



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Turkmen senior citizens campaign against pension cuts, 2006

Time period notes: *The actual end date is unknown, but I found no further protests or actions documented in this campaign. Specific dates for actions were difficult to come by.*

February

2006

to: April

2006

Country: Turkmenistan

Location City/State/Province: Turkmenbashi

Location Description: *Cities throughout Turkmenistan, most notably in Turkmenbashi*

Goals:

To undo the changes to Turkmenistan's pension system and raise pensions to their original higher level.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Notes on Methods:

There was news of "protests" occurring throughout the country, but no specific details, especially after the initial excitement had quieted down.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Senior citizens

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Specific 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:

- Turkmen senior citizens

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 1 week

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Turkmenistan government under President Saparmurat Niyazov

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:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

0 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although the campaign did not effect immediate change, one year later, the new president, Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, undid the changes to the pension system.

Turkmenistan is a country in Asia, located north of Iran and Afghanistan, with a population of approximately 6 million. President Saparmurat Niyazov came to power after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and remained in power until late 2006. Under Niyazov's rule, Turkmenistan's economy declined, with frequent food shortages and mass unemployment. Because of the repressive nature of the regime, protests against the authoritarian government were few and far in between.

However, on January 25, 2006, President Niyazov introduced budgetary reforms that sparked small-scale protests throughout the entire country. The bill cut pensions entirely for 100,000 of the 400,000 listed pensioners, while reducing the amount paid to the rest of the pensioners by about one-third. This meant a loss to pensioners of, on average, \$40 USD per month. The reforms also reduced sick and maternity leave benefits by 20%. These changes would affect entire families, as mass unemployment (unofficial figure of 80%) meant that the pensions from a family's elders were often their main sources of income. Niyazov claimed that the cuts resulted from errors in the national census concerning farm workers.

The pension cut announcement caused several elderly citizens, all in their 60's, to collapse and require hospitalization. However, the announcement also stirred others to action. Pensioners met in private to consider their options, and over 300 people met in public to discuss the issue. Women took to the streets to beg and sell what belongings they had. Many prepared to protest the reform, as they no longer had anything to lose. In early February, pensioners staged protests in the Ilyaly and Kunya-Urgench districts of northern Dashoguz province. On February 6, in the town of Turkmenbashi, pensioners marched on the local administration, and some even committed suicide in protest.

In response to media reports about the demonstrations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement that criticized the Russian media for distributing "deliberately perverted" information and "twisting facts." The Ministry claimed that Turkmen citizens were well taken care of with such benefits as free gas, electricity, drinking water, and salt. However, the statement did not directly address the negative effects of the pension cuts.

Due to the authoritarian government's tight control on media coverage, there was little further documentation on the actions of the campaigners. However, one year later, in February 2007, Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov became president after the death of President Niyazov. Berdymukhamedov restored the original pension levels and introduced new state benefits, such as one-time payments for each newborn baby and maternity benefits. The minimum pension is now \$12 USD each month.

Research Notes

Sources:

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