



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Philadelphian gay rights activists stage first sit-in at Dewey's restaurant, 1965

Time period notes: *The time period for this specific action is limited to six days because it was the result a spontaneous response to an isolated case of discrimination against gays and lesbians in particular and radicals in general. It was supported by the Janus Society, which brought the people and resources (pamphlets, etc) to make an effective protest possible, but it was considered separate from the larger homophile movement that took off only a few months afterward that included protests in front of Independence Hall only several blocks away called Annual Reminders.*

April 25

1965

to: May 2

1965

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Location Description: A diner in Center City, Philadelphia

Goals:

After the protest demonstrations ended the newsletter from the Janus Society reported that they had achieved four central goals: "(1) to bring about an immediate cessation to all indiscriminate denials of service, (2) to prevent additional arrests, (3) to assure the homosexual community that (a) we were concerned with the day-to-day problems and (b) we were prepared to intercede in helping to solve these problems, (4) to create publicity for the organization and our objectives."

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 016. Picketing

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 016. Picketing

Methods in 4th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

- 016. Picketing

Methods in 5th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 016. Picketing

Methods in 6th segment:

- 162. Sit-in

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 013. Deputations › Janus Society leaders met with management

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- gay and lesbian rights activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Clark Polak (journalist, editor of magazine DRUM, and gay rights leader of Philadelphia); Gay rights activists of the Janus Society

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Three Teenagers that were denied service; Clark Polak
- journalist;

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Three Teenagers (Exit); Gay rights activists of the Janus Society of Delaware County

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Dewey's Restaurant Management & Staff

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None

Campaigner violence:

None

Repressive Violence:

None

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The rating on the outcomes is based on the limited analysis of this particular action at Dewey's restaurant, in which those who protested were able to gain back their service at the diner, and the Janus Society was able fulfill the 4 goals it had stated it had wished to achieve through the action. This is not a rating on the Janus Society's success, survival, or growth as a part of the national homophile movement that surrounded this event both before and after it happened.

Due to "a small group of rowdy teenagers," the managers of the restaurant Dewey's on 17th Street in Center City, Philadelphia decided to begin to refuse service to those patrons that were exhibiting "improper behavior." This decision was expanded by some employees to mean "homosexuals and persons wearing non-conformist clothing," which, on April 25th, 1965, resulted in the refusal of service to over 150 people. Two teenage boys and one teenage girl proceeded to refuse to leave the premises when they were denied service. They, along with Clark Polak, a gay-rights leader in Philadelphia and editor of the LGBT-interest magazine DRUM who offered to find the youth a lawyer, were arrested and found guilty for disorderly conduct.

In the next week, the Janus Society, a Philadelphian homophile organization that began in the early 1960s as a more woman-oriented version of the Los Angeles/San Francisco based Mattachine Society that began in the 1950s, intervened in the protest by providing people and pamphlets to continue the protest against Dewey's. Over the next 5 days, the original sit-in of the three teenagers served as an impetus for a "protest demonstration", during which gay rights activists associated with Janus distributed over 1,500 pieces of literature in front of the restaurant while gay movement leaders negotiated demands with the management of the diner. On May 2nd, 1965, 7 days after the original sit-in, three people staged a second sit-in at the diner as a culminating

attempt to ensure that the demands were met. At this demonstration no one was arrested. The police arrived at the diner and determined that they had no authority to force them to leave, and after an hour of holding the sit-in, the managers gave in to the negotiations.

The newsletter of the Janus Society later reported that among the list of the action's successes was "an immediate cessation to all indiscriminate denials of service." DRUM magazine noted that this was "the first sit-in of its kind in the history of the United States" referring to the fact that it was the first documented instance in which a sit-in was held in support of the rights of gays, lesbians, and "non-conformists". It was a stark rejection of the prior stance of other homophile organizations, such as Mattachine, that had built up its reputation on appearing "presentable" and "employable." The support of the Janus Society for those who dressed in a non-conformist manner, such as masculine women and feminine men, preempted this division that would continue throughout the homophile movement.

Research Notes

Influences:

According to Marc Stein, the Dewey's sit-in can be readily associated with the political protest climate of the 1960s, best demonstrated by the black freedom struggle, New Left youth rebellion, and anti-war mobilization which included the anti-racist sit-in movement that began with the 1960 Woolworth's lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro, N.C. It was also significantly influenced and supported by the national homophile movement that began in the 1950s in Los Angeles and San Francisco. In the mid 60s, right around the time of the Dewey's sit-in, the homophile organizations began direct action campaigns.

Sources:

Stein, Marc. *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972*. Temple University Press, 2004.

Stein, Marc. "The First Gay Sit-In". May 9, 2005. <http://hnn.us/articles/11652.html>

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

Alex Frye 30/01/2011

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[1] <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/local-community-or-neighborhood-level-campaign>