

IRISH
UNION OF SCHOOL STUDENTS.

The ABC of
CAMPAIGNING

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THE ABC OF CAMPAIGNING:

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Introduction:

Campaigning serves several purposes and is a major factor in the growth of any organisation. The Standing Committee of the IUSS has already laid out education - agitation - organisation as the basis of union development and growth. This document has been produced by the National Organiser & by the General Secretary as the basic agitational document within the "State of the Union" plan.

Campaigning focuses public opinion on issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. It creates a sense of purpose & awareness within the organisation launching the campaign. It shows the organisation very clearly who can be relied on and who cannot. Campaigning forces authorities to justify their position publicly and therefore to find logical explanations for illogical stands. It demonstrates the power of united, mass-democratic action and points the way forward, thereby strengthening the organisation & recruiting new members. Well organised & strongly supported campaigns will win and gain genuine reforms.

If the IUSS is to grow it must inspire confidence amongst school students, to do this it must be seen as a fighting union, capable of defending itself, its members & its policies. This can only be done through active campaigning on selected issues.

A number of steps in the organisation of any campaign can be laid out. These must be divided into campaigns as the public sees them and campaigning as seen from an internal union point-of-view.

CAMPAIGNING AS SEEN FROM THE PUBLIC'S POINT-OF-VIEW: STEPS TAKEN:-

1. With maximum publicity you must be seen to exhaust all 'legitimate' methods of achieving your objectives. This is done by writing letters to the authorities concerned & demanding reforms etc. Copies of all such letters (together with Press Releases) should be sent to the press. Should some miracle take place and the authorities yield to demands, then of course this should - again with maximum publicity - be claimed as a victory for the union.
2. When (or if) the authorities reply "The Minister found your proposals very interesting..... but after careful consideration..." (i.e. get lost you crank!) a meeting - with maximum publicity - should be held to consider the position & its implications. The meeting should then announce 2 things; 1. That the union has no option but to fight for its demands & 2. The specific demands that it will be fighting for.

Campaigning from the public's point-of-view: steps taken (Continued):

3. Meetings, pickets etc. should be organised and it should be decided whether such things as petitions etc. are to be used. Each meeting, each picket should be announced to the Press & Media. Statements on the major meetings, together with scripts of speeches etc. should be issued.
4. The Campaign should conclude with a Final Rally (either indoor or outdoor). There should be a number of speakers roughly 50% from the union & 50% from other organisations (e.g. Political Groups, Tenants Associations, Teachers' unions, Trade Unions etc.).

CAMPAIGNING FROM THE UNION'S POINT-OF-VIEW: STEPS TO BE TAKEN:-

It must be realised that there are basically two kinds of campaigning - Defensive and Offensive. Defensive campaigning is where the union reacts to an issue that confronts it. Say where a student is expelled from a school or developers try to demolish a historic building & the IUSS decides to fight in their defense - that is defensive campaigning.

Offensive campaigning is where the union takes the initiative and launches a demand based on a political decision by the union to fight on a certain issue (e.g. IUSS Free Schoolbooks Campaign. Internees Release Campaign is a good example of defensive campaigning).

1. The decision must be made as to what the union is going to fight on, why it is going to fight on that issue and what good fighting on that issue is going to do & what the specific demands the union will be making are. This will normally be done by the leadership - whether local or national - and then put to the democratic decision-making bodies. Once the decisions have been adopted/amended the 1st. stage is over.
2. ALL Union members must be educated in the union demands, in the reasons behind the campaign itself and in the arguments behind union demands. Coupled with this internal education and support-creating period should be a period of support-gaining among local organisations (as listed above).
3. The nature of the campaign should be decided at a general union meeting in the Area. It should be decided whether there are to be Protest Meetings, Pickets, Marches etc. Where they are to be held & when. Firm, public commitments from members as to which ones they are going to attend should be obtained. It should also be decided who exactly the campaign is being directed against. It is useless to attack Vocational School Principals on an issue that can only be decided by the VEC...
4. A time limit should be set on the campaign and it should be planned out with this time-limit in mind. All members and contacts must be made aware of the campaign plan when it is finalised.

Different methods of furthering active Campaigning:-

There are many different ways of actively campaigning. These include the following:-

PICKETS, MARCHES, SIT-IN's, STRIKES, PUBLIC MEETINGS (DEBATE), PROTEST MEETINGS (OUTDOOR) & OUTSIDE-SCHOOL-GATE-MEETINGS.

Pickets: A picket is easy to organise. It requires little manpower, achieves fairly good publicity. A picket is a very direct and specific form of protest (i.e. if the Campaign is calling on the Government to do something - then the picket must be placed on some Government building).

Organising a Picket:

Pick a day when a fair few members will be available (e.g. Weekend or Wed. afternoon). 8 people are the minimum for a picket and 20 is a very good picket - there is really no limit to the number of people you can have on a picket. Plan the picket well in advance so that all members know about it. Hold a union meeting beforehand and obtain public pledges from members that they will be there. If possible everybody should have a placard.

Placards are easy to make; one piece of timber (2" x 1") say 3' - 4' long does very well as the upright. Large sheets of cardboard can be pinned on this (tacks or Drawing pins). The cardboard should be approx. 2' 6" x 2". Suitable slogans can be written on the cardboard with marker pens. A leaflet should be produced and used as a handout to passers-by, copies of it should also be sent to the Press & Media, together with a Press Statement. The press should be rung-up beforehand to ensure that they are going to cover the picket. A picket should last for about an hour, the participants walking up and down outside the place being picketed. A picket easily becomes boring for the participants. However they should always look interested & dedicated, that is the only way they will arouse public sympathy. A chant should be started to keep the picket-line active - e.g. "Free Schoolbooks... NOW!" One person leads the chant ("Free Schoolbooks") and the others answer "NOW!"

Marches & Protest Meetings:

There are clear distinctions to be drawn between city marches and country marches. For a local country town march a minimum of 50 people is needed. For a city march a minimum of 100 - 150 is needed. A march must be held on a fairly important issue and on one that has a fair degree of student support. Plenty of advance notice of a march should be given and furious local organising should go on for several weeks beforehand to ensure the maximum possible turnout - there is no limit whatsoever to the number of people that can take part in a march. Several internal union meetings should in the 2 -3 weeks before a march, again pledges should be sought as to attendance etc.

Marches & Protest Meetings (Continued):-

There is nothing more pathetic looking than a badly attended march. Therefore all the stops must be pulled out beforehand in terms of contacting people and generating support. Posters, leaflets, Media Coverage and above all word-of-mouth contact must all be exploited to the maximum. Every school in the Area should be leafleted, postered and outside-school meetings should be run outside the major schools in the Area. Local groups (as mentioned before) should be contacted and asked for their support. The march should leave from a central point that everybody can get to, it should not go on for more than 10 miles (at the longest). The march should be well stewarded (a group of stewards should be organised at least one week before the march). The marchers should be spread out into two or three lines (single-file lines). This way a march of 60 or so can be made to look very big, while a march of 100 - 500 can look fantastic. The march should be led by a banner and if it is a fairly large march several banners should be carried. For example the march should be led by a banner - Donegal Area Council IUSS - and then there should be several banners... - Carrick IUSS - Ballyshannon IUSS - etc. The march should end in a Protest Meeting.

Small March / Poster Parade: With 20 - 30 people a poster parade can be organised. This is where one single line of people carrying placards march down the middle of the street. For details of organising a poster parade see under Pickets.

Protest Meeting: Marches should end in protest meetings, but protest meetings can be organised without holding a march beforehand. A protest meeting should be addressed by 4 - 6 speakers. Again these should breakdown as 50% union speakers & 50% other organisations. A handy platform for a protest meeting is a truck or a pick-up truck. A small Public Address system can be powered from the truck's battery and it can also be used to lead a march - if there is one beforehand.

Protest Meetings (Continued):-

If a Protest Meeting is to be organised in isolation from a march, a great deal of effort must be put into it beforehand. At all meetings (union & public) during the Campaign it should be announced. Similar organisation to that of a march should be carried out beforehand. Speakers should be asked to write out there speeches and copies should be sent to the papers.

Sit-in's:

A sit-in (say in a school) is a dangerous form of protest, because all those taking part can be arrested under the Forcible Entry & Occupation Act. A sit-in is, like a picket, a very direct form of protest, and should only be used where a good degree of local support exists. A mass sit-in is a very powerful form of protest and will force rapid changes.

Public Meetings (Debates - usually indoor):

Hire a local hall or get a room in the local Vocational School. Get speakers from the local and possibly from the National union and speakers from, say, the local Teachers' union branch, the local Trade Unions, Tenants Associations, Farmers Defense Assoc. etc. Plenty of advance notice (3 - 4 weeks) should be given and leaflets and possibly posters produced. Speakers should be introduced as Mr. So-and-So of Ballydehob IUSS, or Mr. So-and-so of the Donegal Trades Council etc. There should be 4 - 6 speakers and their combined speeches should not last for more than 1 hour. After each speaker there should be a round of applause and at the end of the meeting the Chairman should propose a formal vote of thanks - after which there should be a further round of applause. After the speeches are finished there should be an open forum with questions from the floor etc. The meeting altogether should not last for more than 2 - 2 ½ hours at the most. Again copies of speeches, together with press releases should be sent to the local and national press and TV.

Vigil's: Vigils are a handy form of indirect protest and can be coupled with local fund-raising. A vigil should not last more than 48 hours and should not last less than 4 hours. A long vigil can be organised on a shift basis (each shift lasting 4 - 6 hours). Vigils should be organised in a central location so as to have maximum effect. Local and National Press should all be notified and should be rung up before the vigil to ensure that they cover it. 10 people make a very good vigil squad and collection boxes can be strategically placed around the site of the vigil. Placards should be displayed and leaflets should be available explaining the reason for the vigil.

Strikes:

The possibility of organising school strikes cannot be ruled out. There are two occasions when school strikes can be said to be 'on'. Firstly if a very relevant local campaign is being fought it may be possible to organise a strike. If a major national campaign is being fought and people are really involved it may also be possible to organise a strike. A strike can be organised in either of two ways; 1. By a walk-out from the school or 2. By preventing students from entering the school (this can be done by mounting a picket of 20 people or so on the school gates, jammimg locks with Isopon, Plastic Padding etc.). Again all local & National papers should be informed.

Outside school meetings:

These meetings form the basis of any National campaign. To hold a good outside-school meeting you need 6 - 10 people, a megaphone (good extra - not essential), a few leaflets and 2 - 3 speakers. The purpose of the meeting is to catch the students as they come out of the school. The 3 speakers should divide their speeches as follows: 1. 1 speaker on the Campaign issue, 2. 1 speaker on Student Rights and 3. 1 speaker on school issues. For a good local meeting it is essential that contact with the students in the school exists.

Outside-school-gate-meetings; (Continued):-

The issues in the school must be known and dealt with by the 3rd. speaker. It is also handy to know such things as the Head's name and the nicknames of some of the school authorities etc. Literature to be distributed should include such things as specific campaign literature, general union literature, local literature etc.

The outside school meeting is one of the most direct ways of showing students that the IUSS is an active union and a union that is directly related to their demands and needs.

Outside school meetings should be organised about a week in advance and lists of who is going to attend each meeting should be drawn up. It is important to arrive a few minutes before school ends so as to be ready when it does end and the students start to come out. Outside school meetings can be run in support of IUSS candidates standing for election to an S.R.C. etc.

✕END✕

We hope that this will be an on-going document and that it will provide the base from which to develop IUSS Agitation. Remember that it is only by showing ourselves to be an active vanguard, ready, willing & able to fight for our rights and in defense of students that we can move forward to our ultimate objective - a 32 county, democratic union of Irish school students.

There is no issue too large or too small for the union to fight on - it is simply a matter of selection. We hope that you will find this document helpful and that you will use it often. More copies are available on request.

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