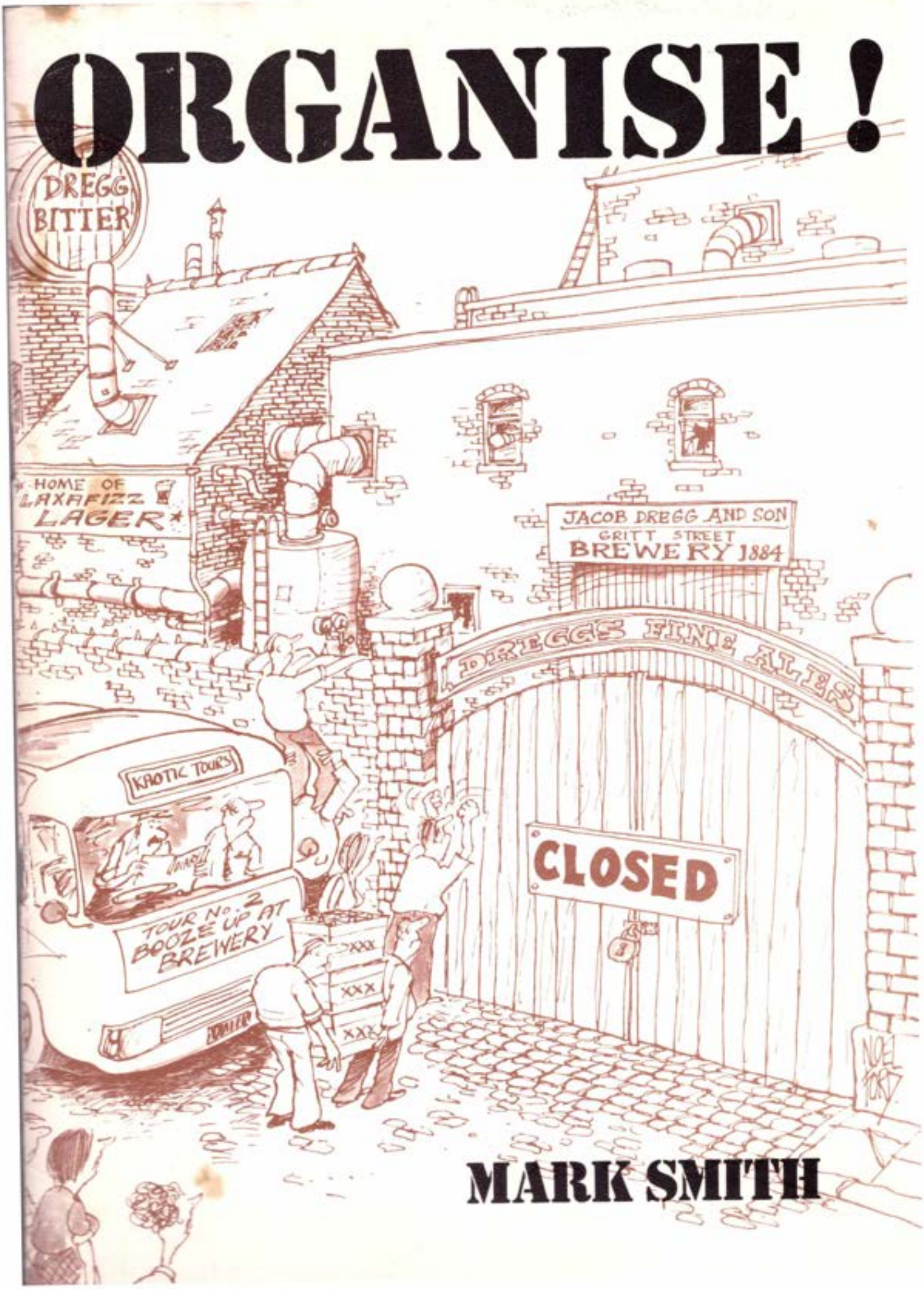
ORGANISE !



MARK SMITH

ORGANISE!

A guide to practical politics for youth and community groups.

NAYC Publications

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ORGANISE!

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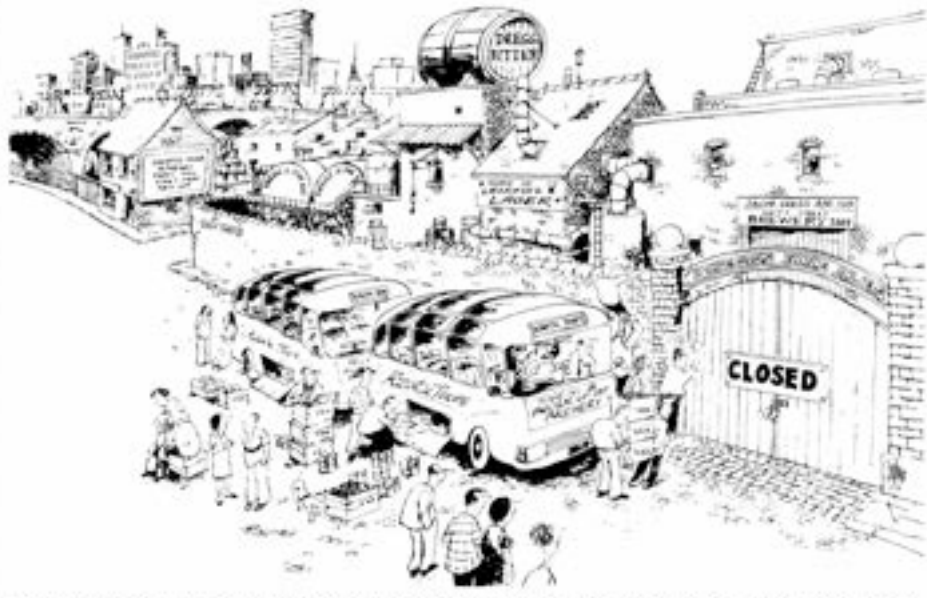
WHY ORGANISE?



People get involved in community action and politics for a whole range of reasons. Mostly what sparks people off is concern about something that has happened or is about to happen. It might be as simple as the fact that you've grown tired of getting wet waiting for buses and are trying to get a bus shelter at your stop. Or it might be anger at the continuing cutbacks in government services or the high level of unemployment.

As individuals we have, (or **feel** we have), little chance or power to get things changed. Most people do not have any real power over what happens in society, they can't influence decision makers. To get power for yourselves, to be able to make people listen to what you are saying involves organisation, information and **acting collectively.** Working together gives you strength and makes more things possible - the jobs can be shared, aims can be more ambitious and your knowledge greater.

Politics often involves only small gains or failure. In writing this book I spoke to a wide variety of people involved in community action and politics. One of the strongest feelings that came across was that whilst the odds are heavily stacked against success, people felt it was still really important to work for the changes they believed in. There was always the hope of some success. Frequently people talked about the personal things they got from taking action - a sense of group solidarity and friendship where none had existed, increased confidence in their views and abilities and enjoyment in doing something worthwhile.

The ideas and techniques talked about in Organise! are concerned with how you can get the power either to do things for yourselves or to make "decision-makers" take your views into account. I have tried to show a way of organising that is:-

democratic - where jobs and leadership are shared

personal - it isn't just that people's feelings are of crucial importance in how successful you are, but also that political forces find expression in our personal lives, for instance, in our own sexism and racism. I have therefore tried to say a bit about the way we can do things in groups that keeps our own feelings and prejudices on the agenda

practical - the book is based on what people have actually done - there is nothing untried or speculative in these ideas and techniques.

Lastly, I would be very pleased to hear from people with any ideas/comments/criticisms about the book. We have printed a fairly small number of copies in the hope that people's further comments can be incorporated into the second edition.

Mark Smith

How to use Organise!

Organise! is a handbook - it is not meant to be read from cover to cover, but for people to look at the bit they need at that moment.

From the list on this page you will see the book is split up into three main sections. **Getting started** looks at the sort of things that make for effective working groups.

Information is power outlines the main points about getting information for your campaign.

Taking action provides a step by step guide to the main techniques of political action.

At the end of each section there is a listing of useful resources.

In the main, the book has been arranged so that you read first about the things you need to know and do first. Readers are strongly recommended to look at "Getting started" and the opening part of section 3 - "A question of tactics". Whilst people might find these parts a bit heavy going, many of the essential points about organising are in these pages.

On page 71 there is a complete index to the book.

GETTING STARTED

INFORMATION IS POWER

TAKING ACTION

GETTING STARTED

This first section is about working and making decisions in small groups. It will be of use to existing groups and committees and to people who are just getting started. The way of working talked about here tries to be:

Democratic - leadership is shared amongst all members of the group. The group as a whole is seen as being responsible for what happens.

Practical - rather than starting with constitutions and structures we begin with what you actually want to do and so let structures etc grow out of taking action.

Personal - feelings and emotions are a really important part of the way a group works. Too many groups try to ignore them and fail as a result.

Active - it's there to help you **do** things rather than sit around and just talk about them.

There are twelve parts to this section. In each part you will find a short explanation of why the point is important and ideas and hints about how you can go about improving the way your group works. On page 19 there are details of books and people that can give you further help.

Be clear about what the group is there to do

You can waste a lot of time and energy by not having a clear idea of why the group has got together. Giving a group only a hazy outline of their job is a certain way of creating arguments and bitterness. It isn't just that being unclear slows you up. It also stops people from offering their help. People want to know what they are letting themselves in for.

Three "rules" can help you avoid troubles:-

* When starting have a clear idea of the problem but not a detailed plan.
* Know what powers the group has.
* Think about what commitment members will have to give.

A clear idea not a detailed plan

If you are trying to get people to join a group or to convince a committee that they should look at a particular problem, you are more likely to be successful if they understand what you are concerned about. On the other hand, if you give the impression that you know all the answers, that you have some Grand Plan up your sleeve, you have also got problems as people:-

* don't like 'know-it-alls'
* might think that if you know the answers you should go away and sort things out yourself.
* could feel inadequate. As you have the answers what can they offer?

It's the difference between saying:

"I'm really worried about young kids crossing Parkinson Road. It has got so busy that there'll be a bad accident soon unless someone does something about it"

and

"The traffic flow has trebled along Parkinson Road since they closed Woodcote Lane. We should insist that the District Council install a pelican crossing by the Post Office. The councillors should be contacted immediately"

That might be the answer but you are more likely to get people's help and sympathy if they feel, and are, involved in making the decisions. When you are starting a group try to ask the right questions rather than give the 'right' answers.

Know what powers the group has

When asking people to join a group you should explain what status the group has. For instance is it:

* **Independent.** To what extent can the group make and carry out decisions without asking other people and groups?
* **advisory.** Does the group report to another person or committee who can then take or leave your opinions?
* **for show.** Has the group got any power at all?

If the group is just for show or has little power (like some youth club members' committees) then people may want to give the whole thing up as a waste of time or fight for more power

Say what commitment is expected

Possible group members will want to know how much time they'll be expected to give to the group. Try to be realistic - remember to add on time spent doing things outside meetings. Also say what "costs" will be involved, e.g. membership fees, or less obvious things like unpopularity with other groups and friends

A checklist for getting people's help

People will respond better if what you are talking about is:

✓ **Clear** - try to put things in as concrete and commonsense a way as possible.

✓ **Important** - the problem hasn't got to be earth shattering but it has to be something that people feel it's worth doing something about.

✓ **Practical** - turning the main road into an adventure playground might seem like a good idea to you but it's not going to appeal to a lot of people.

✓ **Something they can help with** - avoid things appearing so ready made that there is no room for others help. Try asking questions rather than making statements.

✓ **Meaningful** - the group hasn't to be just for show.

✓ **Something they have time for** - the time and cost involved are going to be big factors.

✓ **Fun/exciting** - you need to appeal to people's imaginations. People need to get enjoyment out of helping for them to keep at it. That enjoyment is often the satisfaction of achieving something.

2 Get the right people

Getting the right people in the right numbers is crucial to the success of the group. Whether it is one or two people recruiting an action group, or a large association or club electing a committee, there are some basic things to look out for in making your choice.

Size of the group

If your group or committee gets too big it is difficult for everybody to have their say on an issue and the discussion of small details can be very awkward - with everybody trying to chip in. Also a lot of people are nervous of speaking in large groups. On the other hand if the group is too small you can lose out by not having a wide range of opinions and skills on tap. It also means that individual members are landed with more work.

When deciding a size for the group you have to trade these things off. For a group that has all its members highly involved the best number seems to be between 5 and 7. If you need a wide range of opinions and skills or a full representation of your membership you may have to get a few more people. Remember though that bigger groups will need careful handling if everybody is going to be able to contribute.

For very detailed bits of work such as writing a report or organising catering for an event the best group size can be as small as 2 or 3.

Who to look for

Remember you are looking for a group, not ideal individuals. What one person lacks can be compensated for by another member. It is also easy to under-estimate what people can give to the group - if people are committed and feel involved then it is surprising how quickly things can be learnt or changed. These, then, are some of the things to be looked for:

Broad agreement with your aims

As we saw in the last section there needs to be some broad agreement from the start over the problem and what you want to do about it. However broad agreement doesn't mean total agreement - it is often very creative to have differing opinions providing they are moving in the same general direction.

Readiness to work

If people aren't going to turn up to meetings or be prepared to work on behalf of the group then it's best to avoid them. There are occasional exceptions to this, for instance some groups will include someone who is well known or has a lot of influence as a figurehead so as to gain credibility.

Knowledge and skills you need

People with special knowledge and skills like book-keeping or building can often be very useful members. However don't stop at the 'professionals' - look for people who have direct experience. For instance the people who live in a block of vandalized flats probably know more about the problems of flats than the council officials responsible for them. Anyway if you are trying to change something you should always try to involve the people who are affected. Secondly don't under-estimate your own abilities - a lot of jobs, like book-keeping or writing minutes which look involved, are quite easy to learn, (there are some guidelines in this section).

Can work in a group

Some people just can't work in groups - they like to go-it-alone. Whilst members of a group have not got to be great friends they do have to be able to work together - to be able to give and take. The other half of working in groups is that members are there not just for themselves, they are there to act in the interests of the group or association as a whole. If you think someone is going to put personal interests first it is probably worth looking for somebody else.

DANGER

Handle with care

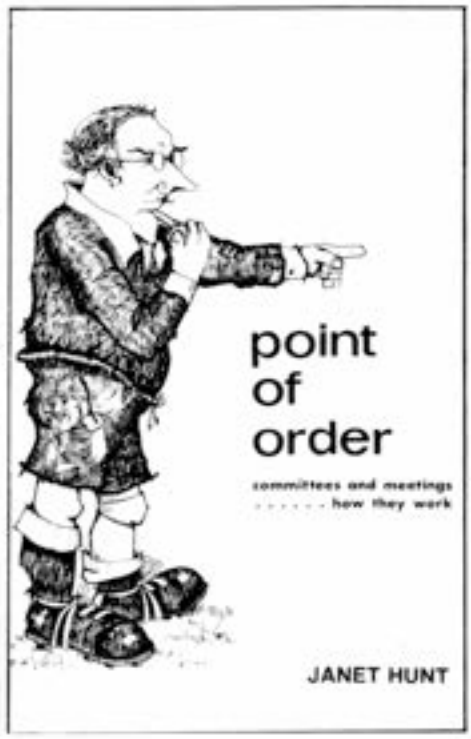
Watch out for:

experts - they often mean well but they can often take over. What you want is advice not a decision.

committee freaks - some people love sitting on committees and playing games with "Points of Order" and the like.

ego-trippers - people who put their own needs well above that of the group are not likely to give the group much.

can't say no-ers - some people can't refuse and end up with more work than they can handle. Watch how much people take on.



3

Give yourselves time to become a group

Groups are not born overnight - they have to be made and that takes time. There is a real danger of jumping in at the deep end by attempting too much, too soon. Most groups will have to go through three stages before they will work well.

STEP 1

In the beginning.....

When the group first meets it is nothing more than a set of individuals. It might be that everybody knows each other (or think they do!), or they may be stranger s to each other - whatever the case they are strangers to the group. The first priority is therefore to try and form a group. A first meeting might therefore look something like this:

Welcome

Where the people who have called the meeting introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the meeting.

5 minutes.

Introductions

Where each member tells the group a bit about themselves eg name/what they do for a living/how they see the problem and so on.

20 minutes.

The purpose of the Group

Here people need to

- get some agreement over what the problem is.
- suggest some broad aims and objectives (for possible ways of doing this see page 12). By the end of the discussion you should try to have some broad statements that everyone can agree to. Try to ensure that everyone contributes.

40 minutes

Planning future meetings

Where dates are set, a rough plan of what needs to be discussed is drawn up, the necessary jobs are taken on by people (see pages 13-16) and the sort of commitment expected from members shared.

20 minutes

It is vital that at your first meeting people are made to feel welcome and that the atmosphere is informal and friendly. Giving people a cup of coffee/tea is often a good relaxer. However don't go too far overboard with the chit-chat as it is important that people go away feeling a start has been made. Be friendly **and** businesslike.

STEP 2

Getting some early success.

If people are to remain committed to the group they need to feel that the group is **doing** something and that they can help. You should therefore aim to do something practical fairly early on - however small. It might be getting an item in the local paper, running a raffle to raise funds, or making a visit to the local Citizens Advice Bureau to get facts.

Having an early success is also important for another reason. After an initial 'honeymoon' period many groups go through a bit of a stormy patch when some of the earlier agreement is challenged. Commonly people agree on what the problem is but disagree on what to do about it. Also at first people are reluctant to tell people what they really think, but as they feel more at home in the group they will open up. Also as the existence of the group gets better known, new members are going to be joining. These people may not see the things in quite the same way as the original group and all sorts of conflict can creap in, with the founder members of the group resenting the "intrusion" of the newcomers. If the group is successfully involved in doing something practical then this is often much easier to deal with. Don't be discouraged if things do get a bit argumentative, as the outcome is often a more realistic set of aims and relationships.

STEP 3

Making yourselves working guidelines.

Once the group has got to know each other, established an atmosphere of trust, and has got a good understanding of its basic aims it can then sort out and establish an accepted way of doing things.

Also, if the group has grown, then the ways of working that were suitable for a small group of neighbours or friends are not so likely to be able to handle many of the problems that arise in bigger groups. If the group cannot get through its business then people are likely to become unhappy and leave.

The sort of things that will have to be sorted out are:

- how decisions should be taker
- how differences will be handle
- how to make sure work gets d

Many groups make the mistake of try to do these things first and end up in sorts of trouble.

Making rules and guidelines is dealt w on page 15

STEP 4

Getting on with the job.

Having got through the first three stag the group should be working well. Y will know this when the members of group:

- know and accept each other.
- feel they can achieve somethir
- agree on the main aims.
- have rules about the way they should work.

STEP 5

Curtains or.....

If the group gets what it wants then it v have to decide whether to finish or go to another issue. Similarly, if the gro finds it isn't getting anywhere, then it t will have to make a choice betwe giving up or finding another way doing things.

Many groups go on longer than th need to and so outlive their usefulne This happens because people loathe wind groups up that they have enjoy and got something from. The whc process can be made a lot easier if t group:

- reviews progress regularly (see page 18).
- has clear aims.
- ensures that its members get involved in other things.

A lot of groups use the 'end' as an opportunity for a party or evening ou which is often a good idea as it mak the winding up of the group very clear.

Should the group decide to go on the are likely to be changes and with n ideas and new people coming in it will necessary to start the cycle again.

This way of looking at the way a gro develops means that you have to p attention to:

- the task or job that the group is there to do; and
- maintaining the group by buildi trust, sorting out arguments, helping communication and so c

Effective groups have to do both.

4 Plan your meetings

All meetings should have some kind of meeting plan or agenda. In some cases the agenda or plan will have been carefully thought out beforehand, in others the agenda is not made until the start of the meeting. Whatever the case, if you don't have a meeting plan you can end up with a lot of unfinished business at the end of the meeting and discussions that go round and round in circles.

Your first step should be to decide what are the important issues that need discussion.

Deciding what is important

Start by making a list of all the things people have said they want to talk about. If you are doing your planning at the beginning of the meeting it's a good idea to write the ideas down on a big sheet of paper with a felt tip pen so that everyone can see what's happening. Give people a bit of time to think about what they'd like to see discussed.

Then try to put each idea in one of the five columns in the diagram.

Easy - This is for bits of business that are straightforward and will only take a short time to make a decision on.

Tricky - Items to go in this column are ones that you know will involve a lot of talking or argument before the group can make its mind up.

EASY	TRICKY	NEED MORE INFORMATION	NOT OUR PROBLEM	FOR INFORMATION

Need more information - Use this column for items that you need to know more about before you can take a decision. Check if people in the group have got the information needed before putting an item here as it could mean that nothing can be done until the next meeting. Always make sure that someone agrees to get the information needed for the next time.

Not our problem - It is likely that some of the items on your list are things you cannot do anything about. When this happens you should try to pass it on to the people whose job it is to deal with the problem. Again make sure a group member takes this job on.

For information - These are items that do not need a decision but that people need to know about.

Once you have got the items in the columns you can start to get an idea of what you can deal with in the meeting.

A further question you can ask is **how urgent** the issue is. Does it need a decision

* NOW?
* SOON?
* LATER?

In this way you can leave some decisions to a future meeting. However don't just make decisions because they are urgent - **it is often better to talk about what is important rather than what is urgent.**

Once you have done this it is then possible to draw up your meeting plan or agenda.

Making your agenda

On the next page you will see an example of the sort of agenda that is sent out proir to the meeting. Before looking at what each item means it is worth noting that:

* a lot of thought has gone into the order in which the items are discussed - in this case the basic business is done first, then the straighforward items, followed by the larger, tricky items. A space has been left at the end in case any urgent or new business comes up just before or during the meeting.
* each item has had a time limit put on it so that the important business gets enough discussion and the minor business remains minor.
* several of the items have reminders of their status eg. "for information" or "for decision". Against some of them are also the initials of the people who have to do things.
* a margin has been left on the right hand side so that people can record decisions and actions. Whilst looking a bit untidy it is a useful way of keeping tabs on who does what.
* those items that "need more information" are shown as items for report with peoples initials after them. This is because this agenda is sent out before the meeting so that people are reminded what they have to do.

Apologies for Absence - the names of the people who have said they could not come to the meeting, are noted.

Agenda Review - here the people who made the meeting plan explain what they have done and the group makes any changes it feels necessary. For instance, putting items into "Any Other Business". If the group is actually making the agenda at the meeting it would be done at this point, make sure that a note is made in the minutes of anybody who undertakes to find out more information etc. for the next meeting. Also if the group shares the jobs, eg who does the minutes, acts as chairperson etc., these things should be sorted out here.

Monthly meeting of Charlsford Youth Club
Members' Committee.
To be held on Wednesday 11 January 1981,
8 p.m. at the Youth Club.

AGENDA		ACTION
1. Apologies for absence	2 mins	
2. Agenda Review	5 mins	
3. Confirmation of the Minutes of the last meeting	5 mins	
4. Matters Arising from those Minutes		
a. Blackpool trip - progress report (LM)	2 mins	
b. Pool table - progress report (AS)	2 mins	
5. Correspondence (TR)	10 mins	
6. Financial Report (JT)	5 mins	
* Savings Account Trial - for decision		
7. Disco Dancing Competition- Report (LM)	5 mins	
8. County Council Cutbacks - how will they affect the club		
Report (PG)	10 mins	
Action to be taken	30 mins	
9. Any Other Business	10 mins	
10. Date of next meeting	2 mins	
11. Meeting Review	10 mins	

To Confirm the Minutes of the Last Meeting - the notes of what happened at the last meeting are either read out or if people have each got a written copy a check is made that people have read them. The group then has to agree that they are a true record of what happened and check for any mistakes. It is a good idea to let people have a written copy of the minutes a week or so before the meeting as this can both save a lot of time in the meeting and remind people of the jobs they promised to do.

Matters arising from the minutes - this is where you talk about the things in the minutes. For instance you may have decided to have a daytrip to Blackpool and left it to someone (LM) to organise - it's a good idea to check up on how things are going. Any big items like, for example, the threatened County Council cutbacks should be given an agenda spot of their own. It is helpful to list the things that are likely to arise on the meeting plan.

Correspondence - any letters the group has received are read out. Again if they are important it is best to make them a separate agenda item.

Financial Report - this is where the Treasurer says how much money you have got (or haven't got!) and what the future prospects are. In our example there is also a matter for decision - how much money to keep in a savings account.

Disco Dancing Competition - Report - an easy item that can be dealt with quickly.

County Council Cutbacks - the main item on the agenda has been given plenty of time (40 minutes). To help the discussion someone (PG) has agreed to get all the information together and to present it in a short report at the start.

Any Other Business (AOB) - here people can raise any last minute or small items.

Date of next meeting - always try to set the date of the next meeting whilst everyone is together.

Meeting Review - some groups leave five or ten minutes at the end of their meetings to talk about how things went - did they keep to time, were the discussions good and so on. This helps the group to work better next time (see page 18).

If possible people should have the agenda (with a copy of the minutes) a week or so before the meeting so that they know what is coming up and can give some thought to the issues. Also it reminds them that there actually is a meeting. In this case someone has to decide beforehand what is on the agenda from the suggestions of the committee members. In formal committees this job is usually done by the Secretary and the Chairperson - but there is no reason why other members of the group shouldn't do it.

If the group is a club committee it is helpful to put a copy of the agenda up on the noticeboard so that other members can see what is going on and can express their opinions to the committee.

A checklist of things to do before the meeting

- ✓ Book the meeting room (check heating, seating, keys/locking up after use etc.)
- ✓ Ask people what they would like to have discussed and then prepare the agenda.
- ✓ Send out the agenda (to remind people of time/place/subjects) plus any other papers they need.
- ✓ Check members have done the jobs they promised to do.
- ✓ Lay on refreshments.
- ✓ Put an agenda on the notice board so that other people can make comments (if applicable).

5 Get the right atmosphere.

Where you have your meeting can have a big effect on how productive your meeting is. You need to create an atmosphere that makes people feel comfortable and ready to work. These are some of the things to look out for:

Size

If the meeting room is big and echoing, people can feel a bit lost. A small room is often quite good because it crowds people together which makes the atmosphere informal (if it's too small you've also got problems!).

Seating

Some people like the comfort of easy chairs, other people feel that dining room chairs round a table make for a more business-like meeting (so that you have got somewhere to put your papers and to make notes). To encourage participation always put the seats round in a circle rather than in rows.

Temperature

Temperature is an important factor in the success of a meeting - if it is too cold then people's attention will wander, too hot and they doze off, too stuffy and they start getting headachy and touchy.

Noise and Interruptions

It is not a good idea to hold your meeting next door to a disco - try to find somewhere that is reasonably quiet and free from people coming in and interrupting you. For that reason try to avoid rooms that have a telephone in.

Refreshments

A cup of coffee or tea can be very welcome during a long meeting - it can make a nice break and so refresh people for the fray. It is small touches like this that make people feel more welcome and at home in a particular group. However don't try to mix refreshments with business.

Access

The meeting place has to be somewhere that people can get to easily. You also have to get into it - don't forget to check up about arrangements for collecting keys.

6 Make decisions

Making decisions in groups can often be difficult as there are often a lot of different points of view to be heard and somehow brought together. On the other hand you usually get better decisions because you have more information available and more people who feel involved in the decision. This last point is important as it is often forgotten that making decisions also involves doing what you decided.

Action groups that don't ever seem able to come to any conclusions will soon fail. Often part of the problem is that people simply don't know the basic 'do's' and 'don'ts' of making decisions. On this page we have set out the six basic stages that groups have to go through when making a decision.

STEP 1

Be clear what the problem is

It's all too easy to rush ahead and take a decision without fully understanding what the question is. It therefore makes good sense to spend some time getting clear on what the general aim or problem is and on it's important details. If you can it can be very helpful to try to write down the problem in a couple of lines. For instance:-

"The British Legion isn't going to have an old people's party this Christmas as their hall is out of action. Several members of the Pensioners' Lunch Club have asked us to run something for them this year. How should we respond to this request?"

STEP 2

Decide what information you need and make sure everyone involved in the decision gets it

The better the quality of your information - the better your decision. Your first move is to decide what information you think you need, including the views and interests of others. For instance, in the case of the old people's party you might want to know:

* how many people usually go to the party?
* is there a big demand this year for another party?
* are there any other reasons for the British Legion pulling out?
* who else might put the party on instead?
* what is involved? eg catering, cost.

and so on.

Some bits of information will be more important to get than other bits - for instance at this stage you can probably get by with rough estimates of cost and what is involved in the catering. Don't forget that peoples' feelings are an important piece of information.

If you haven't got the information then you'll have to go out and get it.

STEP 3

List the possible solutions to the problem and then look at the arguments for and against each course of action

One of the most common mistakes groups make is to start at this stage without getting clear on what the problem is or having enough information to make a decision.

There are two halves to this stage. The first is the listing of possible solutions. It is best not to talk about the solutions until you have a good list of alternatives. One way to do this is brainstorming (see page 17).

In our example you may have a list like this:

* Forget all about the party this year
* Run it ourselves
* Approach another group to see if they will run it - eg. the council, WRVS, the Residents' Association
* Run a smaller event like a sing-a-long
* Offer our hall to the British Legion

and so on.

The second half is to organise the information you have on each of the possible alternatives. As this is a fairly detailed job a good idea is to break the group up into smaller groups so as to get the work done more quickly (see page 17). Try to organise the points into three columns.

FOR: AGAINST: NEITHER

STEP 4

Choose a course of action

In some decisions, possible solutions are clear as soon as you state the problem. In others you need to go through all the steps. Many groups find that this stage is the easiest. It is often fairly simple to knock out a good number of the possible solutions and leave yourselves with just two or three alternatives which you then have to weigh up.

With the old people's party one particular solution may stand out as having a lot of things for it and not much against. For instance, if it was found that there was a big demand for the party and that the reasons for the British Legion pulling out was their temporary lack of a hall and a shortage of volunteers, then you may well agree to offer your own hall and some help on the day to the British Legion for the party. Beforehand you will have needed to decide how you make decisions, i.e. by simple majority votes/consensus/delegation (see page 16).

STEP 5

Carry it out

When you have completed your plan, you can then start to put into practice the various things that need doing. To do this in the old people's party example you will need to know:

* who is going to approach the British Legion and when
* what exactly is the group going to offer
* what is the next stage if they agree

and so on.

STEP 6

Look at what happened

This step is regularly forgotten. A lot can be learnt from looking back at what the group decided and how it worked out in practice. If something didn't work you will need to know what went wrong so that you can do something about it (see page 18).

Checklist for a good decision

A good decision

- ✓ is accepted by everyone
- ✓ makes things happen
- ✓ fits the facts/resources
- ✓ is made at the right time
- ✓ is made by the right people

7 Write up and follow up

A lot of time and argument can be saved by getting things written down. People's memories play tricks on them and groups can easily find that members have very different ideas of what happened at a meeting and what things they are supposed to be doing as a result.

What minutes are

Written notes on what happened at a meeting are usually called minutes. They should show

- where and when the meeting happened.
- who was there and who could not make it (apologies for absence).
- each agenda item with a note of any decisions taken and who was going to carry them out. Also noted are any comments or opinions that members think should be included.

If you look through the minutes on the right you will see that

- the items are short and to the point. If they are too long nobody will read them. However they should be understandable to people who were not there.
- the minutes follow the same headings and numbers as the agenda (see page10). This saves a lot of trouble.
- decisions are clearly marked - **Agreed.**
- 'who does what' is easy to see. The action column means that people can quickly see what they have to do.
- they should be fair and honest.

Minutes are usually signed at the next meeting by the chairperson once everyone has agreed that they are true (item 3 on the agenda) and kept in a special book so that there can be no argument over what was decided.

Minutes of a meeting of the Charlsford Youth Club Members' Committee held on Wednesday 11 January 1981, 8 pm at the Youth Club.

ACTION

Present: Alan Statham, Lorraine March, Terry Riggley, Jane Towers, Pauline Gatting, John Green, Paul Raynes.

1. **Apologies.**
   Apologies were received from Jenny Taylor and Clive Knowles.

2. **Agenda Review**
   The agenda was agreed providing an extra 10 minutes was given to the cutbacks discussion.
   Paul agreed to do the minutes and send out the agenda for the next meeting. Pauline would chair the meeting. PR/PG

   Items heldover to the next meeting.
   1981/82 Sports Programme - some fresh ideas needed. Closure of the Presto Coffee Bar - more facts needed on reasons why. PG/JG

3. **Minutes of the last meeting.**
   The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 1980 were agreed.

4. **Matters Arising from the Minutes.**

   a. **Blackpool trip**
   Lorraine reported that 38 people signed up for the trip and paid their deposits. The coach was booked from Townsons and would leave the club at 7.30 am on Sunday 24 January. The committee was pleased with the response and thanked LM for her work.

   b. **Pool table**
   The new cloth had been ordered and Alan hoped to fit it in a couple of weeks. AS

5. **Correspondence.**
   The only letter received concerned the proposed county cutbacks and this was a separate item.

6. **Financial Report**
   Jane said that they had £641 in the savings account and £152 in the current account - which was good for the time of year.
   Agreed - that the savings account should be kept. There had been no problem with money shortages on the current account and the extra interest was welcome JT

7. **Disco Dancing Competition**
   Lorraine reported that whilst the club team did not get anywhere in the County Finals in December they had all enjoyed themselves. The committee asked Lorraine to thank Jean Rawls for all the work she had done with the team. LM

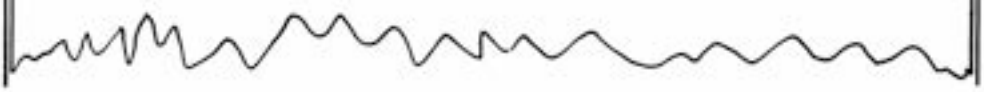
8. **County Council Cutbacks**
   County have said that they would be reducing the grant to the club from £1,200 to £800 next year (starting April 1981). PG explained that this cut seemed to be the same as what other clubs were facing. At the moment they were not going to change the number of paid leaders they allowed the club.
   Following a long discussion it was **agreed** that
   a. A plea be made to the County Youth and Community Officer not to cut the grant in view of the special needs of the club, i.e. the rebuilding work that was going on and the extra hours it was open for the unemployed during the day. Pauline would write. PG
   b. Should see if local councillors can do anything on the club's behalf. Terry and Paul will contact both the District and County Councillors. PR/TR
   c. Starting making plans in case we do need to raise the money ourselves. Look at raising subs, fund raising events etc. Jane and Alan would report to the next meeting. JT/AS

9. **Any Other Business.**
   None.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**
    11 February, 8 pm at the club. All please note.

11. **Meeting Review**
    Good Meeting - kept fairly well to time and all the things people had promised to do had been done. Discussion on cutbacks went round in circles a bit - should have tried to sort out possible actions earlier.

Meeting closed at 9.45 p.m.



How to write minutes.

Most minutes are written up after the meeting and this involves someone taking notes whilst people are speaking. One way of doing this is to:

1. Draw a line from the top to bottom of your paper to divide it in half. Write on the left hand only.

2. On each item make a note of the speaker and the topic first;

3. Then write down key words or phrases rather than what is exactly said;

4. After the meeting read through your notes and put down any extra points and comments in the right hand column; and

5. Then write your minutes.

During the meeting you will probably have to ask the group what they want to see recorded as a result of the discussion. The Secretary, particularly if they are shy, can find this difficult, but it is worth doing, not just because you get clear minutes, but it often forces the group to be clear about what it has just said.

Another way of taking minutes is to write key statements and words on a big sheet of paper with a felt tip pen as the group is working. This means that everyone becomes involved in making the minutes. At the end of each item it is up to the group to think of a short (2 line) statement that sums up the discussion and that the group can agree to.

Following up

Try to get your minutes written up and given out to group members as quickly as possible so that people do the things they promised - efficiency breeds efficiency. A week or so before the next meeting the person who is doing the secretarial work should gently remind people that they promised to do certain jobs - particularly if it means getting information that the group needs before it can reach a decision on an issue.

See section on filing page 32 .

The Secretary

A lot of jobs end up with the Secretary as s/he is the 'engine' of the group. For instance, these are some of the jobs the Secretary might have to do:

Before the meeting

- Book the meeting room (check heating, seating, locking up etc).
- Ask people what they would like to have discussed and then help prepare the agenda (often with the Chairperson).
- Send out the agenda.
- Check members have done the jobs they promised to do.
- Lay on refreshments.
- Receive any letters.

During the meeting

- Take notes for the minutes.
- Have all the correspondence ready for discussion.

After the meeting

- Ensure the group clears up.
- Write up the minutes, circulate and put them in the minute book.
- Carry out any instruction - like writing letters etc.

Other jobs

- Keeping an up to date record of committee members with their addresses etc.
- Looking after all the group's papers and files.
- Press and publicity.

As the job is so big it makes sense to share the jobs out, eg. having a separate Minutes Secretary, Membership Secretary, Press and Publicity Officer and so on. Or take turns to do the job (see page 15).

Be careful with money

Money needs to be looked after carefully if a group is to work well. There are two basic things to be done:

- Plan how you will spend and earn your money.
- Keep to some simple rules about how money is handled so that everyone can understand and see what is going on.

Plan what you spend and earn

You need careful planning if you want money when you need it. Some of the more important points to remember are to:

- Have a good idea of how much money the group is likely to earn over a particular period, (like 3 months or a year), and when it is expected to come in. As soon as you know when the money is arriving you can plan your spending to fit in.
- Work out the cost of the things you want to do well in advance, so that you can either cut the less important or urgent items out if you find you've not got enough money or go out and raise the extra cash you need.
- Keep an eye on price changes - costs can easily creep up on you if you are not careful.
- Give individual activities budgets - by putting a limit on what the group can spend on a particular thing, you won't lose control of spending.

Simple rules for handling money

People are pretty touchy where money is concerned and in groups a lot of bad feeling can arise through petty suspicions about the way a person is handling the cash. On top of people's suspiciousness there is the legal point that committee members can often be personally liable for any debts incurred. For these reasons, groups should always make an effort to deal with money sensibly and honestly **and** be seen to do so. Seven simple rules should be followed:

- Always keep records (the "books") of how the money has actually been earned and spent and make them open to group members.
- Always get receipts for any money you spend so that no one has any doubt what the money has been spent on. Also give receipts for money received.
- Keep incoming and outgoing money separate - this saves mix ups.
- Have a clear system for dealing with money - appoint a Treasurer to be responsible for looking after the cash.
- If you have a cheque book, arrange things so that two signatures are needed to spend any money.
- Set budgets so that people know how much they may spend.
- Insist on regular financial information at your meetings.
- Have your books checked (audited) once a year by an independent outsider so that people see things are above board.
- Pay surplus cash into the bank - don't leave cash lying around.

The Treasurer

The Treasurer's job is to:

- Look after the group's money (see the list of jobs above).
- Pay the bills.
- Keep people in the picture about the state of the finances.
- Help the group to plan its earning and spending activities.
- Prepare accounts for the auditor and Annual General Meeting.
- Collect subscriptions (in small organisations).

The Treasurer is the person in touch with money matters so s/he can, on some committees, become too powerful. Always make clear to the Treasurer that s/he is there to help and advise the group not to make its decisions for it.

As people get so touchy about money matters, you need to look for someone who

- Is trusted enough to handle money honestly.
- Can add up and take away! However, you don't need to be a genius with figures, book-keeping is simple when somebody shows you how.
- Is committed to what the group is doing. Don't just get someone because they are 'good with figures'.
- Understands the job and has time to do it.

For groups and Treasurers who are new to handling money in a 'business' way it is a good idea to talk to other community groups about how they do things. As we have already said, accounts can look a bit daunting at first sight and half an hour talking to an experienced Treasurer is time well spent.

Agree guidelines for the way you work

There are four main reasons why you should agree on some rules to guide the way the group works. Rules:

Help manage the work - who does what, when, why, where and how.

Protect the less powerful - they ensure that everyone has certain rights.

Depersonalize things - rules help to make arguments less personal and more about the issues.

Are expected of groups - they show the outside world that you are 'responsible'.

Groups commonly make the mistake of trying to adopt rules too early in their life. One result of this is to break the main rule about rules.

Have as few rules as possible - those you do have should be practical and easy to understand.

One set of rules that groups often have is a **constitution**. This is a formal document which states the organisation's

- Name
- Objects - what the group is there to do.
- Membership - who can join, how much it costs, what rights members have.
- Management - how officers/ committees are elected and should work.

What a constitution does is to give the group a legal status - for instance you will probably have difficulty opening a bank account for the group without one.

Many groups do not find constitutions necessary and they are usually not that helpful in the day to day running of the group. for this you need some **working guidelines**. (In formal organisations these are often known as 'standing orders' examples of which are given in 'Effective communication' - see the resource section on page 19).

Guidelines you will need

Some of the more common problems that need sorting out are as follows:

How the group makes decisions

You will need to decide between making decisions by

- majority vote
- group consensus
- leaving them to a particular sub-group or member.

It is common for groups to leave smaller, detailed decisions to individuals or sub-groups, having first given them broad guidelines or limits about what they can do. However, the main choice is going to lie between making decisions by majority vote (where the thing with the most votes wins) and group consensus (where all decisions are made and agreed by the total group).

When making decisions by consensus this does not necessarily mean unanimity - that everyone thinks alike. In a consensus everyone has a say but there has to be a fair bit of give and take. A consensus is reached when everyone feels able to say, "Whilst this is not what I personally want, for the group's sake I am willing to support and carry out the decision". If people cannot agree to this extent, a consensus has not been reached and the group will have to continue looking for a course of action that people can agree to.

The strength of consensus decisions is that all points of view have to be listened to and taken into account. However, where there are major differences between members, it is sometimes difficult to deal with them. For this reason some groups use a mixture of the techniques - taking a vote when people fail to agree after some period of discussion.

There are further ways of making decisions that are very common, but are to be avoided - **decisions by lack of response.** This is where someone suggests an idea, and before anyone else has said anything about it, someone else suggests another idea until the group finds one it will act on. All the ideas that have been forgotten have therefore had a decision made upon them, but not in a considered way.

The method, **decision by authority rule**, means that someone in authority, like the chairperson, is left to make the decision. Whilst this can be a very efficient way of making a decision, it can lead to very big problems in democratic groups. As people haven't been involved in making the decision, they are not so likely to be interested in carrying it out.

How the jobs are shared out

Most formal committees organise people's jobs into categories like these:

- chairperson
- secretary
- treasurer
- press and publicity officer

members with special responsibilities, eg. social secretary, membership secretary and so on.

Such an approach has the advantage of being relatively permanent, so people know where they are, and it means people can specialize and develop their abilities. Against this has to be set the fact that the workload falls very unequally and that structured committees can be very undemocratic with the three main officers having a lot of power.

An alternative is to let different members take the chair, do the secretarial jobs, contact the press etc., at each meeting. This does mean that the group as a whole has to take responsibility for getting things done and it ensures a more active involvement of members. It can also make the group more stable, for instance when a key person like the chairperson leaves the group it can leave a vacuum and the group can collapse. However, there are problems with some of the jobs - like the treasurer - where there are distinct advantages to having one person doing it over a period of time.

A mixture of the two approaches can get the best of both worlds. The group needs to list what jobs benefit from being fairly permanent - like a contact address for the group, looking after the books and keeping in touch with the press and then share these jobs around, eg., one person per newspaper. Other jobs, like taking the chair, being secretary, can then be swapped at each meeting.

How to settle differences

In any group there are bound to be disagreements which if not sorted out can lead to wasted time and warfare. For this reason some groups have an agreed way of sorting things out, perhaps by having an outside person or special sub-group to listen to the arguments and then suggest possible compromises or alternatives. In meetings this is often seen as one of the main jobs of the chairperson.

How to make sure that work is done

One of the main problems in working groups is the annoyance and wasted time when people fail to do the jobs they agreed to. The sort of guideline that is useful here is that no one should be given a job if they know they haven't the time or inclination to do it. For this to work (and for people not to feel ripped off when someone refuses a job) the group members will have to go through the building stages talked about on page 8 . In other words there will have to be a good deal of trust about.

Other aids to getting the work done are good minutes and someone following things up between meetings (see page 13-16).

The Chairperson

In formal groups the Chairperson is the central person. These are some of the jobs s/he would be expected to do:

- help the secretary prepare the agenda
- chivvy people up to do the jobs they promised
- start and run the meeting according to the agenda and to time
- handle disagreements
- make sure people get a chance to put their views
- keep people to the rules
- see that decisions are taken and agreed
- help share out the work
- represent the group to the outside

The way of working suggested here would do things differently.

The danger is that the more that one person does, the less and less others tend to do and that power is in the hands of the chair rather than the group as a whole. For these reasons many groups have their members take it in turns to do the job - or split the job up into smaller parts. Here it is suggested that the group as a whole takes responsibility for the way it works. Group members need to be

- fair - everybody is her/his own referee
- firm - the group has agreed rules and should keep them
- sensitive - see who wants to speak but can't get a word in, look for hidden disagreements and undercurrents
- committed - to both the group's ideas and to the idea of the group, (ie. respect the group's authority).

10 Vary your meetings

Your meetings need variety not just because it stops people getting bored but because different jobs will need different ways of working. In this section you'll find a number of fairly simple techniques that can help groups to do their work better.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a way of getting a lot of ideas about a subject in a short period of time and is not as painful as it sounds! People are encouraged to say whatever ideas comes into their head - it doesn't matter how silly/funny/odd the ideas are. The purpose is to get as many ideas as possible. Each person should only speak a couple of sentences or words on each idea. All the ideas are written up on a big sheet of paper with a felt tip pen so that all the group can see the suggestions. Do not at this stage criticise the ideas.

After five minutes or so, (when the ideas have stopped flowing), you will end up with a list to start work on.

There are four rules that make for productive brainstorming:

* List all the ideas anyone has.
* Do not discuss.
* Do not judge - all ideas are ok!
* Repetitions are fine (just write up the idea again).

You then group together the ideas that seem similar and then try to say how good the ideas are:

- what benefit/value is there to the group
- whether they are 'do-able'
- what resources are needed for the idea.

Using small groups

Where you need people to do fairly detailed work or if you are wanting people to share their ideas, a way of doing this is to split up into smaller groups.

Buzz groups - this is where 2 or 3 people "buzz". They simply talk for a few minutes on something like:

* ideas on helping the group to work better
* any questions on what has just been heard

They then report back to the main group.

Small work groups - here 3 to 7 people are asked to do a particular job. They should be given clear instructions about their task and the time they have to complete their work.

Reporting back

When groups have been split up to get on with bits of work there is normally a need for the smaller groups to report back on what they have been doing. These are some different ways of doing this:

* Members simply speak their reports with someone recording their ideas on a big sheet of paper so that everyone can see the main points.
* Reports are written up onto big bits of paper and pinned on the wall for people to read. Alternatively they could be duplicated/photocopied.
* The reports are given to a group whose job it is to bring together and summarise all the ideas into one report.

When reporting back it is important to be brief, stimulating and constructive.

Active listening

One of the biggest problems in groups and committees is that people simply don't listen to what other people are saying. Listening is hard work. Active listening also shows other people that you respect and value their ideas.

To be a good listener it is helpful to try to understand the other person's view without cluttering it up with your own opinions too soon. Useful techniques are:

Checking: "Can I repeat what you said so I can check my own understanding?"

Clarifying: "It seems to me that this is what you mean....."

Building: "Taking what you have just said, I would add....."

Showing support: "I agree with that, go on....."

Paraphrasing

In many ways this overlaps with active listening. All it involves is repeating in your own words what you heard the first person or group say and then checking with them whether they felt it was actually what they said. This technique can often help the group come to an agreement (as well as help to write the minutes!)

Keeping time

Groups and committees are normally pretty bad at keeping to time - people speak too much or talk about things that are not on the point. It's usually up to the chairperson to try and keep things on time, but people often find it difficult to interrupt people, to tell them to hurry up, etc. It's useful to have rules about the maximum time anyone can speak for, say two or three minutes.

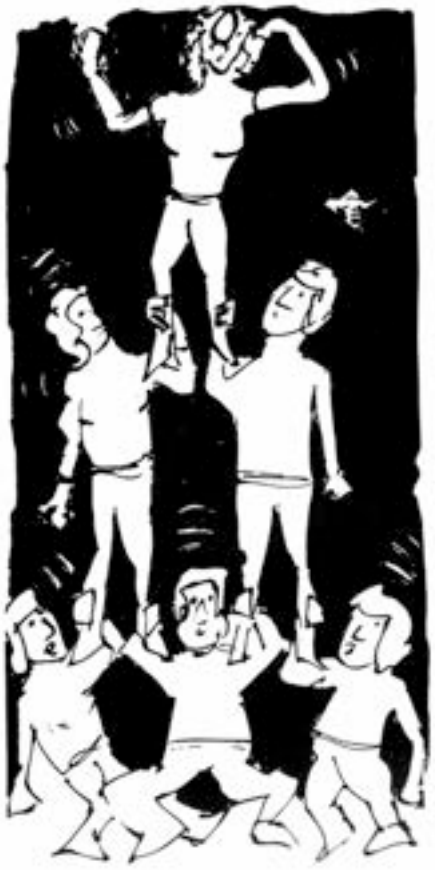
When their time is up they have to ask the group for permission to carry on speaking. Similarly it's a good idea at the start of the meeting to put times on each agenda item.

If people find it difficult to interrupt to say "time is up" then use something like a kitchen timer - a bell is a lot more impersonal and people don't take offence at it.

Breaks

People find it difficult to work for a long period of time, so try and put a coffee or similar break into the proceedings so that people can come back refreshed to the meeting. Also, if people are getting too heated in their arguments or appear to be getting bored or not listening, you might try a break or move to another subject and then come back to the issue when things have calmed down etc.

11 Keep your membership involved



Committees that have been elected to represent the members of a club or association should, in theory, need no reminder of the need to keep in touch with what the membership thinks. Unfortunately such groups often become cliquish and unrepresentative and it is easy to see the reasons why.

Firstly, the number of people who are actively interested in the work of the club or association is normally relatively small. For instance, look at the number of people who come to General Meetings or put themselves forward for election to the committee. Interest in the work of the committee will vary as time goes by - every so often things 'blow up' over particular issues but for most of the time the membership will probably be "quiet" unless you encourage it to be otherwise.

Secondly, committees are usually elected for a year and in that time big changes can occur in the membership (particularly in groups like youth clubs). The people elected at the start of the year can often be way out of touch by the end.

Thirdly, there is a tendency for committees to 'get on with the job' and so become wrapped up in, say, the intricacies of organising and writing a report about the lack of shops on the estate, without noticing that members of the Residents' Association have become really concerned about how busy the roads are.

Lastly, because the committee has to do a fair amount of work together there is a danger of cliques - the committee members will often stick together outside the meeting. This makes it very difficult for outsiders (the membership) to break into the inner circle.

If these are some of the problems with club and association committees then there is an added danger where the 'committee' is set up by a small group of people who themselves then **are** the committee. As this is a self appointed committee it means that there is no formal method for outsiders, (such as the people their work affects), to comment on what they are doing. Thus a group campaigning "on behalf" of a community for adequate nursery provision should look at ways in which they can truly speak "on behalf" of that community, or make clear that it is acting alone (or on its own behalf).

A normal way of working is for the larger group to make the broad decisions (in things like club, branch or neighbourhood meetings) and for the committee to fill in the gaps and then carry out decisions. To avoid problems and mistrust you should follow these rules:

- ✓ Always consult the full group over big issues.
- ✓ Keep people in the picture about what is going on via meetings, newsletters, chatting around.
- ✓ Listen to what people are saying and learn.
- ✓ Try to keep your group as representative as possible - get a good cross-section of the community/association involved.
- ✓ Never invite someone to join the committee without consulting the full group at the earliest possible moment.
- ✓ Be open about money and the way you work.
- ✓ Always remember that you are there to make decisions in the interest of the membership as a whole not just as an individual.

Lastly, if you hear yourself or committee members saying

> They're just not interested in what the committee does

then remember that the committee itself is often the main cause of apathy amongst the membership.

GETTING STARTED

Review what you do

Successful groups keep a close watch on:

- the way they are working.
- their concrete achievements.

They do this so as to always make best use of the resources they have and the situation they find themselves in.

The agenda on page 10 shows how groups can do this on a meeting to meeting basis:

Meeting Review. At the end of the meeting the group talks for a few minutes on what has happened

- did they keep to time?
- were all the subjects discussed?
- what was the quality of the discussion?
- was the atmosphere friendly/helpful/businesslike/stormy/destructive?
- what did group members enjoy/dislike/learn?
- was everybody involved?

and so on.

The review is important because it gives all members of the group the chance to influence the way in which the group works and makes things more democratic. It also gives people the chance to talk about their **feelings** this is crucial to the success of the group.

Matters Arising/Reports etc. These are methods of keeping in touch with whether the group is actually **doing** what it set out to do. To be able to properly review the work the group must have a clear idea of its aims (see page 8) preferably written down so that there is no room for dispute. Their progress is then compared with these aims, and any changes necessary in either the aims, or the way they are trying to achieve the aims, are worked out.

Occasionally it will be necessary to set up a special meeting or to devote a large chunk of the agenda to a review session. Some organisations use the writing of their Annual Report as an opportunity to examine whether they have achieved their aims. Others call in an outside 'consultant' to help them look at things.

In Getting Started we have suggested that you need to do twelve things for the group to work well:

- ✓ Be clear about what the group is there to do.
- ✓ Get the right people.
- ✓ Give yourselves time to become a group.
- ✓ Plan your meetings and get the right information.
- ✓ Think about place and space.
- ✓ Make decisions.
- ✓ Write up and follow up.
- ✓ Be careful with money.
- ✓ Agree guidelines for the way you work.
- ✓ Vary your meetings.
- ✓ Keep your membership involved.
- ✓ Review what you do.

This way of working tries to be personal, practical and democratic. Remember that people's feelings are a really important part of the way a group works, so whatever you do try to make it personally rewarding.

RESOURCES

In 'Information is Power' we have suggested some of the places where you can get help. One of the best bets for help is other sympathetic groups and these can usually be contacted through your local Council of Voluntary Organisations (or Council of Social Service). Youth groups should find their local Association of Youth Clubs can help. Otherwise you may find the following books and pamphlets useful:

Tony Gibson, **Getting Self Propelled**, Nottingham, Education of Neighbourhood Change, 1979.

A neat little guide to how self-help groups can get started. See also their Neighbourhood Action Packs (available from Education for Neighbourhood Change, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD).

The Community Workers Skills Manual, London, Association of Community Workers, 1979.

The manual contains a wide range of personal, organisational and community skills (available from ACW, Colombo Street Sports and Community Centre, Colombo Street, Blackfriars, London SE1.)

Steve Clark, **Working on a Committee**, London, Community Projects Foundation, 1978.

This booklet is an introduction to committee work for community groups. It looks at the reasons for committees, why people join and how they work. The appendices contain specimen notices, a constitution, annual report and financial documents. (Available from Community Projects Foundation, 7 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4AQ).

Michael Locke, **How to Run Committees and Meetings**, London, Macmillan 1980.

Michael Locke has written a readable handbook for formal committees where procedures and points of order are important.

Janet Hunt, **Points of Order**, Leicester, NAYC Publications, 1977.

Point of Order provides a short introduction on how more formal committees and meetings work, together with a useful glossary and and appendix on voting and election procedures. (Available from NAYC Publications, 70 St Nicholas Circle, Leicester LE1 5NY).

Derek Hayes, **Keeping Accounts: A Handbook for Voluntary Organisations**, London, Bedford Square Press, 1974.

A practical introduction to book-keeping and the role of the Treasurer. (Available from Bedford Square Press, National Council of Voluntary Organisations, London WC1B 3HU).

Directory of Social Change, **Accounting and Financial Management for Charities**, London, 1979.

The handbook is for people in charities and voluntary organisations. It is written in straightforward language and is particularly suitable for non-accountants. It is divided into 4 sections keeping accounts, financial management, understanding other people's accounts and a brief guide to VAT. (Available from Directory of Social Change Publications, 9 Mansfield Place, London NW37.)

Donald Cousins, **Book-keeping**, London, Teach Yourself Books.

This book gives the basics of double entry book-keeping.

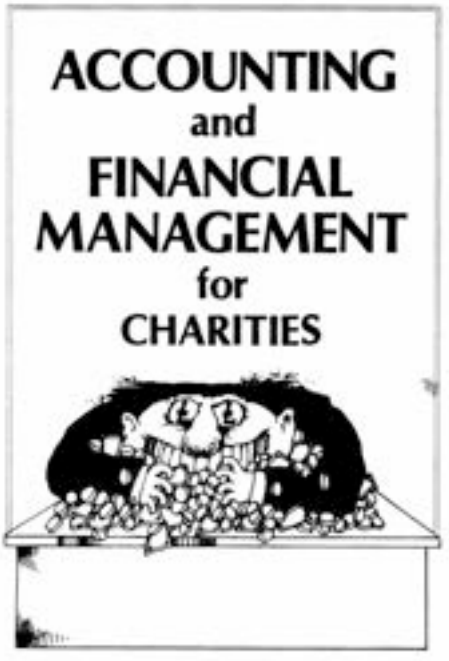
E.C. Eyle, **Effective Communications**, London, Made Simple Books, 1980.

Has a useful section on meetings and minute taking plus a basic example of standing orders.

Readers wanting a guide to more specialist books about non-formal aspects of groups should look at:

Mark Smith, **Social Groupwork - Books for Workers**, Leicester, NAYC, 1981.

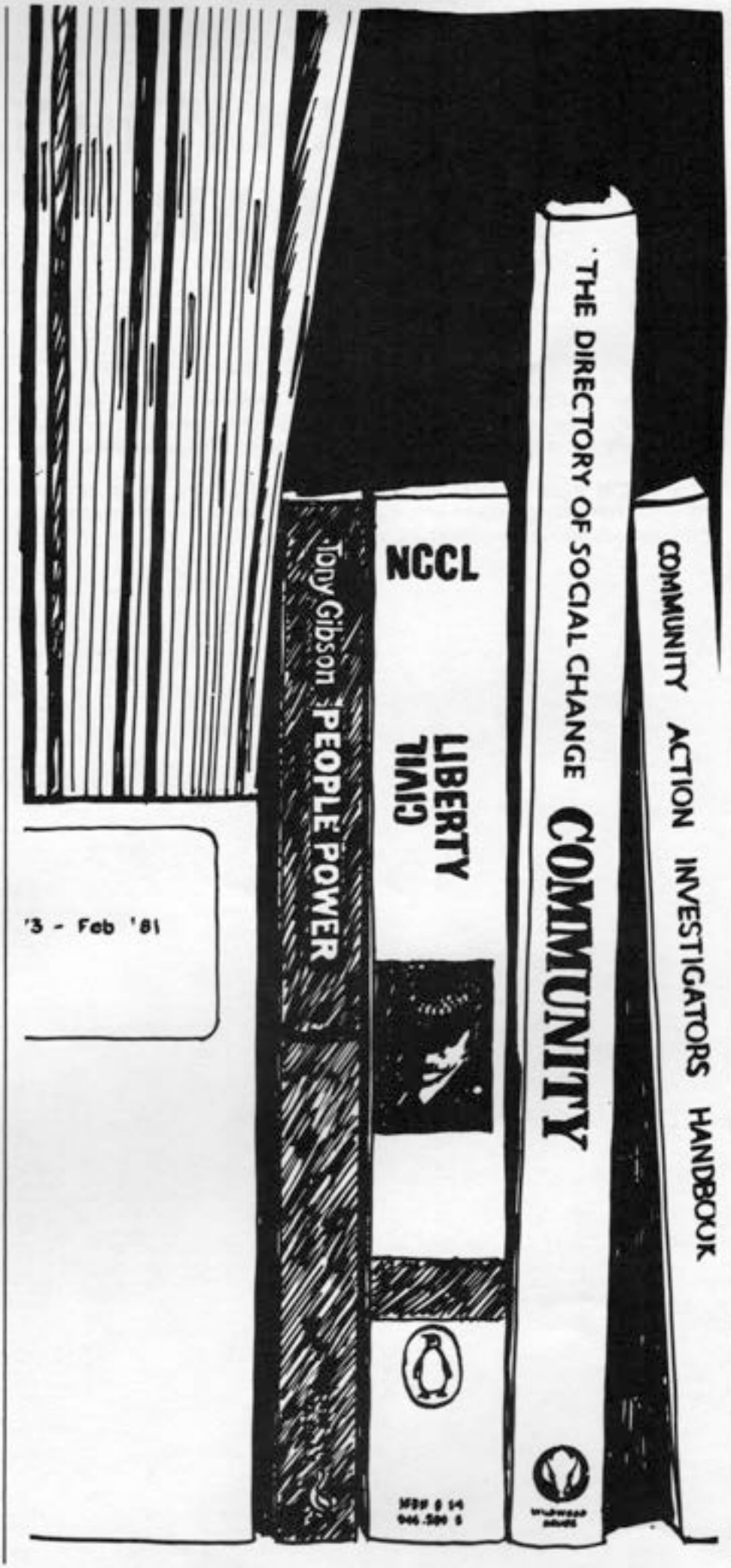
which is a short bibliography.



INFORMATION IS POWER

The better your information, the better your chance of getting what you want. Getting good information takes a lot of time and a lot of digging - particularly if you are not sure what you are looking for and where to find it.

This part of Organise is about how to find information. There are many benefits from doing this in a group and you will find it useful to look through the previous section for ideas on this way of working.



The eight steps to getting information

STEP 1

Before you start looking, work out roughly what you want to know and why you need to know it

It is important to have a reasonable idea of what you are looking for before you start wading through council minutes or seeking the advice of an 'expert'. Otherwise you are likely to end up with a lot of useless information and you will have wasted both your own and other people's time. You also need to be clear about why you want a particular piece of information. The sort of questions you should ask are:-

- how important is this information to the work of the group?
- what will happen if we don't get this information?

If the information is of little importance you may want to think again about spending your time searching it out.

A useful way of thinking about the information you need involves asking:

What is the problem?

Who will it affect?

Where will it affect?

When will things happen?

Why are they happening?

and

How will they happen?

In seeking out information you should also bear in mind who is going to take the decision you are concerned with and what pressure can be brought on them to see things your way. (See page 35)

Keep a written record of your questions - you will need them later.

STEP 2

Find out who or what can tell you the answers

There are a lot of different sources of information so that it is often difficult to know where to start. Over the next few pages you will find a list of some of the more useful sources. These are likely to be most helpful when trying to find out things about what local councils and groups are up to. If you don't know anyone personally who can help, the best place to start is either your local Citizens Advice Bureau (or Welfare Rights Centre) or the local library. If they haven't got the information you need, they can usually point you in the right direction.

If, at this stage, you find the information you need is going to be really difficult to get, then you should weigh this up against the information's importance. You may want to try another tack.

Having found out who or what can tell you the answers you will also need to know a little about them so that you can approach them in the way that is likely to get the best response.

STEP 3

Decide how you are going to do the asking

The answer you get often depends on who people think you are and what they think you will do with the information. Sometimes it is better to say you are representing a group, at other times it is best to say it's for individual interest. Just what method you choose is going to hinge upon how much you know about the organisation or individual you are approaching. If in doubt, do what you are most comfortable with.

Secondly, you should decide what sort of manner to adopt when doing the asking. For instance, should you sound knowledgeable or play the innocent? It very much depends on the person you're asking, so there are no fixed rules here except don't sound angry. Anger makes people defensive and unlikely to share much information. A good principle is to ask for "advice", particularly if it is young people doing the asking.

Thirdly, you need to think carefully about **who** is the best person to do the asking. If you think that a councillor or, say, social worker will get a better reply, and you know someone suitable, (ie who is on your side and can be trusted), ask them to do it for you.

STEP 4

Listen, look and learn

Over the next few pages there is advice about doing the actual 'asking'. Also don't forget to consult the people who are, or will be affected, by the issue you are concerned with, about what they think and will do.

STEP 5

When you don't seem to be getting very far - don't give up

Because accurate information gives you strength people are often unwilling to tell you what you want to know as it might weaken their own position. Also the sort of information activists require often takes a lot of finding as it is fairly specialised. This might mean ploughing through lots of council minutes or commercial directories. It might mean you have to get a bit of extra technical knowledge before you can understand what you are reading or learning. If one person or department refuses to give you the information you need - don't give up - try someone else or another department. And then another, until you get somewhere. In the end it's worth the effort, especially if it makes the difference between losing and winning.

STEP 6

Having got the information, organise it

Some of the headings you could use to organise your information are:

History - what has happened so far, when did things occur,why has the issue become important now.....?

The nature of the problem - what is the actual problem, what suffering/results does the problem cause, who does it affect.....?

Who can influence decisions on the issue? - who are the people and/or groups who can do something about the issue - who can influence them, (see "A Question of Tactics"), and what will influence them?

Where do the various people/groups stand - what position do the various people who can influence a decision have? Can they be moved? What about other community groups - will they get involved?

Your solution - what do you think at this stage is the answer/answers? What does this mean in practice - who will be affected and when?

One way of organising information is to write a report, (see page 54). Whatever you do, it is best to get things down on paper so that you can **see** the gaps or connections between your facts.

STEP 7

Even when you think you've got the answer - check it out

Is the information accurate? Sort out the facts you are certain of from those you are not so sure about - check both. Quite often you will find you have only got part of the story. When you use information to support a case it is important that it is correct so that you don't get shot down.

Is the answer really what you wanted? It is common for the information you get to change the question you have been trying to get answered. Look back at your original questions. And if necessary start again!

A note of caution - watch who you show things to - you don't want to give your opponents unnecessary warning of what you know and intend to do. Also if you have written something that is untrue about somebody you could get into hot water with the libel laws.

STEP 8

Use or store for further use

When making decisions about the usefulness of information you should bear in mind the future work of the group - not just the current work and campaigns. If the information you have could be of use in future work then keep it and make sure it is easy to get at (see page 32). This is particularly important for any good contacts you have made or people that owe you a favour. However, be selective about what you keep.

How to ask people for information

In person

Before going to 'interview' someone you should have done steps 1 - 3 on the previous page. This involves:

* working out your questions - whilst you are talking you'll probably think of more questions but you should not go unprepared.
* checking who is the right person to see.
* thinking what they might want from you in exchange for information.
* preparing yourself - if you are not used to interviewing, practice with a friend or group member beforehand, letting them play the role of the expert.
* sorting out how much time you need.
* making an appointment - choose a time and place that's convenient for the person - you'll get better results if they are comfortable.

Some basic rules about the interview:

* Start by explaining who you are and why you want their help. Present yourself in such a way as to get the best results. Manners and appearance can be crucial here.
* Ask if the person minds you taking notes or tape recording what they say. It is easy to forget what has been said if you don't take notes. However some people may not say as much as you want if they see you noting things down. Tape recording can be a touchy area.
* It's them you have gone to hear so try to avoid doing too much speaking yourself. After the introductions stick to asking questions.
* Listen - it is often difficult to keep your full attention on what the person is saying - it sometimes helps to take brief notes.
* Try to shape the questions you have prepared according to what the person is saying. This involves picking up on some of the points s/he is making, and even the kind of words s/he is using.
* If there is something you don't understand get them to explain it.
* At the end it is often profitable to summarize what has been said.
* Don't forget to thank the person and prepare the ground in case you want to use them again.

After the interview write up your notes and check any points that are not clear or are unanswered (see page 14 for details of note taking).

This type of interviewing can be a bit formal - quite often you get good bits of information socially - when you bump into someone at the shops or in the club.

Actonbury Holiday Playschemes Association
17 Hubbard Street
ACTONBURY
Hantshire

25 January 1981

Director of Leisure Services
Actonbury District Council
Town Hall
ACTONBURY
HT3 2JX

Dear Mr Jones

We were concerned to hear that the District Council intends to cut the amount of money it intends to spend on holiday playschemes in the next financial year. Could you please tell us how these cutbacks will affect us. In particular we would like answers to the following questions:-

1. Will the cuts affect the number of part-time paid playleaders we can have each week?
2. What grant will the District Council give us for equipment? This year it was £500.
3. Will the Publicity Section continue to advertise the schemes on the Council noticeboards and in the local papers?
4. How will the Council run schemes at Portland Leisure Centre be affected?

We hope you can help us with these questions. It would be a great help to us if we could have this information for our next Executive Meeting on 14 February.

Yours sincerely

KAREN MIDDLETON
Chairperson

The letter

If you can't speak to the 'expert' in person or don't feel confident enough, then write to them. There are times when it's best to 'get things in writing' - with an interview people can deny they said something.

The key to letter writing is to put the 'expert' in the position of having to answer your points - so make your questions clear. Try to be precise and polite - abusive letters won't get you much information. In the example you will see a deadline for getting information - always make sure that the receiver will have enought time (a couple of weeks) to reply. Be careful not to sound too pushy.

Our letter was typed - typing does make the letter look more official and easier to read. However, handwriting - the 'personal' touch - can often get good results. Using headed paper (and therefore showing you are an organisation) is often best for dealing

with other organisations. However, when approaching Councillors or MPs it can be better initially to write to them personally - especially if your address makes you a potential vote for them.

You should **always** keep a copy of what you send so you know exactly what's been said and to remind you to write again if you don't get a reply. It's a good idea to send copies of your letters to people you want to keep informed of your actions (like your local Councillor).

If you don't get a reply or if the letter you receive is not satisfactory then take it further. Try going further up the line if you think that the person you have written to can't or won't help further, (for instance write to the Chairperson of the Social Services Committee if you have been writing to the Director of Social Services).

A checklist for letter writing.

- ✓ Always make sure the address and who is sending the letter are crystal clear.
- ✓ Date the letter.
- ✓ Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- ✓ Be clear - work out exactly what you want to say before actually writing the letter.
- ✓ Be concise - keep your letters short by not so short as to sound rude.
- ✓ When seeking information, ask questions.
- ✓ Use the right words - avoid anything that might have a double meaning or is unclear.
- ✓ Avoid slang and technical jargon unless you are sure that both you and the receiver understand what is being said.
- ✓ If you need an early reply - ask for it.
- ✓ Keep a copy of the letter.

A good dictionary and a copy of Roget's Thesaurus are useful.

The telephone.

Phones are ideal for getting quick replies and getting through work. You can probably make ten calls in the time it takes to interview one person. However, phone calls are best left for "quickies" - if you want lengthy or detailed information it is best to go for an interview or write a letter.

Telephoning large organisations like companies and councils can prove frustrating - it can often take a long time to get through to the right person in the right department - so be prepared to hang on and keep explaining what you want. If you can't get through and have to leave a message or are promised that the person will ring you back, check you get a reply. Ring up again if you don't.

If you are nervous about phoning someone up, practice your 'speech' a couple of times before you pick up the phone. In any case you should always work out what you want to know before you phone. It is a good idea to use a written checklist/shopping list like the one below so that you don't forget questions.

Lastly, you should keep notes on what is said (and put a date on the note). Sometimes it is a good idea to get what has been said on the phone in writing so that it can be used in reports etc. This can be done when phoning, by asking for confirmation in writing, or by writing to the person listing the points of the conversation and when it took place.

A checklist for using the telephone.

- ✓ Work out beforehand what you need to say. Make a list of your questions to remind you.
- ✓ Establish who you are talking to and identify yourself early on (you don't want to waste time talking to the wrong person).
- ✓ Be friendly and courteous - as you are at a distance and you can't **see** the other person's reactions, it is easy to give the wrong impression or sound rude (in some cases this can be an advantage!).
- ✓ Speak clearly - telephones do funny things to your voice so try to speak a little more slowly and say the words carefully.
- ✓ Spell difficult words or names if the information is important.
- ✓ Keep a note of what is said, and date it.

A personal telephone book can save a lot of bother - when you have phoned somebody make a note of their number and their extension if the organisation is big.

Where to get facts.

Citizens' Advice Bureaux/ Neighbourhood Advice Centres.

The people who run them can usually offer expert advice about a wide range of problems. If they don't know the answer they can normally put you on to somebody who does. In some Bureaux the atmosphere is a bit formal and frosty but on the whole they are a good starting point. (Look in the telephone directory for your local centre).

Libraries.

In the library you will usually find:

A community information service. Most libraries keep details of local organisations and clubs. They will also often have files on various local issues which include press cuttings, reports etc. Libraries sometimes have copies of local organisations' newsheets and magazines. They nearly always have copies of council minutes.

Reference books. The number and size of reference books often puts people off - but don't give up because if you get the right one it can save you a lot of time and effort. Some examples of what you will find are:-

* **Directories** - like the Municipal Year Book, Social Services Year Book, Who's Who. These are good for giving you the names and addresses you need and some basic information.

* **Handbooks** - like Civil Liberty - The NCCL Guide to Your Rights and the Welfare Benefits Handbook

  These are basic guides written by experts so that ordinary people can understand the law, their rights etc.

* **Textbooks** - these are more general books on the topic. Ask the librarian for advice about where to look and what book to choose.

Newspapers and Magazines. Specialist magazines are often a great help for instance inf you want to know what's happening in education look at the Times Educational Supplement. Libraries also tend to keep back copies of newspapers and magazines if you want to do some research.

Papers/television/radio.

Local papers are an excellent source of information. Aside from the normal newspages, look for the special features and items like the:-

* **business page** - local firms often have articles written about them and their products.

* **'around the clubs'** - many local papers have a special column for association and club news.

* **planning applications** - have to be listed so look to see if any affect you.

* **forthcoming events** - you can learn a lot by going to other people's meetings.

* **gossip columns and reports of social events** - it's valuable to know who knows who. For instance a lot of national pressure groups look at 'The Court Circular' in The Times, as it gives a list of the people who dine with The Prime Minister. If the same names appear regularly then these people are possible targets to influence. Look for "targets" locally.

In the newspages look out for policy statements by local political parties - they can be very useful later when comparing their promises with their performance.

If you know a reporter you may be able to get a lot of useful background information - but be careful, they may want to make a story about what you are doing before you're ready. (See Talking to Journalists page 45).

If you are interested in local issues don't stop with the local rag - a lot of organisations such as political parties, union branches and churches have their own newsletters and magazines. They can be a real mine of information, provided you remember that they are likely to be pushing one viewpoint.

National newspapers, television and radio are obviously useful in gaining information **but** watch out:

* National newspapers are often biased in favour of one side (so can local papers).

* Newspapers have to sell - so the facts are often twisted to make a "good" story.

You need to sort out what is fact and what is opinion.

Follow up stories - approach the group or individuals who are quoted if you think they are going to be sympathetic.

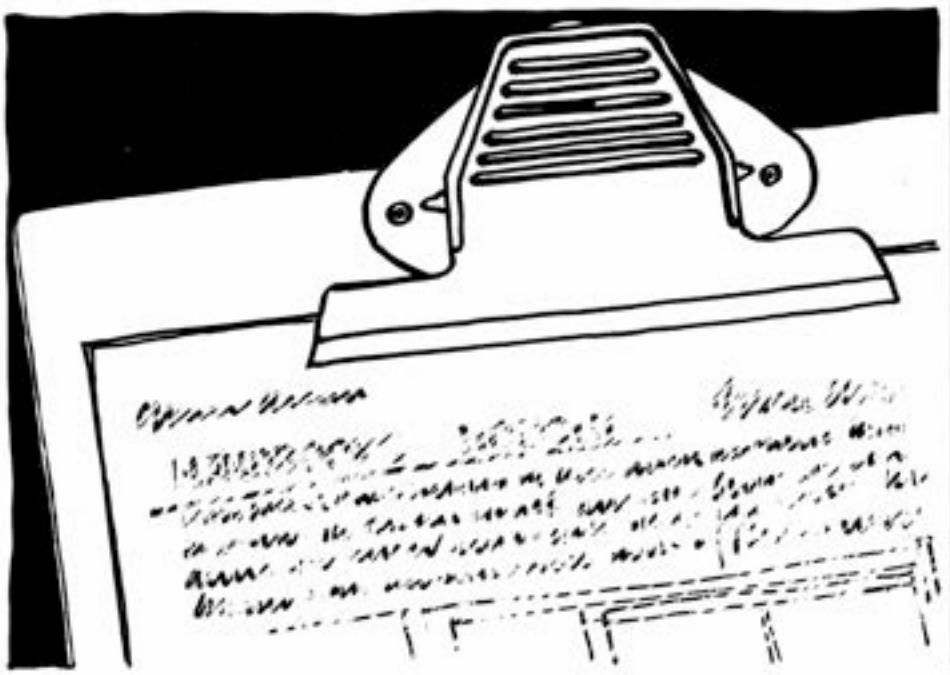
Experts

Many professionals will help voluntary groups for free. The sort of people with knowledge that could be useful to you are accountants, architects, building contractors, businessmen and women, health workers, local government workers, social workers, sales people, teachers, youth and community workers and many more. If you approach people like solicitors and accountants in a normal commercial way the cost can be really high.

When using experts you should have thought out carefully beforehand what you want to know:

* try to make clear that what you want is information, not for them to take the decision for you. As they are 'expert' they have a tendency to take over.

* don't be blinded by science - weigh up what they say against your own local knowledge.



- if you don't understand, ask them to explain - many professionals use technical jargon that only they know the meaning of.

Lastly, don't forget that members of the group may well be experts.

Other pressure groups and associations

Other groups are often interested in the same thing as you and can probably help you with information, contacts etc. For instance, if you are trying to stop small village schools from being closed it would be good to talk to a group in another area that has had some success or experience in opposing this sort of action. The unions can frequently help a group that is campaigning about a problem that involves a local firm or council. Local members of the political parties are also worth approaching provided you know that they will be sympathetic.

A list of local groups can usually be found in the library and your local Council of Voluntary Organisations or Youth Association may also be able to help.

From the horses' mouth

On the next three pages are some hints about how to get information direct from local and central goivernment. Approaching private organisations, like companies and unions, can be a bit more of a problem. If you contact their public relations/press officer you can often get a lot of information - for instance annual reports, press statements, publicity material - but it isn't necessarily what you want. You may have to think up a good story to get anything more. For books about investigating companies and unions, see the Resource section.

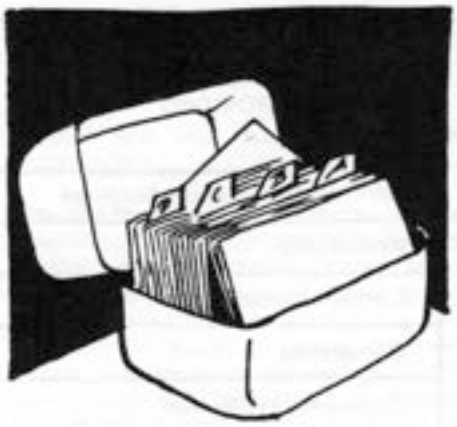
Finding out for yourself

Often the information you need doesn't exist and it is necessary to go out to find it yourself. On page 31 we look at one method - doing a survey.

Your own fact bank

As groups grow and get more experienced they tend to collect books and reports that give them the answers they need without having the trouble of going to the library etc.

A useful aid for goups is the Neighbourhood Fact Bank (see the right hand column). This is a cheap card index system which can provide the group with basic starter information on a wide variety of topics. The system can be extended with your own local information. There are also a number of general books and guides that youth and community groups will find useful and these are also listed on the right.



Your own fact bank

Listed below are details of some of the main handbooks that youth and community groups may find helpful. For an excellent guide to the sort of material available see:

Grainne Morby **Knowhow** London, Community Information Project 1979
A comprehensive guide to information, training and campaining materials for information and advice workers. (Available from Publications, The British Library Research and Development Department, Sheraton House, Great Chapel Street, London W1V 4BH).

A good starting point is:

Education for Neighbourhood Change, **The Neighbourhood Factbank**
The Factbank is a set of 300+ cards which give basic information on a wide range of issues. There is also an updating service. For a shortened version of the factbank and case studies see Tony Gibson **People Power**, London, Penguin 1979.

(Available from Education for Neighbourhood Change, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD)

or

Robert Leach **Coping with the System**, Cambridge, National Extension College/Inter Action, 1980

Subtitled 'A Brief Citizens Manual', this book is exactly what it says. On the whole pretty useful but occasionally the text is too brief.
(Available from Inter Action Inprint, 15 Wilkin Street, London NW5 3NG).

Books about the law include

Civil Liberty - The NCCL Guide to Your Rights, London, Penguin 1978
This guide has become something of a classic and is a must for any group. It covers a tremendous range of topics ans is clearly and concisely written.

Maggie Rae, Pat Hewitt, Barrie Hugil **First Rights** London, NCCL 1979
An excellent guide to the legal rights o children and young people.
(Available from the National Council fo Civil Liberties, 186 Kings Cross Roac London WC1X 9DE).

Trouble with the law: The Release Bus Book London, Release 1979
A working guide to police practice giving all the details needed when being in trouble with the law.
(Available from Release Publications, 1 Elgin Avenue, London W9 3PR)

Two books on womens rights

Directory of Social Change, **Women,** London, Wildwood House 1978
This is volume III of the directory and covers a broad range of subjects including legal rights, health, rape and publications.

Anna Coote and Tess Gill **Womens Rights: A Practical Guide,** London, Penguin 1977
Again a wide range of topics.

Assorted "rights" books include:

Ruth Lister **National Welfare Benefits Handbook,** London CPAG
An excellent annual guide to welfare rights.
(Available from The Child Poverty Action Group, 1 Macklin Street, London WC2B 5NH)

Marion Cutting **A Housing Rights Handbook,** London, Penguin 1979
Written for tenants, this is a good basic handbook on tenants rights, repairs etc.

Carol and Gerry Stimson **Health Rights Handbook,** London, Prism Press 1978
A guide to health rights including mental health.

Lastly on work issues:

Jeremy McMullen **Rights at Work: A workers guide to employment law,** London, Pluto Press 1979
Clearly written, easy to use handbook providing a summary of employment law. A follow-up publication with all the changes brought about by the recent legislation is to be published

Patrick Kinnersley **The Hazards of Work and How to Fight Them,** London, Pluto Press 1978
In the same series as McMullen, 'Hazards' provides a mass of practical information on occupational health issues.

Education for Neighbourhood Change **Workbank,** London, Inter Action 1979
Similar to the Factbank except that the theme is work issues. The range is broad and contributions are brief.
(Available from Inter Action Inprint, 15 Wilkin Street, London NW5 3NG)

Other books that community and youth groups should take a look at are listed on pages 19,33 & 70

Local Government

Local government is a maze. If you look at the table on the right you will see some of the main jobs different councils do.

There are three types of local councils:-

County and Metropolitan County Councils

These deal with long term planning and with a lot of the main services. They usually cover quite a large area like Kent Lancashire and Merseyside.

District and Metropolitan District Councils

Counties are divided up into smaller districts. District Councils look after the more local services. Metropolitan District Councils also have responsibility for the major services like education and social services.

Parish/Town/Community Councils

These are the small local councils that are for villages, small towns and neighbourhoods. They run some smaller local services like allotments and some parks and playing fields (there is some overlap with the District Councils here). They also keep an eye on what the other councils are doing and are usually consulted by them over things like planning applications.

London does not have the same system. It has the Greater London Council (the GLC) and 32 London Boroughs. The GLC looks after major planning matters, transport, co-ordinating house building and sewage and drainage. Many of the jobs that are done by Metropolitan Districts are also done by London Boroughs. The major difference is education, (which also covers careers and youth work), where it is run by a special authority - The Inner London Education Authority or by the Boroughs in outer London.

To use the table you need to know whether you live in a Metropolitan County. These are authorities based around the bigger cities. If you live in:

Greater Manchester
South Yorkshire
Merseyside
Tyne & Wear
West Midlands
West Yorkshire

you should use column B. Otherwise use column A (unless you live in London where column B will be a rough guide).

If it appears that more than one council provides the service you are concerned with - like playing fields and car parks, then start with the level of council that is closest to the community, ie. parish or district.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICE PROVIDED	A Non Metropolitan			B Metropolitan	
	County	District	Parish	County	District
Allotments and small holdings	*	*	*	*	*
Ambulance	*				*
Careers Service	*				*
Cemeteries		*	*		*
Consumer Protection	*			*	
Education	*				*
Electoral Registration		*			*
Fire Services	*			*	
Housing - council/improvement grants/clearance programme		*			*
Inspection of food and drugs	*			*	
Inspection of Shops and other premises		*			*
Libraries	*				*
Museums and Arts	*	*		*	*
Parks, Gardens, Open Spaces	*	*	*	*	*
Planning	*	*		*	*
Police	*			*	
Public Health		*			*
Recreation	*	*	*	*	*
Refuse Collection		*			*
Sanitation, Cleansing, Drainage		*			*
Social Services - Social Workers/ Home Helps etc.	*				*
Swimming Baths/Sports Centres/ Playing Fields	*	*	*	*	*
Transport - Highways	*			*	
Transport - Minor urban roads		*			*
Transport - Parking on streets	*			*	
Transport - Car Parks	*	*	*	*	*
Transport - Co-ordinate public transport	*			*	
Water supply/sewers (local)		*			*
Youth Clubs	*				*

How councils work

Two groups of people decide and organise the work of local councils:

Councillors

They are elected by local voters (people over 18 who live in the council's area), and are supposed to represent their areas views on what is best for the local community.

Councillors generally do the work in their spare time. They are not paid a wage but they can claim expenses.

It is the councillors who are supposed to decide the main points of council policy.

Officers and Staff

The day to day work of the council is done by full time officers and workers within the guidelines laid down by the councillors. Officers have quite a lot of influence on decisions taken by councillors, especially where the matter is quite technical.

Where decisions are made

Most council decisions are not made by the main council meeting but in smaller committees, such as the education committee or the highways committee. These usually deal with specialist areas of work and if the matter is important they then make recommendations to the full council. However, many of the decisions taken in committees are tied up beforehand.

Most councillors belong to one of the major political parties. Some are associated with local groups like a Ratepayers' Association. Councils are nearly always controlled by one of the big parties and the decisions a council makes are usually in line with party policy. 'Party groups' of councillors look at the issues before committee and council meetings and decide on a 'party line'. This means that although councillors are supposed to represent you, they have great difficulty in supporting your views if the party thinks differently.

Where the money comes from

Local government gets its money from three main sources:

Government Grants - The main grant central government gives local councils is called the Rate Support Grant. There are also specific grants for special schemes and housing subsidies. These are paid for by national taxes like Income Tax and VAT. Government grants make up around 50 per cent of the income of local government.

Rates - rates are a local tax on property and are collected by District Councils on behalf of the Parish, District and County Councils.

Other local sources of income - this varies a lot from council to council and comes from things like rents, admission charges, school meals and so on.

Getting information from councils

These are the main sources of information:

Council Meetings - Anybody can go to a meeting of the council and it can be very useful if there is something being talked about that interests you. Going along can give you a 'feel' of what is happening as well as showing where different councillors stand on the issue. Minutes (see below) only tell you a part of what happened. Sometimes committees of the council - like the Education Committee are also open to the public.

Council Minutes, Reports and Agendas - The minutes tell you what happened in council meetings and it is sometimes possible to get on the mailing list for them if you can make a good case. Some of the more useful papers such as committee reports are more difficult to get hold of and getting a sight of those might involve chatting up a friendly councillor. Agendas are good things to watch out for so that you can see in advance what the council or committee is going to talk about. There is sometime a small charge for looking at papers or receiving them through the post.

Local Council Yearbook and Handbook - This is a must for anyone wanting to influence council policy. The handbook or the sort of information usually found in handbooks can normally be got from the Chief Executive's Department or Town Clerk's Department of your council. The sort of thing it can tell you are:

- Names, addresses, telephone numbers of councillors, when and where they were elected.
- Details of council committees - who sits on them, who is the chairperson.
- Names of the main council officials.
- Details of what the council departments are and how they relate to each other.
- Dates of meetings.

They will also quite often give details of the jobs councillors do, the outside bodies they sit on.

Some councils also have a register of councillor interests, (ie. whether they have shares in building companies or are members of a trade union which negotiates with council), which can be seen at the Town Hall.

Council Newspaper/Information Sheets - Many councils publish free their own paper or information sheets and these can be good for giving background information about what they are up to.

Specialized Information - It's possible to get more detailed information from each of the departments involved. For instance if you are concerned about a proposal by a company to build a factory close to where you live you can ask to look at the Planning Register - which will give you details of who is wanting to build, a description of what they wish to build, plans and so on.

Councillors - A friendly councillor can be one of the best means of getting the information you need. However do not assume that they will be on your side unless you know a great deal about them. This sort of information can be got from local papers, attending meetings and so on.

The sort of the thing they can do for you is to:

- let you see minutes, reports and agendas.
- ask questions at council or committee meetings - thus making your issue public.
- ask questions directly of the officers.
- raise matters within their party groups.

Asking questions doesn't guarantee answers, particularly if it is something that the officer or the councillors want to keep quiet! (See 'Lobbying' page 42).

Council officers - If you want to know about the details of a council policy or the way it is being carried out in practice then council officers are probably the best source of information. It is their job to prepare the information and details of policy that councillors make their decisions on. For this reason they can also be very knowledgeable about the plans and policies that are still being developed.

It is important the get the right person in the right department (see page 40 - Using Normal Channels). Council officers are supposed to be neutral and not take part in politics, when in reality they influence quite a lot of council policy. Thus a straightforward open approach, whilst always worth a try, doesn't necessarily bring the results you want (Council officers have a natural tendency to secrecy wherever information about policy is concerned). However, they are sometimes willing to talk in confidence and you should be very careful how you use this information so as to both protect them and to maintain your own access to 'inside' information. When you get information 'in confidence' always try to double check it - more than one community group has been led up the garden path by scheming officers!

Public service unions - Unions like NALGO (the white collar workers' union which also has social workers as members), NUPE, GMWU and UCATT (who have most of the technical and manual workers employed by councils) and NUT (the teachers' union) can sometimes be in a position to know what is happening inside the council, although they are often as much in the dark as the general public.

The Political Parties - Local members of the parties are frequently very knowledgeable about current issues and are therefore worth seeking out - provided that they are sympathetic. There is, however, always the danger of the parties taking the initiative away from you, so be very careful how you do your asking.

General reference books - There are a number of reference books, that bigger libraries normally have, which give details of all councils in England and Wales:

Municipal Yearbook is published annually and give details of councils' services (under similar headings to the table on the previous page) and their members and officers. There is also a useful section on central government. (Annual).

Education Yearbook - gives details and addresses of all Education Authorities, secondary, further education and higher education establishments plus a bewildering range of education connected organisations. (Annual).

The Education Authorities Directory and Annual - Similar to above but only limited listing of 'outside' organisations. (Annual).

Social Services Yearbook - Does similar job for Social Services as the Education Yearbook, plus a limited digest of statistics. (Annual).

Local Government Financial Statistics (HMSO) - gives total income and expenditure for each service councils provide.

Also look in the library for local government magazines like:

Municipal Journal

Local Government Chronicle

or specialist magazines and papers like:

New Society

Community Care

Social Work Today

Times Educational Supplement

Town and Country Planning

INFORMATION IS POWER

Getting information from central government

On some issues like social security you may be able to get information direct from local or regional offices. However, it is likely that most of your information needs will involve Departments based in London. The main Departments youth and community groups are concerned with are as follows:

Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House, York Road, London SE1 7PH. Tel: 01-928 9222 whose job is pretty obvious.

Department of the Environment
Department of Transport
2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB Tel: 01-212 3434
They deal with housing, planning, local government finances, public transport, roads and building.

Department of Health and Social Security
Alexander Fleming House, Elephant and Castle, London SE1 6BY Tel: 01-407 5222
Responsible for administration of the National Health Service, overseeing the personal social services provided by local Authorities and social security services like supplementary benefit and and national insurance.

Manpower Services Commission
Selkirk House, 166 High Holborn, London WC1V 6PB Tel: 01-836 1213
which handles unemployment and training schemes.

A full list of departments and their jobs can be found in Whitaker's Almanack (published annually).

Approaching government departments direct

Writing to central government departments can involve a very long wait for replies even where a policy or details are established. Things become even slower when your question refers to a local situation, particularly if it involves a local Authority. In such cases they generally have to check out the facts with the Authority in question. Departments will not normally give you an interpretation of the law and how it should affect your area and council.

Telephoning, providing you get through to the right person, can get you better results - however, it is often the case that the very things you need 'in writing' are the most difficult to get.

Approaching Members of Parliament

Members of Parliament will generally get quicker answers from the Civil Service when they approach them.
Many groups ask MPs to raise their question in Parliament. This is frequently done through the Parliamentary Question(PQ). These questions take up the first hour of House of Commons business each day and are often reported in the press. Ministers also answer questions from MPs in writing and these are printed in Hansard - the daily record of parliamentary business.

MPs don't have to ask your questions so you may have to find one who is sympathetic (by watching the papers etc). In this respect your local MP is not necessarily the best person to ask. For instance, if your local MP is a member of the same party as the group controlling the local councils you are campaigning against, you may not get a great deal of help.

Remember that MPs usually receive over 500 letters a week, so make life easy for them by:

- preparing the question (look in Hansard for the way questions are asked.
- keeping things short and to the point.
- producing a clear and accurate argument.

It is also worth bearing in mind that many local MPs will respond better to individuals writing to them as potential voters rather than as representatives of pressure groups (do some homework first on this). Also bear in mind that members of the House of Lords can also raise matters in Parliament. Their details can be found in Dod's Parliamentary Companion alongside those of members of the House of Commons.

If a MP does ask a question for you s/he will generally let you have a copy of the reply received. However, should you not get a reply look in Hansard, as all questions - written and verbal - are printed there.

Government Publications

A lot of information is already available, if you can find it, in various Parliamentary and Government reports and regulations. These are published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO). Ask your local library for help in finding the right sources.

The Government Statistical Service publishes a useful free booklet that explains how to find what official statistics you need - "Government Statistics - a brief guide to sources". This is available from

The Press and information service
The Central Statistical Office, Great George Street, London SW1P 3AQ.

For general statistical information see **Social Trends** and **The Annual Abstract of Statistics**. Both are published annually and can be found in most local libraries.

Other Publications

Whitaker's Almanack - contains a wide range of details about government and local government, other countries' government, a review of the major events of the previous year, lists of voluntary organisations and so on. (Annually)

Dod's Parliamentary Companion - gives pen picture of all Members of Parliament plus details of Government Departments etc. (Annually)

Vachers Parliamentary Companion - this pocket book is published quarterly and therefore gives up to date information on the membership of various government and party committees, ministers' responsibility and details of the Civil Service.

Civil Service Yearbook (HMSO) - gives details of Government Departments and lists the Senior Staff.

Keesing's Contemporary Archives - Keesing's is a digest of world affairs and is updated weekly. Most larger libraries have a set.

National Newspapers - in particular keep an eye on the Parliamentary columns.

You should be able to find all of these in your local library.

INFORMATION IS POWER

Finding out for yourself - doing a survey

When there is little known or written about an issue it is sometimes necessary to get the evidence for yourselves. However, collecting information takes a lot of time and effort and you need to be sure that you really need the results you are likely to get. Also the results of your work are likely to be questioned because youhave a vested interest in them. People will suspect it's a case of

In this section we are going to look at two types of survey:

- **opinion survey** which might ask a question like

  "If there was a general election tomorrow which political party would you vote for -Conservative/ Labour/Liberal/SDP/Other Party/ No one?

- **fact survey** with questions like

  "Is there a community centre in the village?"

When doing a survey these are the basic steps you should take:

STEP 1

Be clear what you are trying to find out

You may be starting from a feeling - "there isn't much to do for the kids on the estate", or a hunch, "I'm sure people would support a playgroup". These ideas need to be sorted out if people are to take your survey seriously. Some of the questions you will need to answer surround the following issues:

- **definition** - does everyone understand the words used? For instance what a 'playgroup' is.
- **visibility** - can we actually survey the thing we want? For instance, it might be something that people know nothing about.
- **reliability** - are people likely to tell the truth in answer to your question? eg. "How much do you earn?"

STEP 2

Design the questionnaire

When working out the questions you want to ask, you need to avoid asking leading questions eg:
"Don't you think it is a very bad idea to have a youth club in this street".
This sort of question doesn't present the issue fairly so the results will be questioned.

Decide on the way you want to ask questions. Questions can be 'open', eg. "What do you think of the council's plan to sell council houses?"

or closed, eg. "Do you think it is a good idea for the council to sell council houses? - Yes/No/Don't Know"

Open questions allow people to express what they feel and can often produce unexpected replies and views. However, the variety of replies often makes the answers difficult to analyse. They can be useful to test ideas early on and the answers used to produce a closed questionnaire. Closed questionnaires have the advantage of being easy to analyse. Questions can be answered using a three or five point scale like:

Yes/No/Don't Know
or
very important/important/neutral/unimportant/very unimportant

They can also be answered by people having to choose one of a number of statements.

Make questions so that they will be answered as honestly as possible - avoid if possible very personal or embarrassing questions.

Keep the questionnaire to a sensible length - so that people won't be put off.

Keep questions clear and simple. Avoid jargon and long sentences.

Avoid questions that use negatives. For instance:

"How strongly do you feel that no social worker should be appointed who has not completed two years full-time training?"

Put them in the right order - try to put easier, factual questions first.

When the questions have been sorted out get them **typed** and remember to leave plenty of space so that people can fill in their answers.

STEP 3

Test your questionnaire

Try it out before you inflict it on the general public just to check that it is understandable and works. When this is done the final questionnaire can be made.

STEP 4

Choose who you are going to ask

Who answers the questions is an important factor in how seriously your survey will be taken. For instance you may want to have a:

- **random sample** - this is where the questioner simply takes a chance and asks the first 50 or so people that come along the street etc. As it is chancy it can produce misleading results.
- **quota sample** - here you try to get a group of people that is representative of the population according to age, sex, class and so on.

You also need to decide how many questionnaires you want answered. The smaller the number you have, the more inaccurate your survey will be. So always get at least 30 completed opinion questionnaires. More if possible.

STEP 5

Use the questionnaire

If you have never used a questionnaire before you may find it helpful to practice interviewing first. Some points to remember are:

- let people know what the interview is for
- always be polite. Don't be put off by refusals - a lot of people don't like being interviewed.
- don't bias the survey by your introduction - try to be neutral.
- put the questionnaires on a clip board so that they are easy to fill in. Carry plenty of spare pencils/pens.
- write down answers straight away - so you don't forget them.

STEP 6

Analyse the results

First you will have to read through all the questionnaires to see what sort of answers people have given. With open questions this can take quite a time. In doing this you need to keep an eye open for whether the questionnaire is:

- **completed** - have all the questions been answered. Will missing answers affect the questionnaire.
- **accurate** - are all the answers clearly understandable.

Secondly, the answers have to be brought together. For instance, how many people answered Yes/No/Don't know to question 1 and so on. These results are often shown in tables or as a graph.

STEP 7

Write the results up

See Writing a Report pages 54-55

Amenity Surveys

Fact or amenity surveys are a bit different - here you might be trying to get a picture of the prices local shops charge or the facilities that exist locally. The stages are broadly the same as above. If, for instance, you are looking at the facilities that exist on a local estate to see whether they are adequate you might draw up a checklist like the one on the bottom of this page.

Be careful to keep to a clear area or district.

One good way of seeing how things are is to mark each of the facilities on a map.

Having done the survey and seen what you think is missing, it is a good idea to do an opinion survey of people living on the estate to see which things they use, what they think is missing, whether they have any complaints about the existing facilities.

AMENITY	ON THE ESTATE	NOT FAR AWAY	LONG WAY AWAY
Shops			
Post Office			
Bank			
Chip Shop			
Youth Club			
etc.			

INFORMATION IS POWER

Filing

Many community groups make the mistake of not keeping their records and information in a sensible order. As a result they often spend a lot of time having to find out information that is under their noses. In addition, the thought of getting that information can be so off-putting that they don't bother thus making their campaigns even more ineffective. This short section looks at ways in which groups can keep their information so that it can be used when it is needed.

Types of filing systems

Address/Telephone Books. Simple but efficient - if you are contacting someone that you or the group are likely to use again then the thirty seconds or so that it takes to jot the details in an address book can save time in the future.

Card Index System. On page 27 we looked at one example of a card index - The Neighbourhood Fact Bank - which can be extended to keep brief details of local organisations and issues. Extra cards and boxes can be got from office suppliers and shops like W.H. Smiths. They are good for keeping basic bits of information and have the advantage of being easy to use.

Box files and lever arch files. Box files are simply a box with a spring loaded clip to keep material in place. Letters, reports, leaflets etc. are just clipped into the file. Lever arch files keep letters etc. rather more safely than box files and they can be rather more easily removed by just opening the file at the right place.

Filing Cabinets. These can range from a cardboard box filled with files through natty files the size of a large briefcase to 4 drawer cabinets, (Like the one at the top of the page) and lateral filing cabinets the size of a wardrobe.

What every good filing system should be

Simple to use. Remember that it is not just you that has to use the files but other members of the group and the people who may come after you.

One of the easiest ways to arrange files is alphabetically. Alternatively, you may want to have them in special sections, eg:

finance

minutes

newsletters to members

fund-raising

and so on

Keep an index of the files you have so that it is easy to see the titles at a glance.

Small but full. Keep paper to manageable proportions - every so often go through the files and throw out anything that you are not likely to use. However you should hold onto things like the group's minutes and main pieces of correspondence for a few years. Avoid having two copies of things or duplicate files unless it is really necessary.

Open. Make sure that group members can get to use the files - in some groups the secretary seems to guard them with his/her life. Keep a note of who borrows which file so that things don't go missing.

Up-to-date. Filing can be a real chore but it is on such chores that successful organisation is built. Don't let the filing build up - try to put things away as quickly as possible. In the files themselves arrange material by date - with the older stuff at the bottom of the file and the new stuff on top. This makes for easy filing and easy access.

RESOURCES

Your greatest allies in getting information are the staff in the library. Books about information getting include:

Community Action **Investigators Handbook,** London 1975.
This is a guide for tenants, workers and action groups on how to investigate companies, organisations and individuals. Further updates in 1978 in issues 33, 34, 35, 36 of the magazine.
(Available as a package from Community Action, P.O.Box 665, London SW1X 8DZ).

Association of Community Workers **The Community Workers' Skills Manual,** London 1979.
The manual includes some useful information tools.
(Available from ACW, Colombo Street Sports and Community Centre, Colombo Street, Blackfriars, London SE1).

Michael Barratt Brown **Information At Work,** London, Arrow, 1978.
The aim of this book is to help people make effective use of the information they can get at work. Part of the Trade Union Studies Series which has some other useful books including:

Karl Hedderwick **Statistics for Bargainers**
Joyce and Bill Hutton - **Calculating.**

For books on specific areas.
Glynis Cooke - **Studying - a practical guide for students of all ages,** Leicester, NYB 1978.
This brief guide provides an introduction to studying, taking in information and expressing ideas.
(Available from the National Youth Bureau, 17-23 Albion Street, Leicester LE1 6GD).

Tony Buzan - **Use Your Head** London, BBC Publications 1974.
Particularly helpful on improving reading and memory powers.

E.C.Eyre - **Effective Communication** London, Made Simple Books 1979.
Written for F.E.Students, this book covers many aspects of communication - conversations, telephones, information getting, letterwriting and so on.

Darrell Huff - **How to Lie with Statistics** London, Penguin, 1978.
A light hearted guide to statistics for beginners.

Derek Rowntree - **Statistics without Tears - A prime for non-mathematicians.** London, Pelican, 1981.
A good introduction to statistics.

David Jenkins - **Enquiring about Society** London, Longman Social Science Studies 1974.
A basic introduction to the 'how' of social research.

For details about how local government works, we found the best books to be:

The Labour Party Government Handbook, London 1981 which is a comprehensive guide to the duties and powers of local councils.

C.S.V. **Local Government,** London 1978.
This pack is aimed at teachers and pupils in secondary schools and outlines who does what in local government. It has information and action sheets on the major aspects of local government work.
(Available from Community Service Volunteers, 237 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NJ).

A new book worth looking at is:

Tom Byrne **Local Government in Britain - Everyone's Guide to How it All Works,** London, Penguin 1981

This book gives details of the history, structure, financing and working of local government, which also includes Scotland and Northern Ireland.

TAKING ACTION

This part of Organise! is about campaigning. The first part, 'A Question of Tactics', explains the basics of planning your campaign and should be read by anyone wanting to take action. It is followed by a practical guide to the main ways of taking action. Each of the methods described has points for and against its use and these need to be carefully weighed up. At the end of each section there is a brief guide to resources and on page 70 you will find a longer and more general list of what is helpful and available.

TAKING ACTION

A question of tactics.

The next few pages are a step by step guide to campaigning. No two campaigns are the same. The order of stages suggested here will be probably fit most of the actions you are likely to take, but not all. When reading this suggested plan of campaign it is worth bearing in mind that successful actions are usually based on:

- a clear idea of what you want to achieve.
- setting realistic objectives.
- a good knowledge of your targets.
- determination and persistance.
- the use of a number of tactics.
- careful organisation.
- getting access to the resources you need.
- making allies.
- doing the unexpected/keeping the initiative.

It is also worth remembering that in politics campaigns are not necessarily won because they are right or fair, but through getting the right friends and creating situations where decision-makers see it is in their own interest to support your case. In other words, if you have no chance of getting power for yourselves, you organise things so that it is embarrassing or harmful for those in power to oppose you.

STEP 1

Anticipate

One of the ironies of politics is that the time when you are most likely to succeed is also the time when you are least likely to act. This may be because the importance of the issue is not realised or simply that you are not organised. Successful groups are often active before issues surface. They have been:

building up goodwill - getting the respect of decision-makers as a voice/force to be listened to, making links with possible allies and building a public image that people sympathize with;

maintaining their organisation - their members have been kept involved and active, people know their jobs and they have the resources - cash, access to printing etc - they need to start a campaign; and

watching developments - the group is always looking for indicators of what people and decision-makers are thinking. They do not wait for firm statements and stories before they act.

STEP 2

Getting clear on the issue

As we saw in "Information is Power" getting good, hard information about an issue is vital. Equally important is the organisation of that information so that you are clear about what the issue is and why you want to change things. The main things are to know as much as possible about:

The history of the issue - what has happened in the past, why has the issue become important etc.

The issue itself - the facts, needs, who has an interest etc.

Your solution/s - what solutions are possible - what will happen in each of the solutions - which is your favourite at this stage.

STEP 3

Know what your membership thinks.

You must keep in step with what your membership thinks - not just in the early stages but as the campaign progresses. The views of the members are often not fully thought about - with the result that the active group can be campaigning for quite different things to what the members want. Similarly where the group does not have a formal membership, but is acting on behalf of a particular community, the views of the actual people affected by the issue must be sought.

If the group has not got a large membership and it looks like the issue needs a bigger or more formal organisation then now is the time to start building. (See page 38).

STEP 4

Know your targets.

When you want to make a change you must know where the power lies.

- Who takes the decisions on the issue?
- Who influences those decision-makers?
- What will make them see things your way?

In the previous section there are some notes about who the right body might be in the case of local issues and in the sections on lobbying and negotiating there are some ideas about who the right people are in the body.

However decision-makers are influenced by what other people and organisations think and part of campaigning is to get them onto your side. One of the major difficulties with this is knowing who these people and organisations are. As a quick checklist it is worth looking at the following groups.

Other decision makers: If the matter is being dealt with by a Disctrict Council then also consider County and Parish Councillors, the local MP.

Other interested organisations: If the matter is to do with the environment, for example, then try the specialist groups like The Civic Trust, local conservation groups and so on.

The decision maker's own group: Councillors and MPs belong to parties and their local branches are an obvious starting point. But they can also belong to unions, chambers of commerce, churches etc, who may also have a viewpoint.

Advisers: Councillors and MPs take advice from officials and from people with special technical knowledge.

Newspapers and the media: Can have a big influence on the way decisions turn out.

The General Public: Public opinion can be an important consideration

OPINION MAP

County Council *		Conservative Party * District Council *	Labour Party *	Local Secondary School Staff *	Parish Council * Sports Council *	Local Sports Clubs *
actively opposed	hostile	unfriendly	not interested either way	friendly	sympathetic	actively supports

especially near to election times, (in the case of councillors and MPs), and where an organisation is especially dependent on the public - like a charity or a company wanting to sell its product.

Having got an idea of **who** your targets are, you then have to know **where** they stand.

One way of putting this information together so that the group can see how successful they might be, is to put the different groups/individuals on an opinion map as in the example where a group was campaigning for a new Sports Centre.

STEP 5

Test your thinking

Having got the issues straight in your own minds it is then necessary to see whether your view of things fits the facts in practice. You can try your ideas out on other people who are in general sympathy with your group's thinking. Another way is to put together a fairly simple statement of your viewpoint.:

what the issues are

the changes that need to be made

why they need to be made

and try it out on some of the sympathetic people/groups on your opinion map. Alternatively you can test your thinking out at the negotiation ("normal channels") stage. However you should not give the game away by including all your arguments/key facts and so on - you need to save these for later in the campaign. You then feed the answers you get back into the next stage - planning your campaign.

If surprise is going to be important in your campaign you might leave out this stage - but be sure of your facts if you do.

STEP 6

Plan your campaign

This is the moment when you put together the various bits of action that look possible and work out when and how you wish to use them. There are some fairly obvious rules about this:

Never rely on one tactic alone - successful campaigns usually involve several of the methods suggested in this handbook.

Stay within your means - don't do anything that you are not capable of fulfilling, for instance because of not having enough money or members.

Only use tactics which will help your case - this sounds obvious but groups frequently do things that turn public opinion or decision-makers against them.

Never presume agreement - when talking to people outside the group never assume they agree with you. This particularly applies to your dealings with the press and politicians. If you think someone agrees you are likely to say more than you intend.

Plan but be flexible - you need to be able to react quickly to events and as things develop you will often find that you will have to alter your plan of action.

Don't disclose your next move until you are sure of support - it's very easy to sound grand and important - it's another thing to be able to carry things out.

Match your tactics with needs - don't fall into the trap of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Small issues may only need small actions. Also try to use methods that are in tune with your aims. For instance if you are compaigning against vandalism you don't go spraying slogans on walls!

Keep some cards up your sleeve - don't give all your best arguments away at the first meeting - keep some stuff back so that you can 'surprise' people/keep in the driving seat.

Try to get and keep the initiative - so that people are having to answer your questions rather than putting you on the defensive.

Be on the lookout for possible allies - other local organisations may have similar views.

STEP 7

Get the resources you need

If your group is well prepared then it will already have a certain amount of cash put aside in a 'fighting fund', but almost certainly you will need more. (See pages 65-9). Equally the group will need the use of things like typewriters, duplicators, telephones and so on. Don't leave the making of arrangements like this until the last moment.

STEP 8

Using "normal channels"

Most campaigns start with negotiations. If you are setting up a playgroup, for instance, and are looking for funds you should try the "proper channels" first. Contact the relevant local authority department and talk to the officer concerned. Whilst 'normal channels' are useful they should **never** be relied upon. Watch your issue doesn't get lost in the bureaucracy - keep asking for answers and when dealing with local and central government keep the 'politicians' informed so as to prompt officials into action. Don't get bogged down in details, keep attention focused on the main issues. The whole thing becomes a bit of a chain, as you will need to prompt politicians to prompt officials. This is done by lobbying and/or mobilizing public support. (See section on Normal Channels, page 40).

STEP 9

Lobbying/Mobilizing public support

Think carefully about the relation of lobbying to getting public support. Sometimes it is best to lobby on the quiet, other times to tie it in with the demonstration of public concern. It very much depends on the people you are approaching and the issue you are campaining on. Keep in touch with other local organisations that have an interest in the issue. (See Lobbying page 42 and Making News page 44).

STEP 10

Review

At this stage it is important to take a good look at the campaign so that you can decide what to do next.

STEP 11

Take further action

The key to successful campaigning is to keep as many options open as possible. When moving on to further forms of action do not give up using 'normal channels' and lobbying politicians etc unless these tactics look really hopeless.

STEP 12

Look at what has happened

Whether you fail or succeed it is a great help for future campaigns to look carefully at what has happened. You will get an idea of what you are good at, the sort of tactics that seem to work/not work with particular councils / organisations and the areas you need to look at in your own organisation. If you have failed to get what you want, you are faced with the choice of giving up and going onto something new or starting again perhaps with a different way of working.

RESOURCES

Association of Community Workers, **The Community Workers Skills Manual,** London ACW 1979

This manual has a guide to the organisation of a direct action campaign.

Antony Jay, **The Householders' Guide to Community Defence against Bureaucratic Aggression** London, Jonathan Cape 1972

Jay outlines the main stages of campaigning to stop/change major 'building' proposals like motorways, pylon routes etc. Now out of print.

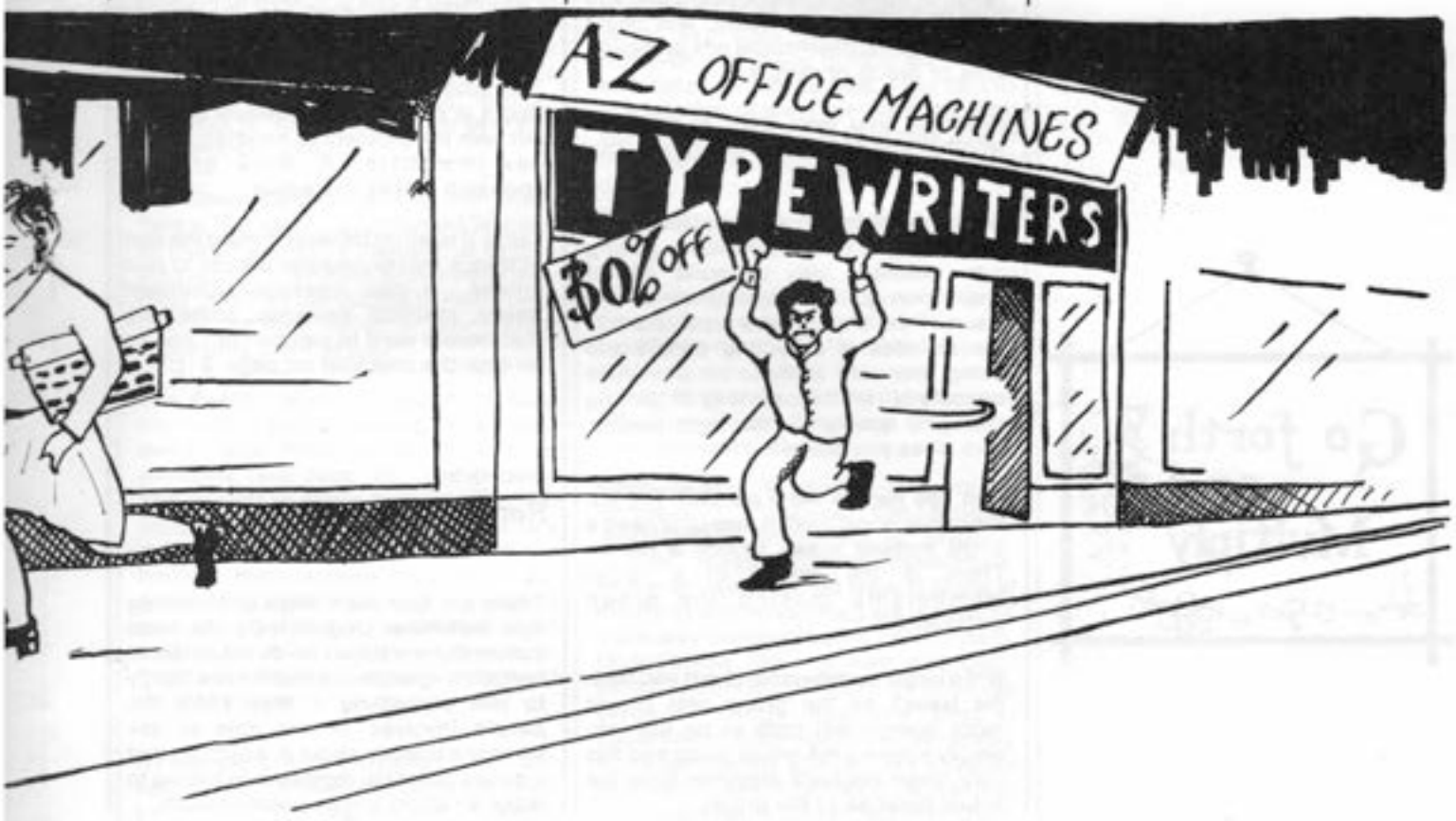
Michael Winwood, **The Activists Dilemma, Local Government decision-making and how to influence it** Swindon, Thamesdown Voluntary Service Council 1977

The Activists Dilemma includes a brief guide to the choice of strategies. (Available from TVSC, Farringdon House, Farringdon Road, Swindon SN1 5AR).

Tony Gibson, **People Power** London, Penguin 1979

This book has eight short accounts of campaigns.

Community Action Magazine The Magazine regularly features community campaigns. (Available from Community Action, P.O. Box 665, London SW1X 8DZ).



Getting Members

Before getting involved in a recruitment drive for new members you should ask whether you actually need or want them. The main reasons for groups needing to increase their membership are:

Numbers give you strength - the larger the group, the more chance you have of people taking notice of what you say.

More members, more money - membership subscriptions are a useful and steady way of raising money.

More members, more activities, more knowledge - the greater the number of people involved, the wider the range of skills and knowledge open to you. Also the increased number of helpers means that more activities can be put on.

Membership increases people's commitment - by getting people involved in a group you improve your chance of educating them to think your way about the issues and it helps to keep people interested in the issues.

An increased membership can make the group more representative - a larger range of opinions can be heard and you have the chance of being, and being seen to be, representative of a particular area or group of people.

However, you may want to question whether these are all advantages to your group. For instance:

Will increased numbers equal increased strength? The efforts involved in getting new members may be quite out of proportion to the importance of the issue. If the change you want is small, the chances of attracting people and using them are likely to be slim. Also **quantity** is not the only way of gaining strength, **quality** ie. the right people, also gives you muscle.

Can you handle more people? The job the group is involved in may only need a small number - like writing a report. There is the danger of a larger membership making the group inefficient.

Will a larger membership divert you from the issue? As the group gets bigger more energy will have to be put into simply keeping the group going and this may divert people's attention from the actual purpose of the group.

Planning your membership drive

The various stages involved in the recruitment of members are very similar to those involved in the other activities described in Organise! Perhaps the closest example is in fund raising (see page 65). The sort of decisions that will need to be made are:

- How many people is it aimed to recruit?
- Who does the group want to give membership to, for instance is there a particular age range or neighbourhood that the group wants to appeal to?
- Who does the group **not** want to give membership to?
- How is the group going to handle the new members, what services can they expect?

and so on.

One of the main qustions new groups will have to answer is about the nature of membership. Is the group to have formal membership - constitution/rules/membership cards/subs and so on?

Many groups find it helpful to set up a small sub group to organise recruitment. It is certainly an advantage to have a clear contact address and telephone number so that new and potential members can find out more about the group.

Recruitment efforts can be concentrated, for one week or month, or organised over a much longer period, canvassing for instance, one day a week. The advantage of the intense burst is that it is over quickly, however you are left with the problem of handling all the new members. A more gradual approach makes this easier.

Lastly it is worth bearing in mind the sort of things that encourage people to join groups - a clear message, significant issues, practical demands, something that people want to feel part of - and so on (see the checklist on page 6).

Recruitment Methods

There are four main ways of attracting new members. Undoubtedly the most successful are based on direct personal invitation - people are much more happy to join something if they know the people involved or are able to ask someone directly about it. Anything that involves potential members in having to make an effort brings poorer results.

The door to door canvass. This method is certainly seen as the most effective method by the political parties. Canvassing involves going from house to house asking people if they would be interested in joining the group. Many groups combine this method of recruitment with various forms of campaigning - like collecting signatures for a petition - so killing two birds with one stone.

It is a good idea for canvassers to work in pairs (more than two, and people feel threatened) particularly if people are new to the activity. If possible, inexperienced canvassers should be paired with old hands.

A better response is usually found if the households being visited have had a leaflet or newsheet delivered to them beforehand explaining about the group and giving notice that someone is likely to call. However, don't fall into the trap of putting out leaflets to more houses than you have got time to call on. When first starting it is probably worth reckoning on each 'team' making between 20 and 30 calls in an evening.

To do the job really professionally you should get hold of an electoral register for the area so that you can greet people by their name. (Local libraries have copies of the register but only to look at as do the political parties and the councillors for the area - otherwise approach the Electoral Registration Office at the District Council).

When canvassing a note should be kept of the responses received so as to, for instance, avoid going back to hostile welcomes or to pin point possible sources of help. It is also a good idea to note down any houses where you don't get a reply so that you can call back later. Canvassers should also have further details of the group and its activities to leave with people who join or are undecided.

The Chain Method - all that is involved here is that each group member is asked to recruit one extra member or to give the name and address of someone they think could be persuaded to join. These people are then visited or sent a letter requesting them to join.

The Event - Many community groups start with a public meeting or use their events and meetings to attract new members (see page 56 for details). The advantage of this method is that the people that make the effort to come to a meeting are likely to be well motivated to become more actively involved in the group. Social events offer a different form of attraction but you are then faced with the problem of having to make a hard sell when people have their mind on other things.

Newspapers and Publicity - Straight appeals for membership using the news pages of local papers or a leaflet dropped through letterboxes are unlikely to have a good response unless they are followed up by personal visits. However, items in local papers and on local radio are important in creating a climate of opinion (at least people have heard of the group when you call).

Following up

It is important to quickly make new members feel part of the group - they should be invited to meetings, get newsletters and be visited by other members. When they first come to meetings, make sure they get a friendly welcome and that they are put in the picture about what is happening. If there has been a special membership drive then you might think of putting on a special social event so that new members can meet other group members in a friendly atmosphere.

Keeping your members

Getting new members is the easy part of the job, keeping them is usually more difficult. You are bound to lose members through things like moving away from the area or from the pressure of other things like work or family problems. However, too many groups make new members feel unwelcome. They do this in a number of ways, perhaps the most significant of which is to simply ignore or forget them once they have paid their dues.

The most important step the group can make in keeping members is also the most boring - the keeping of a membership book which gives deails of people's names, addresses and telephone numbers. An added extra to such a list is if they have any special interests or skills etc that they want to offer the group. Once you know who your members are, you can:

Keep people in touch. The normal methods of keeping the groups' membership informed is through regular meetings and newsletters. However, not everyone feels at home at meetings and newsletters are really only a one way communication - you to them. Undoubtedly the best way is through personal contact. This can be achieved through things like the regular collection of subscriptions.Alternatively some community groups have a system of street or neighbourhood reps whose job it is to keep in contact with members.

Get people involved. A lot of people join action groups because they want to **do** something - so don't disappoint them. Others are less sure but can become very committed if they are given the chance to contribute to the work of the group. However, don't fall into the trap of scaring people off by immediately loading great chunks of work onto them.

Do the job you promised. The group was formed to do a job - so do it! People will soon leave if they feel that nothing is happening.

RESOURCES

Most of the political parties and their youth wings produce material about getting and keeping members. Other useful sources are:

Community Action Magazine Issue 28, Nov/Dec 1976

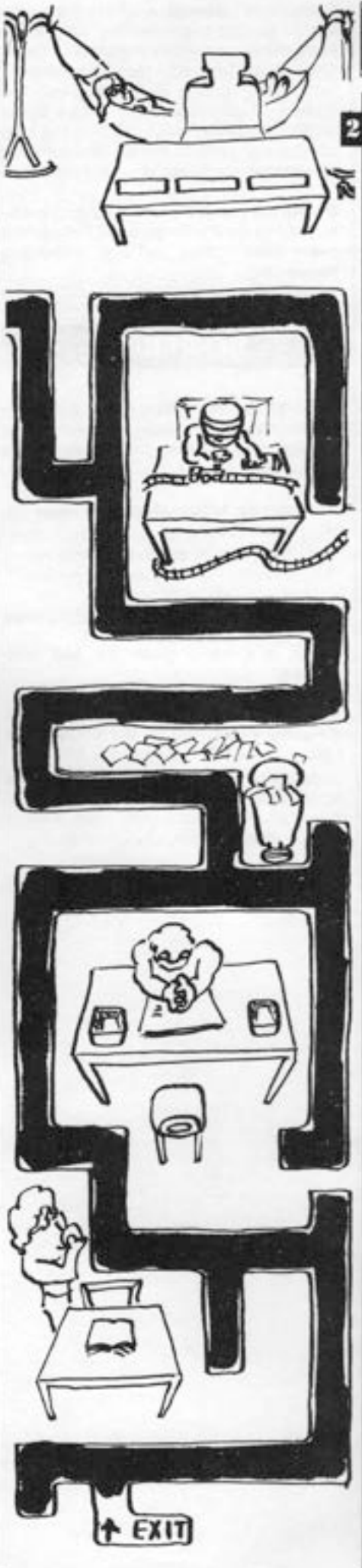
This has Part 7 of their action notes "Membership - getting people involved".

Tony Gibson, **Getting Self Propelled** Nottingham ENC 1979
which is a basic guide for self help groups.

Warren Redman **Help! Getting and Keeping Volunteers for the Youth Club** Leicester NAYC Publications 1981

Although this book is particularly applicable to getting voluntary and part-time help in youth clubs, it has a lot to say to other community groups.

Addresses for all these publications can be found on page 70 .



Using 'Normal Channels'

"Normal channels" are what councils or organisations would like you to use to get your voice heard. Commonly this means you first have to find out who the council or body would like you to contact with your complaint/suggestion. It then involves writing or going to see the person or body followed by a long wait whilst your ideas get processed or forgotten. Used on its own it is unlikely to get you very far but it is usually seen as an important first step in a campaign. One way of looking at 'normal channels' is to view them as a **negotiating stage.**

What using "normal channels" is for

Making use of normal channels can:

get you allies. Council officers and people who work 'lower down' in the organisations you are trying to influence have their own ideas about things. They themselves often want to see changes in the way things are run and might be able to give some support to your case.

get you more information. In putting your case you may well get answers to specific points and arguments.

test your thinking. You can try out your ideas on someone who knows about the issue - but you should be cautious - the official might not be as sympathetic as s/he makes out.

get you what you want. Sometimes you can actually get what you are asking for! If you are only asking for a 'small' change, one that the person you are seeing has responsibility for, then you might be lucky. For instance let's suppose you wanted an extra piece of equipment for a playground, this is not likely to cost very much or cause any problems, so a decision can be made "quickly" and easily - or so you would think!

But, on the other hand, using "normal channels":

is often slow. Your suggestions/complaints can easily get lost within the "system". They lie around in people's filing trays and get conveniently forgotten or passed from person to person. Because things tend to go slowly and your membership is not involved in doing anything, people soon become impatient with this way of working.

can rob you of the "surprise" element. If surprise is going to be an important part of your campaign you will not want to give too much warning of your intentions.

is not very successful if used on its own. Many people don't like change and civil servants and local government officers are well known for their wish not to alter comfortable ways of working. Normal channels should not on the whole be used on their own. Officials will frequently need a bit of pressure from, say, councillors to come to a speedy decision.

How to use "normal channels"

Just how much importance you put on using normal channels and how you use them will depend on whether you think your efforts are going to be successful. For a number of reasons, the getting of allies and their information and the possibility of success for example, it is usual for campaigns to use 'normal channels'. Also it makes redundant the "if only you had gone through the **proper** channels" argument used by opponents when rejecting your ideas. However you should normally use this method alongside some of the other tactics talked about in this section (especially lobbying).

It is important to start with the right person or committee when approaching councils or organisations. If you are in any doubt ring up the organisation and ask who you should approach. The other crucial things to find out are:

How normal channels work - do you have to make a written request that goes to a committee? Are there special forms to fill in and so on?

What is the timescale - is there a closing date for applications? How long is the whole thing likely to take?

From other groups who have used normal channels it is worth finding out the success rate of this sort of approach. If the officials you are about to talk to are sympathetic they may give you some sort of indication.

Always be polite to 'lower staff' - get them chatting as you can often pick up useful bits of information, but never rely on them. Unless the matter is really trivial try to keep people higher up the line (like councillors) in the picture so that they can put pressure on. In turn put pressure on them through things like stories in the local paper (see Lobbying and Making News).

The problem with putting pressure on from the top is that it can rub up the wrong way the officials you are dealing with and so lose you possible allies and help. However, it is worth bearing in mind that you are after **results not relationships**. Be pragmatic - if you think going to the top will do more harm than good then don't do it.

How to present your case

Your proposal or question will either end up on someone's desk for a decision or go to a committee. It might be that all you have to do is to make a written application or you may have to see an official or a committee to explain your case. Whatever the case there are some basic rules to follow:

Always put things in writing - so that you and the people you are trying to influence have a record of your views and they can't 'forget'. A written statement also helps you if you are having to talk about a proposal - it can jog your memory over the main points that need raising. If you are asked to make a written application it is a good idea to have a separate application that can be copied for the relevant committee/person and a covering letter, rather than having both rolled into one. (see Writing Letters page 24 and Writing a Report page 54).

Know who makes decisions/who you are meeting - sort out beforehand who exactly makes the decisions you are interested in and put your energy into trying to influence them. Know what their job is and where they stand on the issue. You may have to bend your argument a little to make them happy.

Get your facts straight and your questions ready - the need for good information has already been emphasised - remember that big organisations can normally "out-information" you. If you are having to make a personal appearance make sure you have prepared your 'speech' and got the questions you need answering clear in your mind. Better still get them written down to remind you in the meeting (see Public Speaking page 58).

Get your timing right - if you are applying for money make sure it's the right time in the financial year (ie. when they've got the money). Also watch that the timing of 'normal channels' fits in with the rest of your campaign.

Create the right climate outside the meeting - this is done by lobbying the right people, (those who can influence the decision), and by using the other methods of campaigning, especially using the media to arouse public opinion. (See the next two sections on Lobbying and Making News). One simple way of keeping people informed is to send them copies of the report/letters you write for the officials. Put a note on the letter/report saying who it has been sent to, so that the people handling your application/proposal can see that other 'influential' people are interested in what is happening, thus keeping them on their toes.

If you make a concession - show it - should you have to give way on a particular point then make a great show of doing so - it plays up to the opponent's sense of self importance and may make them overlook other points.

These rules not only bring more pressure on decision-makers. If followed they also demonstrate that you and your group know what you are doing and so increase your influence.

Following up

Don't let things drop after your case has been heard:

- If you don't hear anything within a few weeks, get back to the people involved and see what has happened. Keep on phoning/writing until you get a satisfactory answer.
- Follow up any new points.
- Should your proposal be rejected try putting it in a different form.
- Where people have been friendly and sympathetic keep in touch with them for further information and advice. Also let them know what you are doing. (It can also be in your interests to keep the unfriendly informed!).
- Carry on with other tactics.

RESOURCES

Some organisations and councils produce booklets/information sheets about how to use particular bits of their machinery. Otherwise see the resource lists on pages 43 and 70

3 Lobbying

Lobbying is about trying to influence people who have power so that they will support your ideas and plans. The word lobbying is often used to mean directly talking to people rather than, say, exchanging letters or items in the press. It is this form of influence we are going to concentrate on in this section.

What lobbying is for

It can be used to:

* influence a decision about to be made (by a council, a company, a union and so on).
* generally prepare people about the group and its thinking for future campaigns.
* get a decision-maker to say where s/he stands on an issue.

As lobbying is basically a conversation it has many of the strengths and weaknesses of talking. On the one hand it:

* makes decision-makers realise that issues are about real people.
* can show the strength of **feeling** on an issue far more effectively than, say, writing letters.
* is more flexible - you ask a question and (hopefully?) get an immediate reply.

But

* lobbying is normally done on the councillor's or official's territory - they are likely to have more control over what happens to you.
* it is more individual, so that you may find the person that you are lobbying takes a personal dislike to you and it colours his/her attitude to your case.
* you can find yourself drawn into their way of working - you can end up committed to things that if you had time to think, (as with writing letters), you wouldn't have agreed to.
* it is often easy to get sidetracked away from **your** issues onto what the person you are lobbying wants to talk about.

Whilst reports and letters are often about **facts**, lobbying is often concerned with **feelings.** Often one of the most significant feelings to get across is the groups determination to get what they want.

It is also concerned with the things that can't be written down or made public: why it might be in someones or some group's interest to support a particular issue, the making of bargains - if you support us on this, we can help you with that and so on. To be successful it therefore needs careful thought and preparation.

Who to lobby

In this section we concentrate on local councils. The main 'targets' are:

Councillors for the area concerned

Once you have found out which council makes the decision contact the councillor(s) who represent the area concerned. Try to see them individually - explain your case and if they appear to agree try to build up a working relationship. Your local councillor can often be very useful - getting the information you need, presenting your case to other councillors, putting you in touch with other people who can help you and so on.

Equally they can be a real problem - particularly if they say one thing and do another.

If the councillor doesn't agree with you - don't give up. Get people to write to him/her, send them newsheets etc so that s/he are 'aware' of local people's feelings.

Also try talking to local councillors on the other councils (if the decision is made by the County Council then also talk to District Councillors). Their support could easily help your case. Many councillors have 'surgeries' where people can go along and meet them. Otherwise you can try them at home, at the Town Hall or at meetings.

Members of Key Committees

Often the most powerful members of committees and sub committees are the Chairman/woman and his/her deputy. Try to get to see them as early as possible.

Also write to or phone all members of the committee discussing the issue you are interested in. Do this 7-14 days before the meeting. (If you are writing, to save money you can write to the Town Hall, as councillors go there regularly and pick up their mail).

To find out who the key people are look in the Councils' Yearbook (see "Information is Power").

Officials

Councillors very often depend on advice from senior officers of the departments involved - like the Chief Education Officer, or the building surveyor. Try to meet them. Invite them to your meetings.

Members of Parliament

A letter from an MP to a local council can sometimes do wonders. Equally they can often put pressure on behind the scenes. Most MPs hold regular 'surgeries' where members of the public can go along and meet them (they are usually advertised in the paper). Otherwise write to them at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1 and ask for a meeting.

Political Parties

Most councillors belong to one of the major political parties - they vote along party lines. If one side is in favour of an idea it's quite likely that the other party will vote against them. Try to make friends in all the major political groups (if the issue allows it!). The local party members, particularly if they are on a party committee, can often influence the way councillors work.

When approaching local parties look back at their election manifestos and the various policy statements they have made about the issue (these are usually reported at some length in the local press). If they are in power, (or have been in power recently), compare their promises with their record. Claiming that parties are not sticking to their promises is a tactic that they are very sensitive to. Another important approach is to stress that your proposal/view of the issue is in line with their stated policy - and therefore shouldn't they support it?

Lobbying is not a tactic just to be used in the heat of the campaign. Often your success is dependent on who is lobbied **before** the campaign starts. You need to get people's commitment to your ideas for the future. The key people to approach are the up and coming politicians and officials and the problem is to identify them. Identification will involve a careful eye on the newspapers, an analysis of the membership and officers of committees and, most importantly, the canvassing of people 'in the know' within the organisation you are interested in. Another way of getting promises for the future with councils is to get the opposition spokesperson for your issue, eg. the person that normally speaks on education matters, to support your view publicly. This is useful ammunition for when they get into power.

Preparation

The main points are to:

Know who you are meeting. Do your homework, if it is a councillor see what committees s/he is a member of, find out what their attitude has been on similar issues, see what they do for a living and so on (see "Information is Power").

Get your facts straight and your questions ready. People will want to know facts and nothing looks worse than you getting simple things wrong. Also make a list of the things you want answers to - in these sorts of situations it is very easy to forget or get side tracked.

Organise. If you are making a presentation make sure everybody knows who is doing what. Make sure that you have suitable material on hand to support your case - reports etc. Leave a written statement of your view of the issues with the councillor so that they have a record of what you think. One way of organising presentations is to use slides or visual aids. For instance if you are complaining about the state of a playground take some pictures and show them. The pictures are a good aid to your memory, they remind you of the points you want to make.

Another tip is if you are meeting someone as a group then have individual members of the group take responsibility for ensuring that the different questions get answered. (See pages 16).

It is always a good idea to rehearse your arguments beforehand. Try to work out what questions you are likely to get asked.

Get your timing right. Get in early enough to make your efforts worthwhile - don't leave everything to the last moment (although lobbying immediately before an important meeting can sometimes be successful).

Think about the size of your delegation - sometimes it is better if an individual lobbys a councillor, (if they know them etc), but there are dangers in this - your message might not get across. Pairs are probably best. Otherwise try to lobby as a group - it means you can give each other support and let the councillor know that there are a number of people with strong feelings on the issue.

Connect the lobby up with other parts of your campaign. You could use it to present a petition or report, have a demonstration beforehand (if lobbying at the Town Hall) and so on.

Think about where to lobby - if you can get people on to your home ground it is an advantage. Better still try to take them to the 'problem'. So, suppose your problem is the lack of telephone boxes on your estate - if you can get a Post Office Official and a local district councillor on to the estate not only does it give them a **feel** of the problem - it can also make a good news story.

Issue a press release - get an item in the paper **before** you meet the people - if it is something you want to be seen doing. This has the advantage of 'doubling' the press coverage - before and after - and of putting the person or group you are meeting on their toes. If an item has already appeared in the paper or on the radio, the issue becomes, in their eyes, of public importance - so they will have to be **seen** to be doing something.

On the day

* Before you go check you have all the information/leaflets etc you need.
* Remember you are there to win friends and influence people. If you are too 'heavy' the person you are lobbying can easily become hostile. Be friendly, fair and firm.
* Try not to let the person you are lobbying dictate the conversation - you are there to convince him/her, not them you.
* Take notes of the key points of the meeting so you have a record of what has been said.
* Think about how you present yourselves - appearances can be very important.

Follow up

* If the person you have lobbied has been friendly - then keep in touch with them. In any case it is often a good idea to send them a letter after the meeting saying what you understood to have been said and promised.
* Keep your members informed via meetings/newsheets/chat.
* Carry on with other tactics.
* Issue a press statement on the meeting. Watch out if a joint statement is suggested - the wording must reflect your position. There are four thing s to watch for:

  Headline - is it fair to your point of view?

  Firstline - make sure it is clearly stated that this is a joint statement.

  Text - are your points there?

  Contact - there will normally be a contact telephone number for further details - see that one of the groups numbers is also included.
* Don't take no for an answer - come back to them and carry on with other tactics.

Writing letters

Letters are a good way of backing up or getting personal interviews. Local councillors receive very few letters so that getting 12 or 15 letters on a single issue will seem like a mammoth amount of public interest (or evidence of a well organised campaign!) It is important that the letters are:

Different - 20 identical letters will have the same effect as one. Avoid jargon and catch phrases.

Personal - they should be written and signed individually.

Spread over time - avoid having them all appear on the same day.

Related to things they have done (or not done) - letters that start, "I was interested to read what you said about....." have a better chance of getting read.

Similarly whilst MPs receive hundreds of letters a week, a member who receives 15 or so letters from his/her constituents on the same issue will take notice.

See page 24 for notes on how to write a letter.

RESOURCES

Community Action Magazine issue 24 Feb/March 1976

Includes a useful but short introduction to lobbying.

Community Workers Skills Handbook ACW

Christopher Hall **How to run a pressure group** London, J M Dent and Son Ltd., 1974

This book has sections on lobbying local and central government.

Directory of Social Change **Campaigning and Lobbying** London 1978

This is the edited transcript of some seminars on 'campaigning' and includes sections on parliamentary and company campaigns.

Details of all these publications can be found on page 70 .

4 Making News

Making news is important. It can:

- Help you educate people about the issues
- Get you money, members and helpers
- Put the pressure on decision makers
- Attract more people to the events you organise

But some news can be bad news. The things you do and the way they get reported might make you unpopular with the people you are trying to influence. You therefore need to be very careful about the way you use the press and how the press uses you.

What is news?

If you look the word 'news' up in a dictionary the definition will be something like: "information about important or unusual happenings".

However what we might think is news is not necessarily what journalists see as news. If you want to see your activities written about or mentioned on local radio it is important to look at what sort of things journalists call "newsworthy". Five points are often mentioned:

CONFLICT

HARDSHIP AND DANGER TO THE COMMUNITY

SCANDAL

UNUSUALNESS

INDIVIDUALISM

Newspapers are in business to make a profit - they have to sell. News has to be entertaining as well as informative - there has to be a 'human interest', drama. A quick glance at the headlines in any paper will show these values at work. For instance:

PARENTS FIGHT FOR SCHOOL OF THEIR CHOICE (Conflict)

WILL YOUR CHILDREN STARVE? (Hardship)

ROLLS ROYCE BRIBES CLAIM (Scandal)

MAN CROSSES CHANNEL - IN A BATH! (Unusualness)

HEART OPERATION MAN LEADS NEW FOOTBALL TEAM (Individualism)

Different papers and programmes have different ideas about what is important, so you need to angle your story to appeal to the people you are contacting and this involves constantly looking at what your group is doing with an eye to newsworthiness.

How to make news

STEP 1

Appoint a Press Officer

The first step is to make someone responsible for publicity and relations with the press. This is so that all the publicity for the goup is co-ordinated and because journalists like to know who they have to contact for a story. This person is usually known as a Publicity or Press Officer.

Groups who want to have such an important job shared can organise things so that a different member of the group is allocated a particular paper or say, radio station. However, problems can arise if you want the coverage to be co-ordinated. It is vital that everybody is putting across a consistent story.

Press Officers need to be able to write in clear English and be able to recognise the sort of stories or angles that are newsworthy. They also need to be good at talking to and meeting people, as there is likely to be a fair bit of 'selling' to be done.

STEP 2

Get prepared

Press officers need to be prepared. S/he must:

- Know what the group wants to achieve and how they intend to do it - so that when the right moment comes s/he can make a story.
- Know the market - the different styles of the papers and programmes, their special interests and so on. This means keeping up to date details of:

  - local and regional papers and radio (the telephone number of the news desk is always useful - look in the Yellow Pages under "Newspaper and Periodical Publishers").
  - local reporters - where they can be contacted, their special interests and so on.
  - newsletters and magazines of other organisations.
  - any other useful contacts like reporters for the national press agencies (look in Yellow Pages under 'Newspaper Correspondents and Representatives' and 'Journalists').

- Know what papers people read and what programmes they listen to. For instance most local councillors read the local weekly papers fairly carefully and will often listen to local early morning radio shows.
- Make her/himself known to reporters - it's often helpful to know 'personally' the reporters you have to deal with. Journalists on local papers can often be 'buttered up' to write you a favourable story.

STEP 3

Watch out for the Main Chance.

You must keep your eye on the press and be aware of the best moment to 'break' your story. The more topical your story is, the greater the prominence it is likely to gain.

A useful ploy is to try and connect your message up with other news stories and events. If, for instance, you are campaigning for better facilities for the disabled you could use the fact that The International Year of the Disabled has just been launched or the coverage of sporting events for the disabled ("You need to be an athlete to get up the steps to the Post Office" and so on).

There is, however, a temptation to get your stories into the press rather too early if you think **only** of connecting up with other events. You need to bear in mind the timing of the rest of your campaign and tie publicity in with that.

STEP 4

Get your news in on time

The press works to a very strict timetable. Stories need to be in on time to get a reasonable coverage. As a rough guide the deadlines are as follows:-

Weekly newspapers - 2-3 days before publication. If the paper is due out on Friday, then news should be in on Monday/Tuesday.

Morning papers - up to 9.00 pm the evening before - but earlier (afternoon) is better.

Evening papers - 11 am for the same day.

Local radio - for news programmes, about an hour before broadcast.

Weekly magazines - at least 3-4 days before publication (a week to be safe).

Monthly magazines - at least two weeks ahead of publication is usual.

These deadlines apply to news items you supply. If you want to get a reporter to cover an event it is vital to give quite a lot of notice (up to 3 weeks). One of the major reasons for events not getting covered is not enough notice is given to the press.

STEP 5

Take action.

The three basic ways of taking action are to:

- talk to journalists
- issue a press release
- write a letter to the editor

Talking to journalists

When you talk to journalists be clear about what you want to say - don't say anything you don't mean. Basic things to watch are:

Don't be rushed - if you are unsure about something, call back later. Write down the main points you want made before phoning, so you don't forget anything and can say exactly what you want to see reported.

Try to picture how your words will be used - always give an explanation if you have nothing to say or are denying something. Be positive.

Be friendly - remember that reporters can often do you a favour.

Watch out for 'summaries' - a common technique used by journalists is to put a long question that needs only a yes or no answer. By answering yes or no you might be agreeing to something the journalist has said which you didn't notice.

Listen for "Buzby" - most of the reporter's work is done on the telephone. Remember that people talk more on the phone than face to face. It's easier to say more than you meant.

Be careful with 'off the record' - sometimes a group or individual wants information to become public but doesn't want their name used as the source. If this is the case you **must** tell the journalist right from the start that this information is given 'off the record'. However 'off the record' requests will be suspected by reporters unless they are of real news value. On the whole it is usually best to avoid them.

Get back to the reporter if you have more to say - if you have forgotten something or you have further information or news, ring the reporter back - it is well worthwhile if the points are important.

If the paper has specialist reporters try to get the right one. Remember to make a note of the main points of the conversation afterwards.

The press release

Reporters like press releases because they make life easier. It means that news is coming to them rather than their having to go looking for it.

Press releases are also good for the group because it generally means that the words used have a lot more thought behind them that when you simply talk. Also because you are having to write things down you are more likely to be able to make the points you want than in interview - things don't get forgotten or crowded out. Lastly a press release is a record of what you say - so remember to keep a copy for your files.

On the next two pages we explain how to write and issue a press release.

Letters to the editor.

The letters columns of newspapers are usually well read and can be a good place to put an opinion across. For instance they can be used:

- to comment on something that has already been written in the paper or magazine or that has happened.
- as a way of raising issues.
- as a method of thanking people (for instance, for supporting an event).

Letters should be short - if they get too long the editor is likely to cut them or leave them out. If possible type them. It's often a good idea to get a lot of signatures on it. Remember to print your name after your signature so that the letters editor can read it.

Always keep a copy of what you send.

STEP 6

Follow up

You should always keep a record of what the press or radio did with the story. Check whether it was fair and got across the points you wanted. If it didn't then do something about it - get a follow up story to set the record straight. Similarly it is also important to check whether there has been any reaction to the story.

DANGER

Media coverage can become a drug - you can come to want it for its own sake not for what it can achieve in the campaign.

RESOURCES

Denis MacShane **Using the Media,** London, Pluto Press 1979.

An excellent guide to dealing with the press, television and radio, especially written for workers and community activists.

Directory of Social Change **Dealing with the Media,** London 1978.

This is a public relations and publicity kit for charities and voluntary organisations.

The books by Christopher Hall, Antony Jay and Bob Houlton all have sections on how to use the press (See Resource Section page 70).

The Press Release

Press releases can:

- give background information
- give notice of a coming event
- be a report of a meeting/ event/ speech
- provide details of a campaign
- be the basis for an interview

How to write a press release.

Is it news?

The first question to ask is does your news have the human interest or the unusualness that journalists like? If not, then do something about it. For instance, rather than merely saying that you disagree with the council cutting the amount of money being spent on pensioners clubs, give human examples of effect - the danger to health because of heating being turned down, the disappointment because a trip has to be cancelled and so on.

The right style

Look at how news is written in the paper/media you are contacting. Try to write in a similar style - but only if it makes you news sound interesting. Many local papers are written in a pretty boring way - the more imaginative your article, the more likely people are to read it.

Who, what, where, when, why.

Every press release should contain the 5 W's.

What is happening
Who is doing it
Where it is happening
When is it happening
Why is it happening

Use simple words and short sentences

You must try to make your news easy to read. Avoid jargon and be careful about using abbreviations.

Concentrate on facts.

If you want to get your stuff regularly published you must take great care over facts, particularly names and initials. Don't say anything you do not mean or that you are unable to prove.

After the first paragraph of your item you should try to put the facts in descending order of importance (start with major things first). Use the five W's.

Using quotes

Every press release should include a quote - they make stories come alive because they personalize what is being said. The quote can be quite ordinary: "Getting through to the next round is a great boost for the lads. We will be putting in plenty of training for that match".

Quotes can also be used for getting across opinions that might look out of place, as news is supposed to be about facts. A sentence that reads:-

Budworth residents are writing to complain about the extraordinary amount of money the council is spending on useless roads, -
sounds wrong - it's got too much opinion where we expect facts. But -

Budworth residents are complaining about the amount of money the council are spending on the road. "The roads don't lead anywhere" said residents' leader John Smith, "the money would be better spent on improving the houses in the area".

sounds much better and more positive, (it offers an alternative use for the money).

Try to get at least a couple of quotes into your stories and get one in early (in the first four or five sentences). Watch your punctuation - quotes can be messy!

What the press release should look like.

Size/length

Try to keep the release to one sheet of paper. If you use more than that, make sure the other pages are firmly stapled to the top page. Only use one side of a piece of paper.

Always use a standard paper - 'A4' is the best (the same size as this page).

Headed paper

If you can, use headed paper. If you haven't got headed paper then make sure the name of the organisation is clearly printed at the top. Many groups have special press release note paper so that their item stands out.

Date

Always put when the news release has been issued.

Embargo

This tells the press when the story can be published. It means you can send news to the press well before you want it to be published. It is often used for things like surprise events, like demonstrations, that need news coverage. On the whole it is best to avoid embargos - if you use one, make the reason clear.

Headline

Make headlines simple. They should give an idea of the content. Often a shortened version of the first sentence will do. You can leave it up to the press to think up a catchy line, (if you think you can trust them!). Type it in capitals. Leave plenty of space at the top for the editor to write instructions on.

The first paragraph

The first paragraph is crucial - it determines whether the reader reads on or not. Never make it longer than two sentences, the first sentence should contain **four W's.**

"Members of Farthing
Youth Club — Who
are holding a sponsored
silence — What
next Monday — When
at the Club — Where
Then go on to the **Why**

"The money is being raised to help research into the cause of deafness".
Why.

Note: This story is a winner because the action being taken (silence) dramatizes the issue (deafness).

Further paragraphs

Keep paragraphs short and easy to read. Always start them a couple of spaces down from the previous paragraph. Keep on using the 5 W's.

Typing

Always try to get your release typed - it stands a much better chance of being read. Leave 3½ cms space either side of the typing. Use double spacing between the lines (so the journalists can alter the text). Four spaces should be used between paragraphs. Never underline anything as this is a sign to the printer to use italics.

If using more than one page.

Number your pages with a catch line in the top right hand corner.

eg: Silence for deafness 1
Silence for deafness 2
and so on.

Ends

At the end of the last paragraph write - ENDS -

Name and telephone number.

The press might want to contact you about the story - make sure you are available.

Picture ideas

If you have pictures, say they are available. If you supply photographs always attach a piece of paper giving a caption and other details. Newspapers are often a bit wary of action pictures you supply - they prefer to use their own photographers for this sort of thing (to avoid fakes etc) - so if you think you are going to do something that will make a good picture, say so.

FARTHING YOUTH CLUB

3 Rambling Terrace
Budworth.

PRESS RELEASE For immediate use

Issued 22 November 1980

FARTHING YOUTH CLUB SILENT FOR THE DEAF

Members of Farthing Youth Club are holding a sponsored silence next Monday (4 December) at the club in Farthing Lane. The money is being raised to help research into the causes of deafness.

"Several members have been helping with a special club for kids with hearing difficulties", explained Dave Green, Chairperson of the Club Members' Committee, "and we wanted to do something to stop more people going deaf". So far twenty five members have signed up for the two hour silence and several more are expected to join in.

"We are trying to raise £100 and we need people to sponsor us to keep our mouths shut", commented Jenny Knowles one of the organisers. "On Saturday we will be setting up a stall outside the Post Office so that people can put their names down for sponsorship".

- ENDS -

For further information contact Sandy Daniels Tel.Budworth 12347(home) or 34512, (work)

Note to Picture Editor.

We can arrange for several of those taking part to be pictured "organising" the silence next Monday (27th) evening.

5 Newsheets

Quite a few groups produce their own newsheets. They can be put together cheaply and easily and are a good way of getting information across to people.

What newsheets can do

They can:

- publicise something you are doing, like a special event.
- educate people, let people know what you think.
- encourage participation (people will get involved in things if they know more about it).
- keep people interested in what you are doing.
- influence public opinion/decision makers.

What to put in a newsheet

The first thing you have to decide is what kind of newsheet you want to produce. Some newsheets are on single issues. Others carry a lot of different pieces of news, like details of coming events, reports on past ones and so on. It's usually best to work on newsheets in a group so that no one is landed with too much work. Also the more people - the more ideas and skills you have. One way of getting clear on your ideas is brainstorming. All that brainstorming involves is the group spending three or four minutes suggesting ideas with one member writing them down. (See page 17).

Another way of getting clear on content is for the group to talk together about the things they think are important or should be included whilst one member writes down the odd word or phrase that sums up what each person is talking about (a bit like brainstorming). After a time the group then looks at the list.

If you are writing a newsheet that covers a number of things the group is doing, here are possible items to include:

- What's happening over the next month or so
- News of recent events
- Some idea of the range of things that normally happens in the group
- Other local community news
- Who does what in the group - who to contact if you are interested

Writing it up

Some groups find the writing the most difficult part - others find it the easiest. It often depends on whether you are used to writing news items. Four hints on writing:

Use the five W's. Journalists when they are trained are told that each piece of news has to include

What is happening

Who is doing it

Where it is happening

When it is happening

and

Why is it happening

Keep sentences short and simple. Don't have long paragraphs.

Watch for the tone of your language - try and sound active. For instance **don't write** "A meeting will be held next Tuesday by members.....", **do write** "Members will meet next Tuesday".

Get your facts straight - if you are not sure of something - check it over or leave it out.

So that the job is not too big for one or two people, try to split the writing up between a number of people. Someone can take responsibility for news, another person for getting the coming events straight, and so on. When all the items are written, the group or editor will have to read through them and cut out anything that isn't necessary.

Another way of doing it is to tape record what the group or individuals are saying. Then listen to the tape and pick out the main points or sentences that you like.

Headings

Stories need interesting headlines to attract people to read what follows. Try to make them short and punchy. But make them relevant to the story.

Layout and design

What you are writing has got to look attractive if people are going to want to read it.

For instance cramming everything in on one line and trying to save paper might mean you don't have such a big bill at the end, but it will mean that nobody will read it. Better to cut out a few words.

Avoid clutter

Be varied

Use cartoons ,

pictures ,

vary your print size

Leave space - give people room to breathe.

Start by 'roughing' it out first on a piece of paper. (1)

Then type up the items and leave space for the pictures to see whether all the words fit on the page. If they don't then cut some out! Check whether the newsheet says all the things you want it to. (2)

Then produce the final copy. (In the pictures it has been typed onto a duplicating skin). (3)

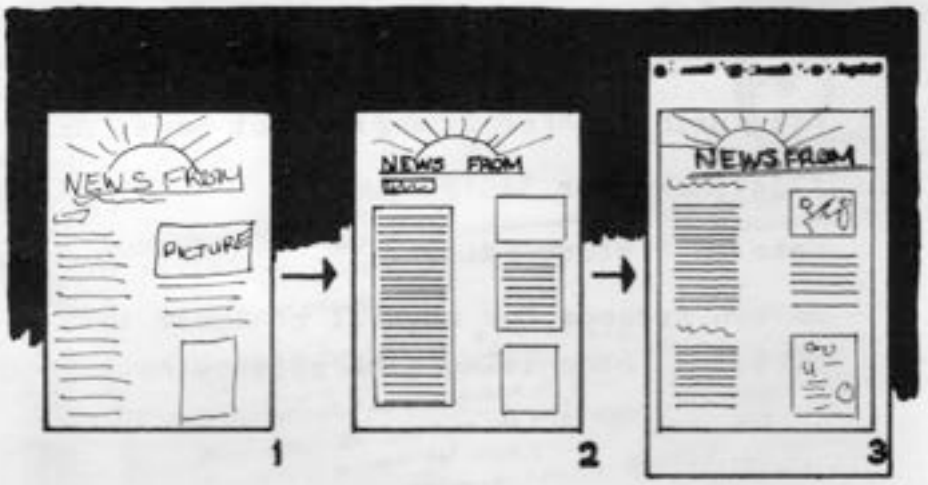
Printing it

There are two main methods of printing used for newsheets.

Offset litho - this book has been produced by that method.

Stencil duplicating

The first method produces better results but the machinery costs a great deal more. Most clubs or groups have or can use a stencil duplicator and the next section is a guide to preparing your stuff for use on a duplicator.



The Front Page

The front page is all important - it should:

* have an attracive heading that gives an idea of what the content might be
* have a date
* clear headings
* your main story (some people will only read the front page)
* variety of design
* name and address of the group and the printer

Distributing it

Now you need to get your newsheet to the people you want to read it.

* Choose where and when you are going to give it out with care. If it's aimed at young people you might give it away outside a record shop, and so on

  but

  be careful about when you give it away. For instance if you give it out at a disco it's more likely to end up on the floor than in front of someone's eyes!

* Prepare the people who are giving it away. Some people find giving out things in the street difficult at first, so it might be best to practice doing it beforehand. People will ask questions/be hostile/not want to know when offered newsheets so it's as well

  - to know the answers to obvious questions

  - not to take people's rudeness personally

  - to be able to approach people without putting their backs up.

* If the newsheet is being distributed on a door-to-door basis then make sure houses are not done twice or important streets left out.

Where a newsheet is regularly distributed it is best to build up a regular team of distributors with each person being responsible for a particular street/factory/club. This will involve keeping a record of who is responsible for what and how many newsheets they require each time.

Newsheets and the law

* Newsheets **must** have the name and address of the printer on them.
* When distributing newsheets on the street it is possible that you might be accused of obstruction so keep to the kerb and keep out of the way of pedestrians and cars.

Doing it yourselves:

Newsheets

Quite a few groups produce their own newsheets. They can be put together cheaply and easily and are a good way of getting information across to people.

What Newsheets can do

They can:

- publicise something you are doing like a special event.
- educate people, let people know what you think.
- encourage participation (people will get involved in things they know more about).
- keep people interested in what you are doing.
- affect public opinion/influence decision makers.

Elton Youth Club produced their newsheet as a part of a campaign to get an extra evening bus so that they could go out on Friday nights. The newsheet got a lot of people interested and the group went on to organise a demonstration. They got their bus service!

What to put in a Newsheet

The first thing you have to decide is what kind of newsheet you want to produce. Some newsheets are on single issues. Others carry a lot of different pieces of news like details of coming events, reports on past ones and so on. It's usually best to work on newsheets in a group so that no one is landed with too much work. Also the more people - the more ideas and skills you have. One way of getting clear on your ideas is brainstorming. All brainstorming involves is the group spending three or four minutes suggesting ideas with one member writing them down. The key to it's success is not to talk about the idea but simply to get a title or a word written up. It is best if the ideas can be written up so that all the group can see so try to use a big bit of paper and felt tip pens or a blackboard. At the end of the time you should have a list something like the following:

MEMBERS ONLY

* **Libel.** Libel means the printing of something untrue about a person which damages his or her reputation. Examples of libel are:

  - when you say someone has committed a crime - and they haven't.

  - if you were to compare someone to an animal whose habits and characteristics are "revolting" (like a snake or a pig) and this opens them to public ridicule. The problem with libel is that sometimes it is possible to have told the truth and still be found guilty. For instance nowadays it is not always possible to print that someone has a criminal record if their trial took place some years ago. Libel can be a very expensive business - so be careful

* **Copyright.** If you see the symbol © with a name and date after it this means the material can't be copied unless you get permission. © means copyright and it also covers pictures and advertisements. You can use the information that is in the book or magazine but you can't copy word for word what is written except where you are talking about that actual piece of writing and wish to quote it.

(For guidance on the legal side see Civil Rights - the NCCL Guide to your Rights)

RESOURCES

If you see a well produced newsletter from another local community group it is often worth your while to talk with the people who made it. Otherwise the following books may be useful:

Teach Yourself Books: **Into Print - A Guide to Publishing Non Commercial Newspapers and Magazines,** London 1975

A longish but practical guide.

Directory of Social Change **The Community Newspaper Kit,** London 1979

A good starting point - the kit includes 3 actual examples of community newspapers, various fact sheets and a couple of simulation games.

John Rety **Community Newspapers,** London, Inter Action 1975

Another useful guide.

See Resource Section page 70

Duplicating

Most clubs have or can get to use a stencil duplicator. The two main makers, Gestetner and Roneo, produce a wide range of machines and special tools that can make what you print look really interesting.

How the duplicator works

Duplicators work on a very simple principle - they are machine versions of the stencils you may have played with as kids.

They use a special stencil which is a sheet of tissue paper coated with a layer of 'wax'. All that happens is that a hole is cut in the wax coating to allow the ink to pass through the stencil and print onto the paper. The tissue is needed to hold everything together. If a hole is cut in the tissue as well you are likely to get an inky mess.

Duplicators also need a special type of paper that soaks up the ink quickly as duplicating ink drys slowly so make sure you buy the right paper.

Most duplicators can print on a number of different sizes of paper. These days the biggest size is about the size of this page (A4). It is possible to use different coloured inks with duplicators - but it can be a bit time consuming and messy. Roneo produce the best machines for this as they have ink drums which can easily be taken out and replaced with another containing a different colour.

How to cut a stencil

There are two main sorts of stencils:

Stencils cut by hand with

- a typewriter

- a pen

Stencils made with a special machine like

- a heat copying machine

- an electronic stencil cutter

With 'hand cut' stencils what you want to print is cut directly onto the skin. In the case of the machine made stencils all you do is to layout what you want on a piece of paper which the machine then copies and makes a stencil.

Using a typewriter to cut stencils

You should put the stencil into the typewriter as you would a piece of paper. Be careful not to crease the stencil as you put it in. Also make sure you have got the stencil in straight.

The stencil is cut by the type when you press the keys.

Stencils for 'hand' cutting normally have three sheets or layers, the:

* Top layer is the stencil itself
* Middle layer is a piece of carbon paper which makes the holes you cut black so you can see what you are typing.
* Bottom layer is a piece of thick paper to stop the type face cutting into the stencil too deeply

Perfect stencils are made by following these rules:

Keep the typeface clean. If the typeface becomes clogged up or is dirty then it will not cut properly and you are likely to get half cut letters. Before you start, clean the typeface with a stiff brush and special cleaning fluid like "Thawpitype" or "Twilklene". You should use a prodding rather than a scrubbing action. Alternatively use something like "Bluetac" - just press it on the type and it should pull the muck out.

Manual vs Electric Typewriters. Electric typewriters produce better results if you can use one.

Type directly onto the stencil. Most typewriters have a special switch which means the typewriter ribbon is not used. If your typewriter has not got a stencil switch then take the ribbon off the machine.

Watch your pressure. Getting the right pressure is important.

Too much will cut the tissue fibres and the centre of letters will fall out.

Too little will mean you have not even cut through the wax.

Just right and you get perfect results.

Experiment to find the right pressure.

One way of helping with problems of pressure is to use a sheet of "Pliofilm" (which is like clear thin plastic) in front of the stencil. Some typewriters have typefaces which are especially sharp and whatever pressure you use seems to cut too much out of the stencil. By using "Pliofilm" you soften the blow the typewriter makes on the skin.

On the other hand if you still have difficulties then a typing plate might be the answer. All this is is a sheet of hard plastic which goes behind the skin to stop the type from penetrating too deeply.

Correcting your mistakes. Correcting a stencil is easy. You simply roll it up about six lines, insert a pencil between the stencil and the carbon paper. Then put a thin coating of correcting fluid over the mistake and leave it to dry for a minute. By separating the stencil from the carbon paper the correction will dry faster and the stencil and carbon will not stick together. Once dry the error can be corrected by typing on top of the mistake.

Drawing and writing on stencils

You can write and draw on a stencil using a stylus (which is basically a hard round point). Old biro's (when the ink has run out) can also be used but you don't get such good results. To cut a stencil in this way it's best to clip the stencil down on to a hard surface or special stylus plate - this will stop the stencil slipping round and will produce a good image.

There are three main types of special pens for drawing on stencils

styli - which are produced in various widths.

loop pens - instead of a point, these have a wire loop on their tip so as to produce very thin or thick lines.

wheel pens - these have a fine spiked wheel which produces a dotted line. They cannot 'dig in' or tear the stencil and are ideal for ruling forms or shading drawings.

Wheel pens should be used with a hard smooth surface underneath the stencil. For best results styli should be used with a transparent textured backing sheet between the stencil and the carbon - but

you can get away without this.

Headlines or special lettering can be easily made using plastic lettering guides (try to use an extra fine or fine stylus).

Special effects can be achieved by putting a burnishing plate behind the stencil (these plates are embossed and patterned. You can use things like sand paper instead!) You then rub the stencil with a burnisher or a teaspoon.

Types of stencil. Gestetner and Roneo make different types of stencil depending on the job you are doing. For instance:

"Academic" This is a transparent stencil designed for tracing.

"Gestescript" A special stencil for drawing.

Both of these can also be typed on.

Where to get special stencils and tools. Try your local stationers or office supplies shop first. If they can't help, try Roneo or Gestetner direct - they have local branches in big towns or cities. Gestetner make a special starter pack with a range of tools etc.

Machine cut stencils

Many schools have machines that cut stencils. Also quite a few 'Office Services' type shops have stencil makers and will charge you about £1.50 - £2.00 to make a stencil.

There are two types:

- The heat or thermal processor
- The Electronic Scanner

Whilst the first type is cheaper to buy, the second is more common and produces better results. (It should do, as it costs about £1200 to buy new!)

Scanners will copy almost any original onto a stencil which you then duplicate in the normal way.

Good scanners can produce stencils from photographs and coloured originals. Whilst the results aren't brilliant they are usable.

Any scanner will cut stencils from simple black and white originals.

Your original artwork must not be too thick as they have to bend round the drum on the scanner.

RESOURCES

Some local voluntary service councils and youth associations run a printing/duplicating service for community and youth groups. If they don't, then they can usually tell you which other local groups you can approach to get printing done.

Gestetner produce a useful guide to duplicating for clubs and associations.

For details of this you should write to:

Gestetner Duplicators Ltd
Education Division
210 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DA

A good short guide to the different printing methods is

Jonathan Zeitlyn **Print: How you can do it yourself** London InterAction 1975

See Resource Section page 70

Preparing material for machine stencil cutting

Preparing your artwork. Start with a piece of white paper the same size as you want the finished job. On this sheet you paste all the things you want printed. Watch for dirty marks and glue. Always leave a margin of about ½ inch round the edge of your paper as duplicators can't print right up to the edge.

You can use Letraset for headings.

or Headlines from papers.

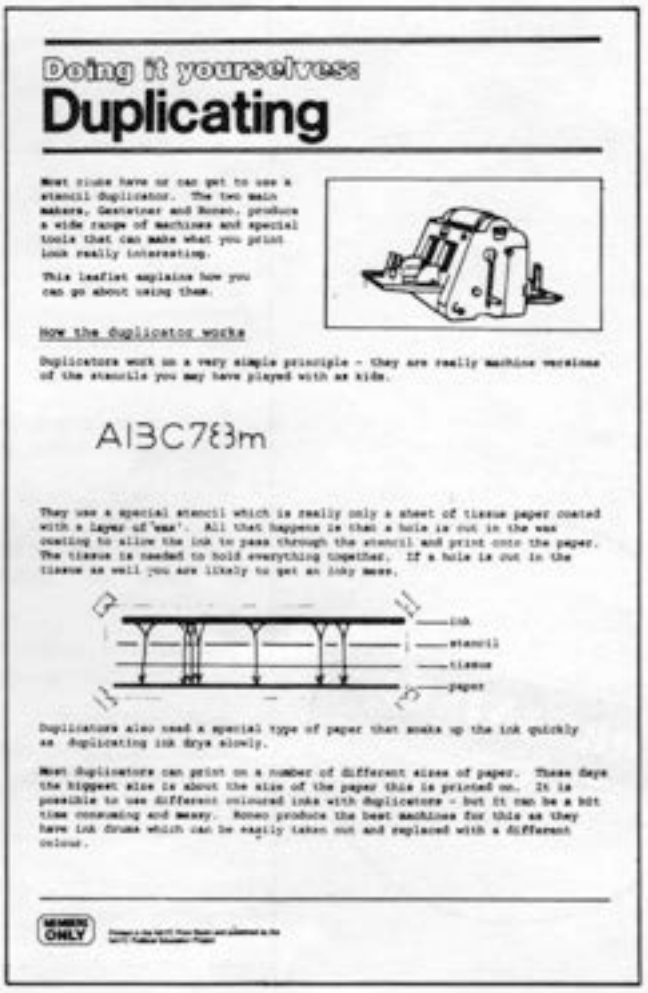
Mistakes can be corrected by typing on a piece of paper then sticking it on (you can use gummed paper or sticky labels), or by using 'Snopake', which is like white paint and once it dries it can be typed over.

Photos can be cut out and stuck on.

Illustrations can be traced and left on tracing paper provided the lines are nice and black. (Tracing paper should be stuck on with sellotape).

Use a rubber glue like 'Gow Gum', as it gives you time to move your items about to get the right position.

Always use black ink - the darker it is the better for copying but try to avoid using big areas of black as it won't copy very well. Very similar principles apply to producing artwork for other forms of printing, like offset litho.



Doing it yourselves

Duplicating

Most clubs have or can get to use a stencil duplicator. The two main makers, Gestetner and Roneo, produce a wide range of machines and special tools that can make what you print look really interesting.

This leaflet explains how you can go about using them.

How the duplicator works

Duplicators work on a very simple principle - they are really machine versions of the stencils you may have played with as kids.

A1BC7£3m

They use a special stencil which is really only a sheet of tissue paper coated with a layer of 'wax'. All that happens is that a hole is cut in the wax coating to allow the ink to pass through the stencil and print onto the paper. The tissue is needed to hold everything together. If a hole is cut in the tissue as well you are likely to get an inky mess.

ink
stencil
tissue
paper

Duplicators also need a special type of paper that soaks up the ink quickly as duplicating ink dries slowly.

Most duplicators can print on a number of different sizes of paper. These days the biggest size is about the size of the paper this is printed on. It is possible to use different coloured inks with duplicators - but it can be a bit time consuming and messy. Roneo produce the best machines for this as they have ink drums which can be easily taken out and replaced with a different colour.

MEMBERS ONLY

6 Other forms of publicity

Aside from good media coverage and newsheets there is a wide range of ways of getting your message across. As with much else in Organise! publicity has to be planned. You need to be clear about:

- **objectives** - what do you want to achieve?
- **motives** - why do you want publicity? Is it just for yourself?
- **market** - who is your message aimed at and what do they need to know?
- **resources** - publicity can be expensive/what skills are there in the group?
- **timing** - how does your publicity effort tie in with the other things you are doing?

Some of the methods described on this page can be very time consuming and costly. Look before you leap!

Leaflets

Leaflets are one of the main methods of getting publicity for local groups. They can be used to:

- advertise a coming event
- inform people about an issue
- let people know of a service you offer

Production of leaflets is very similar to what is involved with newsheets, with the following exceptions:

- leaflets tend to be about one issue or thing rather than several.
- leaflets usually have less writing on them. Just a brief description rather than a full explanation. A case of quality rather than quantity.
- leaflets are less "newsy" - they are often more campaigning.
- their size is usually smaller. Leaflets are often printed on paper half the size of this page (size A5)

They need careful preparation and must be attractive to look at if they are to be read. Some of the points worth checking for are as follows:

- are the facts correct?
- is it easy to read?
- does the leaflet say the things you want it to?
- does it have the name and address of the printer on it? (It must do by law).

Try to look at the leaflet as you think the people receiving it will.

Opening lines are very important - keep it short, and lively if possible. Perhaps you need to start with a question to get someone to lead on.

If the group is involved in the regular distribution of leaflets then much is to be gained by setting up a regular distribution team (see section on distribution in 'Newsheets').

Posters

Posters are an easy way of getting **small** amounts of information across. They are for making simple points.

If you are making them yourselves then bear the following points in mind:

- leave yourselves plenty of time to make them - a nicely made poster looks much better than a quickly drawn up one.
- make them the right size. If you want to stick them in people's windows or in public buildings, then don't make them too big or nobody will have them (don't go bigger than twice the size of this page). For other situations you can go for size.
- use the right materials. If you can get hold of "day glo" paper - the stuff with bright reflecting colours - then use it - you get very striking results.
- look for the best place to put them. Try shops, pubs, post offices, launderettes, clubs, libraries, churches, community centres, schools, factories, people's front windows, boards in the front garden (like estate agents' boards). Always put your name on them so that people know who is campaigning.

You cannot put a poster up anywhere unless you

- have the agreement of the 'owner' of the site/property
- are sure that the poster does not block or obscure the view of a road
- have a poster no bigger than 6 feet square (otherwise you will need planning permission - unless it is an election poster).

Some local authorities have additional regulations.

Sticking posters up in public places, ('flyposting'), is illegal and you can end up with a pretty hefty fine if you are caught.

Selling literature

Bookstalls at public meetings or a stall on the local market can be good ways of selling your own material, as well as books and pamphlets by other groups you support. It is important that the display is fresh and attractive - old and dirty pamphlets will attract nobody.

Community groups are not normally covered by local regulations controlling street selling, so it is possible to sell booklets/papers etc on the streets. However you should check the situation with the police first. The main legal problem you are likely to have with street selling is that you may be accused of causing and obstruction (See page 49).

Another successful sales method is to sell door to door. As with membership drives it is best to put round a leaflet a day or so before you call, saying that someone will be calling with pamphlets on a particular issue. Here it is crucial that you have a pamphlet which is:-

- cheap
- short
- on the 'right' issue

Stickers

Several groups have used small sticky labels to great effect. For instance you quite often see this sticker put on posters and it makes a point very well (but you should know it is illegal to do this). They can be stuck on letters, used as badges, and so on. Stickers are cheap to produce, about £2 per thousand. There are several specialist firms who produce them (mainly as address labels) and they usually advertise in Exchange and Mart or the Sunday papers.

Badges

These days it is possible to make small numbers of badges quite cheaply. Badges are quite a good way of stimulating conversations. Quite a few community groups have their own badge making machine so you can make your own for about 5p or 6p a badge. The machines themselves cost about £200 . Otherwise you will have to go to a specialist badge makers and that can be quite expensive (again they advertise in the Exchange and Mart).

Exhibitions

"Exhibitions" sounds a bit grand - perhaps 'displays' is a better word. Put together a collection of posters, photographs, drawings, words etc. which could be shown in a shop window (the building societies quite often have displays in their windows), in the library, or in a room where public meetings are held. Exhibitions quite often involve a lot of work and it is heartbreaking when people walk straight past them. They have to be attractive and striking if they are going to be looked at.

Films/Theatre Groups

Putting on a film show or theatre group that makes the points you are concerned about can be a good crowd-puller. Also because you are getting into the entertainment/arts field you can give your campaign quite a different feel. Most of the forms of publicity we have talked about have tended to deal with facts, whereas films and theatre can deal rather more with feelings and emotions.

Word of mouth

Talking to people is often the most effective form of publicity - especially in local communities. There are some pretty obvious places where people stand around and gossip - the club, pub, launderette, post offices, corner shop, the school gate at going home time. On the one hand people are more likely to listen to you talk, in, say, the chip shop, than turn out to a public meeting. However on the other hand information can get badly distorted on the 'grapevine'.

RESOURCES

Directory of Social Change **Community**, London Wildwood House 1977.

This book has a number of useful sections on community arts and communications plus details of the independent film distributors and some theatre groups.

Dilys Ruwis **Getting your message across,** London (National Federation of Community Organisations) 1981.

This is a basic publicity primer written for community groups. (Available from National Council of Voluntary Organisations).

National Council of Voluntary Organisations **A Simple Guide to Designing an Exhibition,** London 1971.

Advice on the basic principles of display work.

There are also a number of specialist books on poster and exhibition design and it is worth looking in bigger bookshops and libraries for these.

Legal aspects are covered in **Civil Liberties - The NCCL Guide.**

For details of the local availability of film projectors, exhibition stands and similar equipment, try your local Council of Voluntary Service/Organisations, Youth and Community Office, or local Youth Association.

See Resource Section page 70 .

7 Writing Reports

Hardly a day goes by without hearing on the news that some group or the government has produced a report. There are reports on anything and everything. For instance here are some titles of some recent local and national reports: **The future of nuclear power. Sports provision in Nuneaton. Buying used cars.**

One of the most common reports local groups write is their Annual Report which sets out what has happened in the last year. Reports can be 400 pages or 4 pages. Some of the most effective local reports have been the shortest. This section is about writing reports and how they can be used in campaigning.

What reports are for

The main uses of reports are to:

- help you get clear on your arguments. The preparation involved means you have to work out your position carefully.
- give you the space to make a full statement of your argument. Other things like newsheets and leaflets only have limited space.
- get publicity.
- gain you respect. If the arguments are good and detailed, people will listen to what you say.
- make your opponents think again about their actions or proposals. Detailed reports need detailed answers.

However,

- reports take a lot of time to produce. You could be using your time better. Also writing a report can slow thing up - you might need to act quickly.
- the organisation you are campaigning against is likely to have the resources to 'out-report' or 'out-statistic' you. There is a danger of getting tied up in figures and details rather than concentrating on the main principles or political arguments.
- reports have to be good. If the arguments are easily broken down, (because you haven't done your homework), you can lose ground.
- other methods might be more effective. Using fact sheets for instance.
- reports can give too much of your thinking away. One of the major weapons is surpise.
- writing reports can make things a bit too specialist for other members and therefore cause splits.
- large reports can be very costly to produce.

The message is clear - make absolutely sure you need a report before spending a lot of time producing one.

Reports and campaigning

A report is only part of your campaign. If they are not used along-side some of the other tactics suggested in this handbook then they are not likely to get you very far. They are a useful way of **starting** your campaign. A report is a good basis for things like lobbying, as councillors and MPs want to see details backing up arguments.

As reports are part of a campaign, careful thought should be given to how much you put into them - you might want to keep some arguments back for later.

Who are reports aimed at?

Who do you want to read the report? This is going to affect how you write and what sort of details you have to put in. Reports are normally written because you want to get your own way on an issue. They are therefore usually aimed at decision-makers - councillors, MPs, council officials and so on. It's important to be clear on exactly who you need to influence (see lobbying), because different groups want to hear different things. For instance:

- Councillors may be more interested in the general principles and the political effect of an issue.
- Officials may be more impressed with detailed arguments - the facts and figures.
- Technical experts will want to see the scientific arguments.

What's in a report

- Accurate facts and figures - anything you are not sure of leave out.
- Arguments and opinions - your views, other people's views.
- Recommendations - your solutions to the problem, clearly stated.
- Photographs, plans, and drawings where they help.

Reports normally have a set format:

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

1. History and background
2. The problem as you see it
3. Discussion
4. Appendices

Summary and Conclusions

Reports should start with the end! Many people reading reports simply want to know the main points - so if you want your points read - make it easy for the reader. Also if the reader knows the main points from the start the report is easier to understand. Keep this section short and to the point **but** try to cover all the important issues.

Introduction

This should set the scene - why your group is interested and what the problem is. It is often useful to say what the report does **not** do.

1. History and Background

The background is normally written in date order - explaining when things first developed and what has happened up to the present time. Use quotes if they are helpful to your argument. These you can get from:

- council minutes
- letters you've written and had replies to
- press cuttings
- other reports

When using quotes always state where you got them from, their date and make sure you've got who said it.

2. The problem as you see it

Make as clear a statement of the problem as possible, using any evidence you have gathered from reports, surveys, interviewing people and so on.

3. Discussion

You might want to talk some more about your findings, compare them with other people's views.

Don't be afraid to summarize the main points again at the end.

4. Appendices

The appendix (if you need one) has all the odds and ends that don't fit into the main part of the report. In it you might include details of how you did a survey, or bits of evidence provided by other groups.

A checklist for report writing

When writing a report the main points to bear in mind are:

- ✓ keep it short- long reports rarely get read in full.
- ✓ try to look at it through the reader's eyes.
- ✓ avoid jargon and long words - not only do they make sentences difficult to read but also a lot of people won't understand them.
- ✓ vary the presentation - where possible use pictures, maps, tables, etc. so that it keeps the reader's interest.
- ✓ start your report where you ended - with the conclusions.

How to write a report as a group

Careful thought needs to be given to the way the report is written. If it is left up to one person to do the work and the writing, it either doesn't get done, or it becomes that person's "property" - it may then reflect what the writer thinks rather than what the group believes.

When groups sit down to write things it often takes an hour to write the first line! How then, do we write a report in which all members of a group have had a chance in making and gaining learning for themselves?

STEP 1

The groups as a whole decides what the report is needed for. The group then brainstorms major issues, answers, approaches etc (see page 17).

STEP 2

The results of the brainstorm are then discussed by the group, so that broad areas are decided on.

Note: Try to keep the discussion on general points - talk about detail can come later.

STEP 3

Split the different areas up between the group. This might mean that one person, or small groups of 2 or 3 people, each take responsibility for writing a particular section of the report on the basis of the general discussions. Alternatively, if the report is to be short, a small group does the lot.

STEP 4

The small groups then bring their bits back to the large group. The discussions should be about the detail (as the major issues should have been thrashed out earlier). If there are big disagreements in the group, put it back to a small group/groups to come up with an answer.

Don't just stop at group writing - carry it through into layout and production, what to do with the report, and so on.

Producing the report

See the sections on newsheets and duplicating - the steps involved are similar. There are, however, some special points to be made about reports.

- Remember to put a summary and a list of recommendations at the beginning.
- Lay the report out clearly - break it up into clear, well labelled sections. Use sub headings. Different coloured paper for different sections helps.
- Try to introduce diagrams, pictures, cartoons, if they help the argument.
- Think about the cover - an interesting front page encourages the reader.
- Consider whether to number the paragraphs. This makes it easier for people discussing the report.

Using the Report

- Send it to the people who matter - the people you are trying to influence, the media and your members.
- When presenting the report to 'decision-makers' include a covering letter saying why they should read and support the report.
- Try to follow it up personally (see (see 'lobbying').
- If the report is long then why not produce a fact sheet for distribution to the community/members
- When giving the report to the press, take reporters through the report, explaining any important issues.
- Get your timing right - remember press deadlines and, as with lobbying, try to have news items appearing at the same time as 'decision makers' receive the report - so that they pay more attention to it.
- Use it alongside other techniques.

RESOURCES

There are useful notes on writing reports in

Community Action Magazine 22 Oct/Nov 1975

Mike Winwood **The Activists Dilemma** Thamesdown Voluntary Service Council 1977

The Community Workers' Skills Manual

Antony Jay **The Householders Guide.....**

A specialist book on report writing worth looking at is

John Mitchell **How to write reports** London, Fontana, 1974

This is a comprehensive guide to the preparation, writing and production of reports.

See Resources Sections on page 33 and page 70

8 Public Meetings

Public meetings are one of the most basic ways of getting or measuring support on an issue. However like all the methods talked about here they have to be good to be successful. Badly organised or unthought-out public meetings are just as likely to lose you support and goodwill.

What public meetings are for

The first step is to get clear on why you want a meeting, who you want to come and what you want to come out of the meeting. All these things will affect how you go about organising the meeting. Some of the reasons people hold public meetings are:

- to find out what people feel are important issues.
- to talk about and plan what action can be taken.
- to explain your view on the issues, perhaps as a way of starting or maintaining a campaign.
- to form an action group
- publicity
- to listen to and/or confront experts /councillors.
- to keep groups open and democratic, via Annual General Meetings etc.

Planning the meeting

Having decided what are the main things you want to happen at the meeting, you then need to work out a meeting plan (see page 9). Think also about the **feel** of the meeting - do you want it formal/informal and so on?

Public meetings generally fall into four bits.

The Start

- welcoming statement
- short explanation of the reasons for the meeting
- brief outline of how you want the meeting to run.

Middle

- speeches/statement by the group
- speeches by others, eg. a councillor or official
- comments and questions from the audience -

The finish

- suggestions and resolutions on action
- winding up statement on behalf of the group (summarizing the main points, as you see them, of the meeting)
- appeals for cash, membership etc.
- details of future meetings

Socializing

- chatting to people after the meeting

In the planning it is necessary for you to decide who is going to do what and when. These are some of the main jobs which need sorting out:

The Chair - the chairperson's job is to:

- open the meeting - explain what it is about
- introduce each speaker
- keep people to the point and the meeting to order (ie make sure only one person speaks at a time)
- keep an eye on the time, don't let speakers go on for too long, make sure that everybody who wants to, gets a chance to speak
- be sensitive to the feeling of the meeting - watch for people getting bored
- keep people to the agenda
- direct questions to those people who can/should answer them
- summarize and end the meeting

Stewards. You want people to feel welcome at the meeting and to know that the thing is organised. It is therefore good to have stewards who show people to their seats and, if necessary, help to keep order.

Speakers. People get nervous about standing up in front of an audience, so it is helpful if the burden is shared by a group of people. When you are putting your views forward get one person to give the background, another the solutions, a third the action you want to take - and so on. (See page 58 for how to make a speech).

If you are inviting 'outsiders' to speak, such as councillors, 'experts', then make sure you give them plenty of notice and provide them with a broad idea of what is going to be discussed. Also give them a time limit or else they may dominate the meeting. Make sure outside speakers know where they are due to speak - send them a map if necessary.

Secretary. It's wise to keep a record of what happens at the meeting although this doesn't have to be as complete as minutes (see page 13).

Refreshements. If you want people to do things, join the group etc., one of the best ways of approaching them is informally after the meeting. Providing a cup of tea or coffee can make a good reason for people to stay behind and chat.

Pre-meeting meeting. A day or so before the meeting get the group together to check that everybody is clear about what they have to do and that everything is arranged.

Resolutions and Motions. If you want the meeting to take a particular action you should have thought out a motion beforehand so that people can vote on it at the meeting. The following is an example of a motion:

"This meeting of Highfield residents deplores the failure of Butterside District Council to provide proper play facilities for the under 12's on Highfield Estate. The meeting believes this failure contributes to the increased vandalism on the estate and exposes children to considerable danger through being forced to play on the streets. It calls on the District Council to reclaim the land adjoining the Community Centre and to build a suitable play area on it.

A good motion should:

- identify the motion's sponsors (the meeting of Highfield residents)
- explain why the motion is needed (vandalism and danger)
- state the right attitude or opinion (have a play area)

and if it is calling for action it must also say

- who should take action (Butterside District Council)
- what action should be taken (build a play area)

Motions need to be **proposed** and **seconded** before they can be voted on by the meeting so it is a good idea to make sure that a couple of people take on the responsibility to do this at the meeting - after a motion has been voted on and agreed it is then called a **resolution.**

As soon as you get into the resolution game you are likely to have to deal with amendments. This is where a member or members of the meeting want to alter the wording and meaning of a motion. An **amendment** must

- specify whether words are added or deleted
- say where the change should be
- give the exact wording of the change

For instance:
Delete the words "to reclaim the land adjoining the Community Centre" and **add** in their place the words, "to buy the

land next to Judkins Mill on Copperfield Road."

Amendments need to be voted on. If passed they then become part of the motion which in turn must be put to the meeting for a final vote. Only one amendment should be taken at a time. If several are suggested it is normal practice for the last to be taken first.

Length. Try to keep meetings fairly short. Aim for about 1½ hours. More than 2 hours and people's attention will drift, people will leave.

Attendance list. It's useful to have a record of who came to the meeting. Ask people to write down their names and addresses so you can contact them again.

Literature Stall - if you have got books and pamphlets to sell, then make sure you have a stall. Literature stalls can also serve a useful function for people who are interested in joining the group - it is easier for people to go to the stall and ask questions than personally approach say, the chairperson.

Cash Collection - should you want to make a collection you should put people with collecting boxes at the exits.

Films/Slide shows and the like. Rather than have a whole line of speakers, meetings can often be made more interesting by having a relevant film, (keep it short), or presentation. If the group is, for instance, concerned to get the park tidied up, then why not show pictures of what you want done? Using this sort of method can often make the speaker's job easier.

Checkout the availability of screens, black-out facilities, type of plugs etc. beforehand - it can save a lot of red faces!

Time and Place

Time - try to choose a time when most people will be able to come. Make sure the meeting does not clash with popular TV programmes or other local events. If you are inviting guest speakers or councillors to attend then see what nights are going to be convenient with them. Many people like to avoid Fridays and weekends. The normal starting time for a meeting is 7.30 - 8.00 pm. Most important of all, leave yourselves enough time to organise the meeting properly.

Place - where you meet will depend on the number of people you think will come. If only a few people are likely to come it might be possible to hold the meeting in a house. If the meeting's going to be larger, then book a hall or room that is convenient for people to get to. Always underestimate the number of people who will come-it takes a lot to get people out of their seats to a public meeting. Fifty people can look and feel lost in a large hall and crowded in a small room. In general small crowded rooms make for more lively meetings. (see page 11).

Lastly when booking a hall or room check what times you can have the room, where to collect the keys from, what facilities are there, (are there enough chairs for example), and what has to be cleared up afterwards? Get confirmation of the booking in writing.

Publicity

Leaflets - to be distributed to houses in the area, given out in shops etc. They should be lively, so that people will be encouraged to come to the meeting and say what is going to be talked about. Remember to put details of time, place, date and who the organisers are. Most people seem to recommend that leaflets should be put out five to seven days before the meeting so that people have enough notice (but it is not too far away to let them forget).

Posters - A few well-placed written posters - on club notice boards, prominent windows etc. Put a poster up outside the hall.

Newspapers - Get an article in the prior edition of the local paper. You might also consider advertising.

Word of mouth - often the best way of getting a good attendance - personal contact means people know what they are letting themselves in for. See pages 52-53.

At the meeting itself.

- Get there early - people often turn up well before the meeting and you need to make sure everything is in order - inevitably someone will forget to do something!
- Arrange the seats how you want them - if possible try to create an informal atmosphere by **not** putting speakers on a platform or stage. Put the audience's seats as close to the speakers as possible.
- Make sure people are welcomed and guest speakers recognised.
- Start on time - it makes a good impression.
- Have a jug of water and some glasses ready for the speakers.
- Be sensitive to the feeling of the meeting - the chairperson should watch for people getting bored.
- Try to keep contributions short and to the point.
- Make sure that the meeting is clear about what action has been decided upon and how they can help.
- Try to finish early, particularly if the informal meeting of people afterwards is felt important.
- Tidy up and thank the caretaker, especially if you want to use the room again!

Follow up

- At the next group meeting it is helpful to review the public meeting to see what can be learnt about the issues or about organisation.
- Issue a press release (see page 46).
- If people have volunteered to do something - get them to work as quickly as possible or their enthusiasm will drop.
- Carry on with other tactics.

RESOURCES

Community Action Magazine 19 April/May 1975

This contains a very full account of how to organise a public meeting.

Pat Spencer **OK on the day!** Leicester, NAYC Publications, 1981.

A guide to running conferences - especially useful to youth groups.

See also:

Christopher Hall **How to run a pressure group**

Antony Jay **The Householders Guide**

For details of how to construct a motion see:

Bob Houlton **The Activists' Handbook**

Michael Locke **How to run committees and meetings**

9 Making Speeches

If you are involved in community action and politics it is likely that you will have to make a speech at some stage.

Most people find making formal speeches difficult. The idea of standing up in front of a group of people, however small and friendly, can be very daunting. By following a few simple 'rules' much of the difficulty can be overcome and in this section we look, briefly, at some of the main points to bear in mind.

Expect to be nervous

Everybody is afraid of making a fool of themselves in public. All good speakers are nervous before they begin, however well they manage to conceal it. Probably the most important step any speaker can take to help themselves feel more at ease is to be well prepared. This means knowing your subject and your audience, working out what you want to achieve and say and then rehearsing your speech several times.

Be Yourself

Try to be as natural as possible - use your normal every day language and do not worry about your accent or the way you pronounce words. It is very easy to fall into the trap of trying to copy the style of well known speakers and communicators. Your job is to get a message across and two qualities that audiences respond to in speakers are enthusiasm and a belief in what you are saying. You are likely to lose these qualities when you start aping 'professional' speakers.

Know your Subject

The audience will expect you to know your stuff. Make sure that what you say is based on fact - avoid overstatements - Audiences will soon find you out if you don't and will lose confidence in what you are saying.

It is important to **show** people that your argument is based on fact - use plenty of practical examples of what you mean.

Know your audience

There is a saying

In other words a speaker should have as much interest in the audience as the subject. Questions that need to be asked are

- how much will the audience already know about the subject?
- what do they expect to hear?
- why are they at the meeting?

The answers you get to these questions should have a big influence on what you say and the way you say it. For instance, if the audience knows little or nothing about the subject avoid technical jargon.

Work out what you want to achieve

Why are you making the speech? Are you trying to get a discussion started - in which case you should try to ask questions rather than give answers, - or are you there to:-

- give information - make sure you have the information to give;
- explain a course of action - does your explanation actually explain; or
- get people's support for a case?

Decide what to put in your speech

You should start by jotting down the main points you want to cover (perhaps by brainstorming - see page 17). Having listed your ideas you need to put them in a sensible order, getting rid of anything that is not directly needed. A good rule adopted by many speakers when they are writing their speeches is as follows

1. Tell them what you're going to say.
2. Tell them.
3. Tell them what you've just told them.

Speeches need a beginning, a middle and an end. Start by introducing yourself and the subject. It is important to get and keep the audiences interest and attention from the start - a useful ploy is to tell a story or give an example to set the scene - laughter is often valuable at this point - it makes people feel more involved. However avoid anything too dramatic - you want the audience to laugh with you, not at you.

Once the audience is clear about your subject the next stage is to give them your full message. Give concrete examples, explain your points and make clear your advice and suggestions. Try to make your points follow on logically and leave your most important or telling point to the end.

Finish by giving a **brief** summary of the main points and say which ways the audience can help with the problems outlined. Thank people for listening and the organisers/helpers for their work.

Keep things short and to the point

People can only listen for short periods of time - anything over 20 minutes will lose people's interest. Avoid 'going off the point', rambling stories, anything that is likely to sidetrack the audience.

Prepare for questions

People will want to ask questions about what you have just said or say where they disagree - be prepared. Work out answers beforehand to the obvious questions. Also remember to leave enough time during the meeting for questions. If you don't know the answer, say so.

Get things written down

Not many speakers are able to make a good speech without using notes. The four basic ways of preparing a speech are as follows:

Writing the speech out in full - The problem with this method is that it is normally boring for the audience - reading tends to take the life out of speeches and, as the speaker is looking at his/her notes, and not at the audience, is uninteresting to watch.

Writing out the speech and memorising it - Even if you can manage to remember everything, (which is highly unlikely), the delivery can be very flat.

Speaking from brief notes - Here the speaker uses headings to remind him/her of the main points of the speech. This method is normally much more lively for the listener than the first two approaches. Quite a few speakers write these headings down on small cards, the size of a postcard (5"×3"). If you use this method it is vital that your writing is clear, large and on one side of the card only. The difficulty with cards is that they can get out of order, especially if they are dropped, so number them clearly.

Speaking 'off the cuff' - This is where the speaker makes a speech using no notes and apparently without any preparation. In fact many 'off the cuff' speeches are prepared - speakers have a selection of short ready-made speeches that can be adapted from memory.

Revise and rehearse

Read your speech out aloud and time it. If possible tape record it. When listening concentrate on what you are trying to say - does your message come across loud and clear. If it doesn't then revise the speech. Cut out anything unnecessary. Also watch your timing. When you think you have got things just about right ask a friend to listen and to make comments.

Getting started

Unaccustomed as I am.....

Often the most difficult moment in making speeches is when you have to stand up and say the opening words. Once you have got that over you are on your way. One tried and tested formula for this situation is to take a deep breath, smile and say your first words looking at the people at the back of the hall.

Vary your pace and use silence

There is a real danger of rushing at things - speaking so fast that it seems like you are trying to break the sound barrier. The experts say you should aim at about 125 words a minute but to make things sound interesting you need to alter this slightly and use silences. A pause can be a very good way of emphasising a point. It is also more interesting if you alter the volume and tone of the voice - but this can come with experience.

Use visual aids

Using slides or writing things up on a board or demonstrating a plan using a map or a model, provided that all the audience can see them, can be a way of breaking up and making a speech more lively. It can also provide a very handy prop for the inexperienced speaker.

Look at your audience

If you are confident enough it is useful to look at people while you are talking. This both helps to involve the audience more in what you are saying and allows you to see how the audience is taking your speech.

Use feedback

One of the most common forms of feedback is when members of the audience interrupt what you are saying. There are a number of things you can do:

- **Ignore them.** This can be difficult - particularly if there are a lot of people shouting!
- **Promise to deal with the point later**
- **Ask people to wait until question time**
- **Use the interruption** - perhaps to make a point of your own - however this takes skill

Dealing with interruptions becomes a lot easier with experience - many speakers (like comedians) have a collection of suitable replies.

If it looks like you are not going to get all your points across it might be better to cut your losses and finish (but try to do it with style) and make the remaining points in 'answer' to questions.

The other main form of feedback is people's expressions - do they look puzzled/bored, are they fidgeting etc. Again it might be necessary to finish what you are saying fairly quickly, or to change tack, alter your delivery, use a visual aid, explain something further and so on. With experience you will be able to 'read' an audiences' mood.

Watch your mannerisms

Speakers can often irritate their audiences by fidgeting with say keys or coins, or by 'umming and ering'. The best remedy for these things are knowing your speech and rehearsing it.

Make your ending clear

Try to end on a high note - don't let things fade away. The easiest way is to restate the most important points.

Review what you do

After the event think about your performance - get friends to make comments on what you did so that you can improve things next time.

RESOURCES

There are a number of books on public speaking, some useful but many pretty awful. The following are worth looking at:

Dennis Castle and John Wade **Public Speaking** London, Teach Yourself Books, 1980

A very readable introduction to public speaking.

E C Eyre **Effective Communication** London, Made Simple Books, 1979, has a chapter on public speaking.

William R Goudin and Edward W Mammen **The Art of Speaking** London, Made Simple Books, 1980

A full, if somewhat 'heavy' treatment but useful for the hundred or so excersises it includes.

Otherwise both Bob Houlton **The Activist's Handbook** and **The Community Workers Skills Manual** have good short notes on the subject.

10 Petitions

Petitions are one of the most common and easy forms of taking action. However they take quite a bit of time to organise and are often not that successful at getting anything directly done. However they can have useful side effects.

Uses of a Petition

There are five main uses of petitions:

Getting a decision made - Council committees will often discuss petitions that are presented to them, but it is advisable to check with the council's Chief Executive what is normally done with petitions. If the committee has rules that mean that petitions can't be accepted, then the chairperson of the committee will usually accept it.

All a petition does is to get the matter discussed and to show that a number of people are concerned about an issue. If you want to get support, much fuller arguments will have to be put before the committee. This can be done by lobbying, producing a report and so on.

Petitions can also be presented to other committees and organisations - for instance to school governors or to the managers of a local firm.

Getting an issue known - This is the most usual use of a petition. Getting people to sign a petition gives you a good excuse to talk about the issues you are campaigning on. It can also be a way of getting feed-back on people's feelings.

Petitions can also be used as a means of getting wider publicity through the press (see section on Making News).

Getting new members - As you talk to people about the issues, it may be possible to interest them in the work of the group.

Part of a larger action - Presenting the petition is sometimes combined with a demonstration to show the strength of feeling on an issue.

To counter an opposing petition - If another group have organised a petition that you are opposed to, then it is sometimes a good idea to show the strength of feeling on your side. However you have to be sure you can get enough signatures or you might look foolish. It is often better to use other techniques or even ignore opposing petitions.

When to use a petition

* Will you get enough people to sign it? Big numbers are not everything. It is sometimes better to have a small petition rather than a big one - quality rather than quantity. If all the people signing the petition have a strong and direct interest in the issue, such as residents of a street it is proposed to knock down, then what is important is whether all or nearly all the residents have signed.
* Does it fit in with the rest of your campaign? Petitions should normally be used with other tactics.
* Is it worth the effort? They take a bit of organising - and you have to judge the possible impact of the petition.
* Have other simpler methods been tried?

Content and layout

A petition should include:

* who is being petitioned. (Workshire County Council).
* who is doing the petitioning. (Cornerstone School Parent Teachers Association)
* a statement of what the petition is about (repairs to the school)
* three columns, one for names, one for addresses, one for a signature.
* numbered lines for easy counting.

It is important to be accurate and the statement should be short and clear so people know what they are signing and the people receiving it know what you are wanting.

Petition forms should only be printed on one side of the paper.

If the petition is to be presented to Parliament then there are special rules. These can be obtained from the Clerk to the Committee on Public Petitions at the House of Commons.

Organising a petition

Set a time limit for the collection of signatures - Leave yourselves enough time to collect the petition forms together before you want to present the petition.

Decide where you are collecting signatures from - Door to door collection is the most efficient way of collecting signatures in an area, but anywhere where people meet such as shops, the pub etc. are also good places. If you are collecting signatures in several places look when you get the forms back for people who have signed twice.

Organise! - If it is a big area split it up into smaller parts and have one person take responsibility for each part. Also have one person responsible for collecting forms and checking people know what they are doing.

We the undersigned members of Cornerstone School Parent Teacher Association, demand that Workshire County Council should immediately take steps to make the necessary repairs to our school building. We are particularly concerned about the state of the toilets, the rotten window frames, and the inefficient heating system.

NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE
1.		
2.		
3.		

Make sure collectors know the issues - One of the jobs a petition does is to educate people about the issues so it is vital that collectors know what they are talking about. It's a good idea to have a meeting of collectors before you start so people are in the picture.

Watch out for Mickey Mouse signatures - Some amazing people sign petitions! Try to avoid joke signatures - they'll do you no good.

People don't like being the first - Always carry a completed or 'started' petition form when you are collecting as people don't like being the first to sign. You can always start by signing yourself!

If you are nervous about approaching people, why not practice first? Work out what you want to say when you ask. Once you've done it a few times it becomes a lot easier.

What to do when you have got the petition

- Check whether you have got enough/the right signatures to go ahead with presenting the petition.
- Check who should get the petition (sometimes it is necessary to present it to more than one person or organisation).
- If you can, get a photocopy of the petition for yourselves in case anything should happen to the original.
- When presenting it to the council get a written receipt for the petition.
- Get media coverage for the presentation of the petition.

Follow up

- Issue a press release
- Keep on asking the council/organisation for an answer to your petition.
- Review the organisation of the petition to see if anything can be improved on for the next time.
- Continue with other tactics.

RESOURCES

This has mostly been based on:

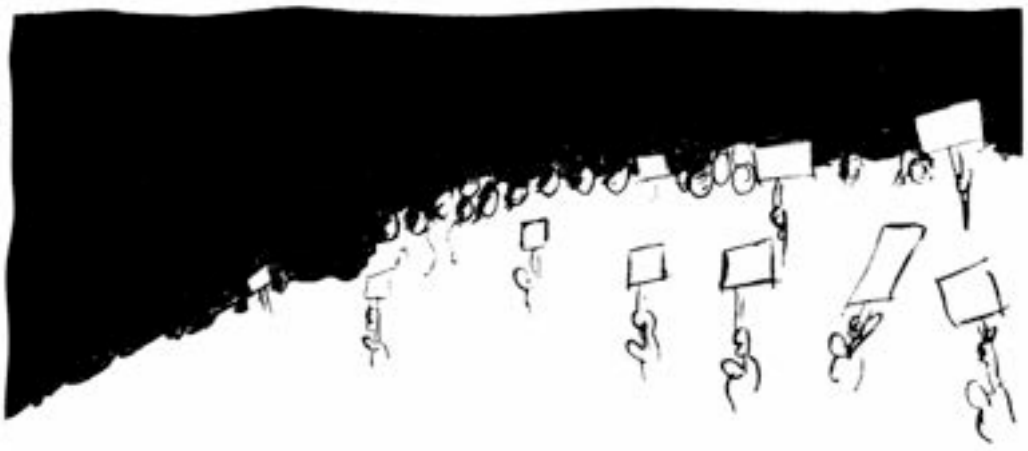
Community Action No 20 - Action notes No 2 "Organising a Petition"

where you can find fuller notes and

Christopher Hall **How to run a pressure group**

Otherwise see the Resource Section on page 70

11 Demonstrations



We regularly see pictures on television and in the papers of people marching with placards protesting against this or that. Demonstrations can be a very powerful way of getting people's feelings across - particularly if they are lively and involve a good range of events - like floats or actions that dramatize what you are protesting about (such as setting up a playground on the Town Hall steps). However they can go badly wrong and can do your case great harm. This section looks at when and how to organise small local demonstrations.

What demonstrations are for

There are four main reasons for holding a demonstration:

- to get publicity - demonstrations are news
- to show support for your cause - not just by numbers but also by people's strength of feeling
- as a way of keeping your membership happy - demonstrations can be great morale boosters - people like to be **doing** things
- as a means of bringing together a number of different groups on an issue

but

- demonstrations take a lot of organising to be successful. Their newsworthiness is a double edged sword. If there is trouble, or it looks a shambles, you could do a great deal of harm to your work.
- demonstrations can be like taking a sledge hammer to crack a nut. You should try simpler means first (see A Question of Tactics).

Only use a demonstration if you are sure it will be successful. Don't try anything too big until you have had some experience of organising smaller events.

How demonstrations fit in with other actions

Demonstrations are often used to support other tactics, like

- presenting a petition to a council committee
- lobbying a councillor or MP
- publicizing a report

Used like this they can be very effective.

What sort of demonstration

Demonstrations need an attraction, a catch line. Old style marches with banners and slogans are not so newsworthy. Try to put variety into what you are doing. For instance why not try:

- street theatre - with a short play about the problem you are protesting about.
- actions which dramatise the problem such as presenting a dustbin of rubbish to the council who is not providing a good litter collection.
- using floats or bands (like a carnival procession).
- giving away balloons with slogans on them.
- a march in silence.

and so on.

In short try to make your demonstration **special.**

Size is also an important consideration. Small demonstrations can be effective - like petitions it depends on the issues. For instance a village hall committee might want to stop a youth club using the hall. The club might only have 20 members - but if they **all** turn up to complain to the committee then that is news. Also you need to weigh up speed with numbers. Smaller demonstrations are quicker and easier to organise - you may have a greater impact because your action is topical.

Planning

A lot of things that apply to organising public meetings also have to be borne in mind when planning demonstrations (se page 56).

Getting support

It's often just not a question of getting your own friends and members out to demonstrate but also involving other people and groups who hold similar views. For instance cuts in the amount the council spends on education doesn't just affect one school, but them all. The more groups that are involved, the less possible it is for your opponents to accuse you of being unrepresentative. Your cause might also be helped if you can involve well-known people - MPs, councillors,personalities etc. Certainly this will make the press more interested. However when involving other groups you should remember:

- it will add to the amount of time it takes to organise
- you might find yourselves taken over or having your demands altered beyond recognition.

Publicity

Press releases/posters/leaflets/newssheets etc. See relevant sections.

In the advance publicity give clear details of assembly and meeting times, and the route.

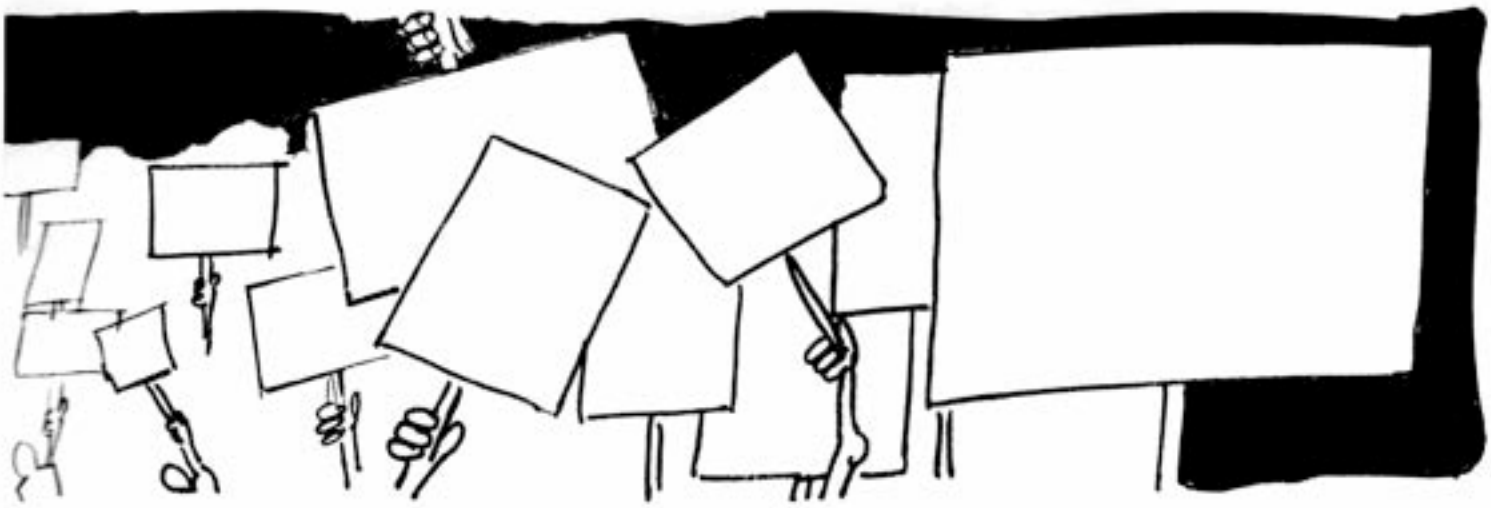
Time and place

There may well be a natural time and place for the demonstration such as a council meeting. Otherwise you need to think carefully:

- when will the event have the most impact? - get your timing right for the press, to embarass your opponents, when the public will see you.
- when can your supporters come?
- what are your targets? - you might be able to combine protests at several relevant places. For instance if you are campaigning to get better opening hours at the swimming pool you might demonstrate at the pool, outside the Town Hall, in the main shopping area.

Demonstrations and the law

If the demonstration is going over public roads then you will **have** to negotiate with the police over possible routes and times. As a march uses a public highway it is within the law. However, where a procession is large there is a danger of obstructing the highway, either by holding up traffic or pedestrians. By



giving the police notice, (and taking their advice), they are much more likely to take a lenient view of such an 'offence'.

Secondly, Local Acts often require organisers of marches and meetings in public places to give advance warning also to the local Authority. This must be in writing and given 36 hours before the event starts.

As soon as the demonstration stops moving, (such as when assembling or in a meeting at the end), the position becomes more complicated. There is a much greater possibility of causing an obstruction and for this reason it is best to chooose a meeting place well away from the public highway. However, you are left with the problem of where. You must **always** get the owner of the lands' permission before you use it. This applies to parks, common land and waste land as well as more obviously private property.

If you are thinking about using a loudspeaker or a band you must check the Local Acts and by-laws at the District Council Office as there are often regulations to limit noise. Loudspeakers can normally only be used between 8am and 9pm in public places and it is usual to give 48 hours notice to the local police station.

Start to finish

Demonstrations, like films and stories, need a beginning and an end. At the start choose somewhere that is easy to get to, has the room you need to assemble and that people know. It is a good idea to have something happening to keep people amused or interested during the time it takes people to assemble.

Try to finish on a high spot (the finale!). You might end with a meeting (if it's going to be outside, make plans in case the weather's bad).

Leaflets/speakers/placards/slogans

You should prepare a leaflet that explains why the demonstration is happening to be given out to onlookers. Make your placards clear and big (if you want them to be read on the press photographs). It's often good to bring a bit of humour in (look how the cameras pick up the joke banners at football matches).

If you are having a meeting it is worthwhile organising a public address "system" - even if it is only a portable megaphone. Also if you are going to have people chanting or singing on the march - work out the words beforehand. Whilst leaving things to the last moment can be inspirational - you should give yourselves time to consider the impact of your slogans etc.

Control

Demonstrations need careful controlling and it is for this reason that people are rightly nervous about them. For instance:

- what happens when a group joins in the demonstration that you don't want there?
- how do you stop obscene chants?
- what do you do when you meet opposition?

You should have people who have clear responsibility to marshall the demonstration. On bigger events it's a good idea if they are identified with an armband or badge. Communication is important, so have a portable megaphone so the marshalls know what to do.

Before the march the marshalls should be absolutely clear about their duties, the route, and what to do if there is trouble.

Refreshments

If the event is going on for some time then it may be a good idea to organise some refreshments, tea, sandwiches etc., particularly if it is a cold day. If you are selling these in a public place you should check with the police that it is OK.

On the day

As with public meetings - get there early, check all the arrangements, try to ensure things go as planned.

Follow up

You should have worked out what form your follow up will take before you went on the demonstration. As a guide you should:

- issue a press release
- review what happened to see what can be learnt and what further action needs to be taken
- maintain momentum - campaigns shouldn't end with demonstrations but with the changes you want being made.
- thank people who gave help.

RESOURCES

The best short guide to organising a demonstration is in

Community Action Magazine No 41

otherwise look at

Christopher Hall **How to run a pressure group**

The Community Workers' Skills Manual (Section on street speaking).

A must is **Civil Liberty - The NCCL Guide** for the legal side.

12 Further forms of action

In this section we deal with two main types of action:

1. Direct action
2. Appeals to 'higher' authorities

Direct Action

Taking direct action is often a risky business legally or politically or both! Careful thought needs to be given to using such means as they could just as easily lose you support as gain you it. A good 'rule of thumb' is to use direct action when other means have failed. Legal advice should always be taken beforehand. It should never be attempted unless your case is strong and you can carry things through to the end.

Doing it yourselves

At its most straightforward direct action might take place as a result of a group feeling it was getting nowhere with its attempts to influence a council or organisation. For instance, the group might have been campaigning to get a derelict site cleared so that it could be used as a small car park for local residents (to get the cars off the road). Because the council did not seem to be doing anything the group organises local residents to clear the site and people begin to use the space. The problem is that it is not their land, so that technically they are acting illegally. In reality it is the sort of action that is likely to gain public sympathy. Whether it gains the councils' sympathy is another question - especially if they had other ideas for the site.

Another form of ' direct action' is to do something yourselves for a day. For instance you might be complaining because there is no school crossing patrol on a busy road and to draw attention to the issue a group member might act as 'lollipop' man/woman for a day whilst arranging suitable publicity.

Boycotts and non co-operation

Another form of direct action is the boycott. Basically all a boycott is, is when a group or individual refuses to have contact with something. The best known recent example of this has been the call to athletes to boycott the Olympic Games. Local uses of the boycott might be to ask people not to buy goods at a prticular shop or not to attend a particular meeting. Boycotts should always be used with other tactics, such as using the press, leafleting, etc.

Picketing

In recent years a lot has been writen about picketing during strikes. A picket is usually thought of as a small group of people standing outside a particular firm or building to peacefully give or get information from people going into the place. The normal purpose of a picket is to ask people not to deal with or work for the firm in question. As a result of recent cases, pickets of things like shops or private premises which are not part of an industrial dispute, can run into serious legal difficulties with claims for compensation awarded for any loss of business which occurs as a result of the picket. It would seem that picketing on a particular issue outside a number of different buildings, by walking up and down, for instance, is okay, providing the pavement or road is not obstructed orthere is no threat of a breach of the peace. However picketing of a specific building or shop is very dodgy.

Sit-ins and occupations

One of the aims of this method has generally been to stop the normal use of the particular building or room being sat in/occupied. Thus council chambers have been sat in so that council meetings could not go ahead.

The other major use of the method has been where a particular facility, such as a nursery school, has been closed down, and groups have occupied the building so as to carry on with the activity. In the case of our example it might mean parents continue to run the nursery school.

The negative nature of the first technique runs a great risk of losing any sympathy the public or decision-makers have for your case. That is aside from any legal difficulties you might encounter. The more positive approach of continuing a service is more likely to gain you public sympathy (although not the decision-makers sympathy!). However it is similarly beset with legal difficulties - the law of trespass, etc.

Appealing to 'higher' authorities

When you have exhausted the other tactics it is sometimes possible to use 'higher' authorities.

One of these authorities is the **Ombudsman** or "local authority commissioner". The job of the ombudsman is to investigate complaints concerning bad administration or injustice by local authorities. All you can complain about to the commissioner is the **way** in which a council does things not about the pros and cons of a particular decision. They can only look into the case if the local authority has first had a chance to investigate and have not done so. This all make complaining to the local ombudsman a fairly marginal tactic.

The chance to make other appeals depends very much on the nature of your complaint and who it is directed at. For instance, if your campaign is directed at the Department of Social Security, they have a system of tribunals. Where there are cases of discrimination against women, it is possible to use the Equal Opportunities Commission. In special cases it might be possible to use the courts, for instance where you feel a council or organisation is acting outside the law. These sorts of appeals usually involve a great deal of preparatory work and, especially in the case of the courts, a lot of money.

RESOURCES

This section has been largely based on Mike Winwood **The Activists Dilemma**

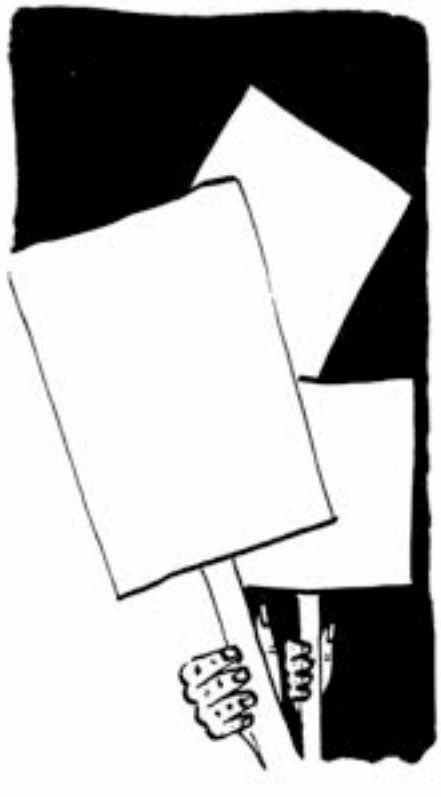
Other useful sources were

Community Action Magazine

Community Workers' Skills Manual

A must if you are thinking about this sort of action is

Civil Liberty - The NCCL Guide to Your Rights



13 Fund Raising

Most groups have to go out fund raising at some time or other. You need money to campaign. You need money to run the things you want. Sometimes it takes more time and energy to get a council or organisation to do something, (like getttting an extra piece of equipment for a youth club), than if you went out and raised the money for it yourselves.

Fund raising can be a real chore. It can also be fun. How successful you are and how much you enjoy your money-making boils down to two things - luck and planning.

Running a fund raising campaign is very much like organising the campaigns we have looked at in the rest of the handbook. You need careful preparation, publicity and people. The basic steps are as follows:

STEP 1

Decide why you need the money

In your own minds you may be clear why you want the cash but it might not be so obvious to the people you are asking for money. You also need to consider whether what you are wanting the money for will appeal to the public.

STEP 2

Decide how much money you need

Try to look at things long term - not just at what you need to get you through the next two weeks.

Consider whether your target (the amount of money you want) is realistic - think again if you don' think you can raise the money.

STEP 3

Form a group to organise the fund raising

Organising takes time and needs some special skills like being able to handle money, write to the press/advertise, 'manage' people. At your first meeting you should see who has the right sort of experience. If people don't have the right knowledge etc. look for people who might be able to help. There may be someone you know in another local organisation who can give you advice or even direct help. Details of other local organisations can usually be found in the library or from the local Council of Social Service. Organisations like the Round Table, Rotary and the Lions Club who raise a lot of money may be worth approaching.

STEP 4

Decide how you want to raise the money

Choose something that is practical and profitable - if something looks like a lot of hard work for little return avoid it. Some questions you should ask are:

- Will you need a number of fund raising events or can you get what you want from one?
- Can you get the knowhow and resources you need to run the event? Don't be over-ambitious, particularly if it is your first event.
- Does the way of fund raising fit in with the thing you are getting money for? For instance, a sponsored silence to support a club for the deaf is a good way of dramatising your efforts.
- Do people who are giving the cash get 'value for their money'? - you want them to give again.

STEP 5

Planning and preparation

Plan carefully - try not to leave things to chance. Whilst there are many ways of raising money, events, of some sort, are the most common. These are the main jobs involved in organising an event:

Costing the event

Work out what the event will cost to put on - remember to include costs like advertisements, printing, hire charges and any goods/prizes you need to buy. Check this against the amount you think you will raise.

Choosing the right date and time

Leave yourself enough time to get the thing organised and advertised. Look out for the other local events that might clash (you can ask the Town Hall and local paper about this). Also remember 'national' events like cup finals and holidays. Choose a sensible time, eg. don't hold fetes at meal time or 7 o'clock in the morning.

Choosing the place

People have got to be able to get to the event easily. You need a building or place that is going to fit your needs, eg. like having a kitchen, toilets, car parking etc. Watch out for fire and safety regulations for the numbers you are expecting.

Letting people know about the event.

Get an item in the local papers and take a small ad in the 'What's on' column. Make posters, leaflets etc. (See the sections on Making News and Publicity).

Managing the event

It's often a good idea to have one person who takes overall responsibility for supervising and co-ordinating the event so that things don't get done twice and decisions can be made quickly.

Getting helpers

Make a list of the jobs that need doing and of the people that might be able to help. Don't lumber individuals with too much - try to share jobs out fairly. Ask people early so that they don't fix up to do other things on the day of the event. Try to give them as full a picture as possible of what you want them to do. The better organised things appear, the more likely people will give their help. Make sure you have enough people.

Don't forget any specialist help you might need - like first aid arrangements (you can ask St. John's Ambulance Brigade or the Red Cross to help on big events).

Other people to contact

If it is a big event or is happening in a place where you might cause an obstruction or inconvenience, then talk to the police.

Keep tabs on what is happening

Make a list of all the jobs, who is supposed to do them and when. You will need several meetings in the weeks before the event to check whether things have been done and to take action if something unexpected crops up.

Get insurance cover

You should make sure that in case of accidents/theft etc you are insured - otherwise you can lose more than you raise (See "Insurance" on page 69).

STEP 6

Keep people involved

If the fund raising group is a 'sub' group of a bigger committee, make sure the others know what's happening. Also keep other members in the picture. A lot of the success of fund raising events depends on word of mouth publicity.

STEP 7

On the day

Whilst different events involve different jobs - there are some basic rules to all events; make sure that there is:

- Someone responsible for each activity and that they know how to deal with the problems that are likely to happen.
- Someone whose only job is to co-ordinate what people are doing.
- Tight control on money - don't leave it lying about and if it's going to be a lot, make arrangements to keep it safe after the event (put it in the bank as quickly as possible).
- Preparation in case of emergency, ie. you know where the fire extinguishers are, that someone is around who can deal with the 'little' emergencies like nipping round the shops when the canteen is running out of tea bags.
- Plenty of time left to clean up.

STEP 8

Following up

After the event:

- Try to thank everyone who helped.
- Publicize the amount you raised.
- Have a meeting of the group to talk about how things went, what can be learnt for future events.
- Spend the money on what you said you would.

Jumble Sales

Jumble sales are one of the most common ways of raising money. They don't involve the group in having to layout a lot of money but they do involve a lot of organisation. This is what you need:

A hall - It should have a kitchen so that you can provide tea and coffee, toilets and if possible a lot of the equipment you need.

Somewhere to store the jumble - Someone's garage is ideal, providing it is dry.

Equipment

Plenty of tables for stalls
Chairs
Coat stands (if you can borrow some), hangers to display the clothes
Card and felt tip pens for signs
Sticky labels and tags for prices
Drawing pins/sellotape/string
Plenty of big plastic bags and boxes to collect/store/get rid of jumble
Tools - like hammer/pliers/screw drivers

Helpers

You will need people to:

Collect the jumble
Sort it
Set up the hall
Run the stall (at least two helpers on each)
Take money on the door
To look after and collect money from the stalls during the sale
Run the refreshments
Cover first aid
Co-ordinate things
Publicise the event

Jumble - You need good quality jumble - the main types of saleable jumble are clothes (especially good quality everyday clothes and childrens wear), books, toys and bric-a-brac. To get it ask friends and family for jumble. Also, arrange a collection round the neighbourhood. To do this you:

1. Deliver a leaflet to the houses on the estate saying you will be calling to collect jumble if they have any.
2. Collect the jumble on the evening you said you would.
3. Sort the jumble out - be tough - chuck out things that are not going to sell. Put the jumble into the stalls you want - for instance:

   Kiddies clothing
   Menswear
   Womenswear
   Shoes
   Books etc
4. Price the articles - keep them cheap (but watch you don't underprice - it's best to go to a few jumble sales run by other people and get an idea of prices).
5. If you have got some really good stuff it might be worth keeping it back and holding a 'good as new' sale or auction - as you will be able to charge more. Also get someone who knows about antiques/bric-a-brac to give you an idea of prices on these items, as it may be better to put those into an antiques auction or to sell separately to dealers.

Other stalls - You might consider having a jam/cake/groceries stall - if people haven't got jumble then you could ask them to give something else. Also you might think about having a raffle (there are laws about raffles - see resources list).

Organisation

- Leave yourself plenty of time to set up the hall and stalls. You will normally need a morning or an evening to prepare.
- Have a 'meeting' of all the helpers at the same time to sort out any problems, deal with any last minute bits of information and check everybody knows their jobs.
- Ask helpers to be in the hall 15-30 minutes before the sale is due to open.
- Get change ready for the stalls and the door. Some jumble sales use a supermarket checkout system rather than having people taking money on all the stalls.
- Watch security - a lot of things can get stolen at jumble sales.
- You are not likely to sell all the jumble, so arrange to dispose of it after the sale or for someone to store it. Used clothes dealers will come and collect straight after the sale.

CHILTUM YOUTH CLUB

Fairbrow Street, Welton, Brucks.
Tel: Welton 1234

Sponsored Silence

Participants will be trying to keep quiet for two hours starting at 6.30pm on 11th July, 1980. You pay for every 5 minutes they can keep quiet. The money is being raised to buy new football strips for the under 14 boys and girls five-a-side teams.

Name of participant _____

Address _____

_____

NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE	AMOUNT PER 5 MINS	AMOUNT DUE
		TOTALS		

The above participant kept quiet for minutes.

Signed Official Steward

Sponsored Events

Sponsored events can be quite big money spinners for very little work. There are hundreds of different types of sponsored event. For instance, sponsored:

walks
swims
silences
fasts
litter clearance
dancing

The principle is the same for all of them - the people taking part persuade others - friends, family, people at school or work, to pay a specific amount per hour/mile/length/bag of rubbish/ and so on.

Good fund raisers are when you get sponsorship to do something that is socially useful like clearing litter or keeping quiet!

Things like sponsored walks have tended to go out of favour as they involve quite a lot of organisation - marking out the route, preparing refreshments, route marshalls - and they have not had a good safety record. If you are doing something like this its best to have a circular route somewhere safe like on a playing field and ensure you have first aid people on hand. Similar care has to be taken with events like swims.

The first thing to do is to choose the activity you want and decide on a rate for the job, that is to say whether you will charge per hour/5 mins/ per bag of rubbish etc. Take care on this one particularly when you are doing something different - it's very difficult to know how many bags of rubbish you might fill so it might be best to go on time taken.

Then set a date, four to six weeks away, for the event to take place.

Give out sponsor sheets to everyone who is going to take part. They should look something like the one on this page.

Sponsor forms should say exactly what the event is, what the money is going to be used for and give the sponsor some idea of what they will have to pay - in the example if the person keeps quiet for 2 hours they will have to pay out 24 x the amount they said. Follow the basics as suggested in the first part of this section.

At the same time you should give out an information sheet to participants which gives details of the event, the rules and who the organiser is. If the event is to involve children you will need to get their parents permission beforehand.

The organiser should keep a list of the names of participants so that s/he can chase people up.

During the event you should collect in the sponsor forms, add them up (keep a note of the amounts) and then sign them and give them back when the event is over so that participants can collect in the money. Remember to provide refreshments for helpers and participants and be prepared for accidents and the unexpected.

Set a time limit for when you want the money in, encourage people to collect it as quickly as possible - people's memories are short!

Chasing up is the most difficult, but the most important part. This is often forgotten as people seem to relax after the event.

For the more 'special' events you may have to talk to the local council and police so as to make special arrangements. For instance in the case of a sponsored litter collection you may have to check with the unions (so that you are not seen doing the work of the dustmen), the refuse department, the owners of the land you are 'cleaning' and so on.

Getting donations

This method of fund raising involves you in approaching specific people and organisations and asking for money. There are four main groups!

- local industry and shops
- local and national trusts and charities.
- local government.
- individuals.

Firms, trusts and Charities

When looking around for people to approach think carefully about whether your cause is likely to appeal to them. Charities and trusts often have rules about who and what they will give money to. It may be necessary to do a bit of cosmetic work on your case so that it appeals. Don't waste time writing to places where you are likely to get a refusal.

The letter you send should follow these points.

- Be brief and clear - try to get everything you want to say on one side of A4 paper.
- Type your letters so that they are easily read. Be sure the signature is clear.
- Explain what the group does - who it helps and why, plus what plans you have for the future.
- Say why the group needs funds now - how would the donation be spent, include a relevant budget. Make sure the figures are accurate.
- Present your group as being special - why they should give to you rather than anyone else.
- Make it clear if you are approaching other people and whether you have received any other funds to date.
- Show what's in it for the firm/organisation (where appropriate!) eg. if the donation is going to be publicised.
- Write to the right person. Find out, (by telephone), who makes the decisions on appeals. Also, don't just approach the management in firms; trade union branches and workers social clubs are always worth a try.

You can make a list of likely firms to approach by asking round for suggestions, looking in the local paper - ads as well as news items - the yellow pages and the local chamber of trade directory. Also ask in your library for details of local companies. Two books worth looking at are:

Company Information - United Kingdom (Kompass)

Key British Enterprises (Dun and Bradstreet Ltd)

For details of the trusts and charities who may give you money another trip to the library is neccessary to look in:

The Directory of Grant Making Trusts (Charities Aid Foundation)

Also write to the Chief Executive of your district council asking to inspect the index of local charitable trusts as this has most of the local ones listed.

Youth groups should also approach their local Association for information about youth trusts.

The other possible source of money are organisations like The Lions Clubs, Rotary and Round Table, who raise money for charitable causes. For details of their organisation ask at the Library, local Council of Social Service or Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Local government

Local Authorities often help youth and community groups but the amount they are prepared to give varies from area to area. You may have to write a similar letter as to trusts etc. but many local Authorities have special application forms etc. The sort of information you need is.

- Who makes grants. Some councils have a legal responsibility for certain areas of work like County Councils and education. But don't just go for the obvious, often local parish and town councils will give small donations.
- Who or what is eligible for money.
- Who the right person to approach is. Look for titles like "Community Development Officer" or "Youth and Community Officer". For small councils, write to the Clerk.
- How do you make an application.

For advice, again approach your local Council of Social Service or local Youth Association.

(Also see page 40 Using Normal Channels).

Individuals

When approaching individuals for money it is usually better to make your letter more general and personal. You should pick your targets with care. One way of doing this is to select the neighbourhood where you think people are likely to contribute to your cause and deliver a personal letter to each house. You can get the names and addresses from the electoral roll in the library. Think carefully about presentation.

Collections

Door to door and street collections are a good way of getting money largely because they don't involve laying out much money beforehand. However, the laws concerning this sort of collecting are very tight.

Before you can go door to door or street collecting you have to get a licence from the police for the area. In theory you can apply a month in advance of the proposed collection date, in practice it is advisable to apply a year in advance!

Collections do need careful planning so that the same people don't get asked for money over and over again. Using a street map, divide the roads into areas and tick them off when you have got a volunteer to collect from those streets. Keep a note of who does what.

Collectors have to be at least 16 and should always be polite when asking for money. On street collections avoid obstructing the pavement or making a nuisance of yourselves. If you are doing the sort of collection where people put money in envelopes then these can be delivered by people under 16. Collectors also need to have special identification (you will get details when you apply for permission to collect).

Some types of collection don't have to be licenced. For instance pub collections can be very profitable (and hazardous!) from 9pm onwards on pay days and weekends. To do this you should always ask the publican's permission. Alternatively ask him/her if you could leave the collection tin in the bar for a few weeks. If you do this, let the bar staff know what the collection is about and, if possible, leave some leaflets that explain things.

Other Fund Raising Ideas

Doing jobs. There are any number of possibilities here. For instance:

babysitting service
car washes
gardening

Stunts. Unusual events that can be linked with things like street collections or fêtes. For instance:

miles of pennies
tiddly winks competitions
balloon race
record breaking attempts

Collecting goods. Here the group collects things like old postage stamps, trading stamps (like Co-op and Green Shield stamps) or old newspapers. Trading stamps can be exchanged with the companies for cash, postage stamps sold to local stamp dealers and old newspapers sold by the ton to firms that recycle paper.

Social events- Discos/Barbecues/Bingo /Films/Concerts/Pantomime/Dances/ Cheese and Wine Party. All events need a lot of time and organisation if they are to be successful.

Selling stuff. A lot of groups make money by selling stuff. For instance:

Food/confectionery
Pens/Cards
Gifts
Clothes

There are a number of firms who specialise in supplying fund raising goods to groups. The problem with selling is that you are liable to get left with unwanted goods and thereby lose your profit. Also it involves a large outlay to start.

Insurance

Most youth groups and many community groups have some form of insurance. The three main types to be considered are:

Public liability insurance

This is sometimes called legal liability or third party insurance and is a **must.**

If anyone is injured by say tripping on a loose floor board which has not been repaired or made seriously ill by food poisoning form the use of dirty kitchen equipment, they can sue the group if it is thought that the group has been negligent. If negligence is proved, the compensation rewarded can be very high - £50,000 or more.

Personal accident insurance

If one of the members or helpers meets with an accident (not neccessarily through anybody's fault) whilst taking part in a group activity, then they can be compensated. There is no reason to have this by law but many groups feel under a moral obligation to insure for this. Risky events like sponsored parachute jumps etc will need special insurance.

Fire, theft and all risks insurance

If the event you are holding involves the use of valuable equipment or the sale of 'expensive' goods it is sensible to insure against their loss.

Members of youth clubs that are affiliated to NAYC can join special insurance schemes to cover all these risks. Details can be got from your local Association of Youth Clubs.

RESOURCES

Hilary Blume **Fund Raising - A Comprehensive Handbook,** Routledge Kegan Paul (1977)

This is a useful handbook - it covers most of the major things like flag days, sales, fetes, raising money from trusts and industry.

Redmond Mullin **The Fund Raising Handbook,** Mowbrays (1975)

This book is more suited to bigger organisations and bodies and is a guide to the whole process of fund raising with particular emphasis on getting donations/grants.

Fund Raising - a collection of ideas for raising funds, The Scout Association, Baden Powell House, Queens Gate, London WC2A 1JB.

A useful collection of down to earth ideas for fund raising and how to do them.

Fund Raising: Age Concern action guide, Age Concern, Bernard Sunley House, 60 Pitcairn Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3LL

A good starter booklet if you have not been involved in fund raising before.

Fund Raising for and by small groups of volunteers, The Volunteer Centre, 29 Lower Kings Road, Berkhamsted, Herts (1980)

This book is a short but useful introduction to raising funds via donations/grants with a fairly extensive list of possible trusts to approach. A bit pricey but could be good value if you get some money using it!

Resources

If you want advice about taking action it is worth looking around locally. You could ask:

- other local pressure groups
- youth and community workers
- the local Council of Voluntary Organisations
- your local Youth Association/ Association of Youth Clubs
- local political parties (where appropriate)

The main books used in writing this section were as follows:

Community Action Magazine
PO Box 665, London, SW1X 8DZ Tel: 01 251 3008

Community Action reports on what is happening in Tenants and Action Groups and community campaigns and has feature articles on various issues plus occasional practical notes on how to organise. It also publishes the Investigators' Handbook. The magazine comes out 6 times a year.

Community Projects' Foundation **Community Groups' Handbooks** obtainable from 7 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4AQ.

These are a series of five booklets dealing with different aspects of community groups.

The Community Workers' Skills Manual, Association of Community Workers, ACW, Colombo Street Sports and Community Course, Colombo Street, London SE1

The Directory of Social Change **Community** London, Wildwood House 1977 obtainable form DSC at 9 Mansfield Place, London NW3.

This book has extensive sections on community action, community arts, communications and resources.

The Directory of Social Change **Campaigning and Lobbying,** London 1979

This is a rather wordy pack of transcripts of some seminars they held on campaigning.

Tony Gibson **People Power** London, Penguin 1979

Aside from a very useful Fact Bank the book contains eight accounts of campaigns/actions.

Christopher Hall **How to run a pressure group** London, Aldine Paperbacks 1974

A book based largely on the experience of campaigning on environmental issues.

Bob Houlton **The Activist's Handbook** London, Arrow Books, 1975

A short guide largely aimed at trade unionists but useful to community activists. It has sections on role relationships and social groups, 'working the system' and on dealing with the media.

Antony Jay **The Householder's Guide to Community Defence Against Bureaucratic Aggression,** London, Jonathan Cape 1972

Based on a feature written for the Sunday Times Magazine this short book (now out of print) gives a lot of hints about campaining. It was written largely for the environmental/planning lobby.

Denis MacShane **Using the Media** London, Pluto Press 1979

A very comprehensive guide to dealing with the press, television and radio.

Civil Liberty - The NCCL Guide, London Penguin 1979

The guide is an absolute must for groups.

Ann Taylor and Jim Fryth **Political Action,** London, Arrow 1979

Another book from the Trade Union Industrial Studies Series which, whilst aimed at trade unions and political action, does have relevance to community campaigning.

Michael G Winwood **The Activists' Dilemma - Local Government Decision-Making and How to Influence it,** Swindon, Thamesdown Voluntary Service Council 1977

An extended set of course notes. Obtainable from TVSC, Farringdon House, 1 Farringdon Road, Swindon SN1 5AR Tel: (0793) 38398.

The political parties also produce material that has been very helpful in putting this section together. We used material from

The Association of Liberal Councillors
The Birchcliffe Centre
Hebden Bridge
West Yorkshire
HX7 8DG

The Conservative Party
32 Smith Square
LONDON
SW1P 3HH

The Labour Party
144-152 Walworth Road
LONDON
SW17 1TJ

In all three cases the material was specifically written for party activists.

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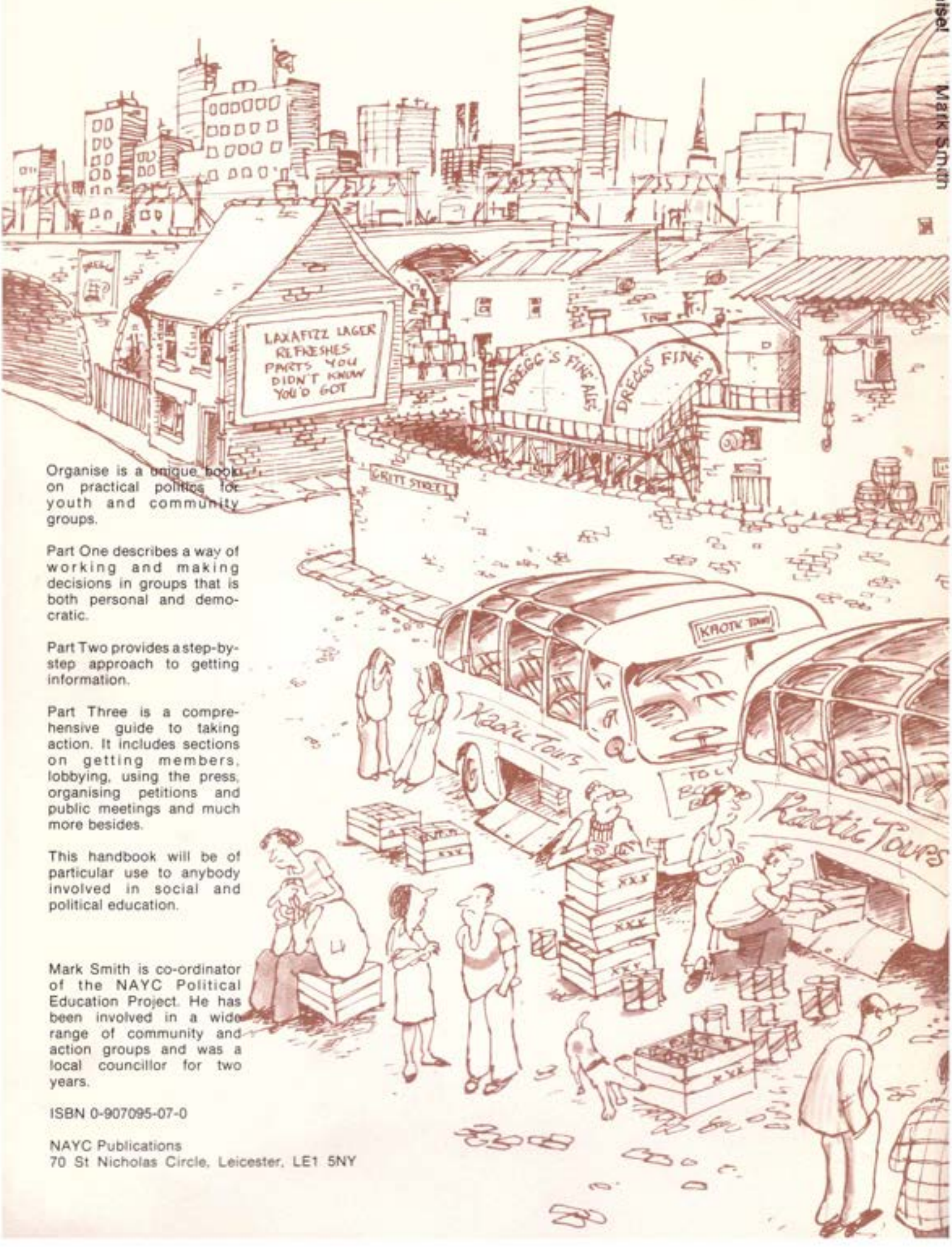
Organise!

Mark Smith



Organise is a unique book on practical politics for youth and community groups.

Part One describes a way of working and making decisions in groups that is both personal and democratic.

Part Two provides a step-by-step approach to getting information.

Part Three is a comprehensive guide to taking action. It includes sections on getting members, lobbying, using the press, organising petitions and public meetings and much more besides.

This handbook will be of particular use to anybody involved in social and political education.

Mark Smith is co-ordinator of the NAYC Political Education Project. He has been involved in a wide range of community and action groups and was a local councillor for two years.

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