mexico's warden. Through his time as warden, Baker implemented a number of changes in the prison's operating power structure, building direct ties and internal structure with inmates while diminishing the authoritarian power of correctional officers (COs). During this time, Baker also allowed the growth of inmate programs to improve educational and social skills.

Officers and administrators who favored the older system of discipline and custodial authority criticized Baker's reforms for the breakdown of authority structures between COs and inmates. On February 1970, Baker resigned as warden, and Felix Rodriguez took his place, slowing the process of prison reform and reinstating some of the authority COs had lost under Baker.

On 6 October 1971, inmates commenced a work and hunger strike, demanding the return of reforms and reduced restrictions on inmates. Rodriguez refused to address the inmates' demands as a collective, instead stating that he would listen to complaints on an individual basis, which the inmates refused. On 7 October, officers announced an ultimatum for the strike to end by 11 a.m. the next day, 8 October. In response, also on 7 October, inmates began to riot, destroying property in the dormitories. While the campaigners themselves were not violent towards other people, the COs responded by using clubs and tear gas to stop the property destruction by the prisoners. The one and a half hour riot also caused the destruction of \$65,000 worth of prison property. Following the suppression on that day, the prisoners ended their work and hunger strike.

In the months after the event, a number of guards were indicted for brutality against the Prison of New Mexico inmates. Rodriguez began a return to Baker's track for rehabilitation through inmate programs and building connections to inmate administrators. This did, however, lead to demoralization and apathy among the prison's custodial authorities.

Research Notes

Sources:

Colvin, Mark. *The Penitentiary in Crisis: From Accommodation to Riot in New Mexico*. Albany: State University of New York, 1992.

Colvin, Mark. "The 1980 New Mexico Prison Riot." <http://www.radford.edu/~junnever/articles/prison.htm>

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

Fatimah Hameed, 17/05/2013

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