

# HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

The tactics we might use in a campaign - for example, leafleting, letters to the government and press, public meetings, demonstrations, nonviolent direct action, are based on assumptions about how change happens. Most of them are intended either directly to persuade the government (or another elite which holds power) to change course, or to stir up public opinion so that the powerholder is pressured into making a change. After a preliminary step of identifying who the elite is (it's not always obvious), the different ways that change can be made to happen can be summarised as:

- Persuade the elite letters, delegations, information-giving
- Coerce the elite boycotts, demonstrations, non-cooperation
- Replace the elite vote another party in, dubious as people in power tend to fall into the structures and patterns of behaviour that they inherit
- Become the elite get elected, palace coup, but there is always the danger of being co-opted
- Ignore the elite direct action, just do whatever it is for yourselves, build your new alternative within the shell of the old, eg Gandhi's 'constructive programme' of making village India self-reliant and self-governing
- Abolish the elite revolution, restructuring society to disperse the power.

## How deep a change?

When we embark upon action to bring about social, political or economic change, we need to know how deep a change we are seeking - the more it requires people to change their deeply held beliefs and attitudes, or to change their behaviour, the more difficult it will be and the longer it will take.

The change may be quite small and simple. Take the example of Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), a less polluting car fuel: life goes on just the same but people put LPG in their cars.

### Requires:

- 1) people to believe that petrol and diesel are harmful pollutants (education)
    - doesn't require them to take painful action or change their world views in any major way;
  - 2) public pressure on politicians to counter the car lobby and oil companies (letter-writing, lobbying, demos, visibility for the campaign)
    - not too threatening to car manufacturers
- in order**
- 3) to get government legislation or fiscal action (dialogue with government / civil servants)
    - some cost to the government in lost revenue
    - but they get brownie points for being green

**OR** the change may be major like **shifting from cars to public transport**.

Requires the same, but very much stronger forces against:

- people may have to suffer inconvenience and higher prices;
- stronger commercial/ economic forces against;
- against government's belief in market forces and 'freedom'

**OR** the change may be huge and deep like **shifting to a sustainable economy**.

Requires deep changes in people's basic beliefs about how humans relate to the earth, what the meaning of life is if it's not shopping, fair shares for all rather than an ever-growing cake to continue to divide up unequally.

## How ideas spread

New ideas and thinking take some time to spread in society. Here is one description of linear process of change, using the example of trying to make a shift from cars to public transport:

- Prophets have the initial idea, eg the environment is being degraded.
- Pioneers give up their cars, even at a great cost or inconvenience to themselves.
- Early Majority will change to public transport if it is convenient or if they are under some social pressure to do so.
- Late Majority will change to public transport if there are incentives to do so and/ or sanctions on using their cars.
- Laggards will only use public transport if there is no alternative

It is no use running a campaign which depends upon most people behaving like Pioneers, or even like Early Majority; they just won't.

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