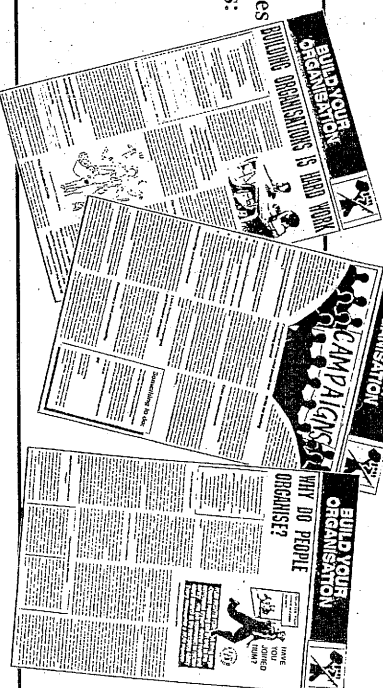


# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION



# BUILDING ORGANISATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD



The Build Your Organisation series is now moving into it's 3rd month. Over the past 2 months, our series on building organisation has dealt with issues such as:

- why do people organise?
- what is the role of organisation?
- how organisations work.
- how organisations are built.
- what are the obstacles to building organisation?
- how to sustain organisations.

The series on building organisation has given us an understanding of why organisations are important in our society, and why it is so difficult to build them. Organisations are a tool which we can use to transform the society which we live in. Organisations can also be used to strengthen our demands in our communities, factories and schools.

The Build Your Organisation series continues next week with an organisational development programme. The series will give practical advice on a wide range of organisational issues, such as:

- Meeting procedures in organisations. This includes issues such as how to organise a meeting and how to run the meeting properly. Issues of minute taking, and taking notes and reporting back from meetings will also be covered in this section.
- The role of leadership in an organisation. What skills do leadership need in an organisation, and what is the role of office bearers and executives in an organisation.
- Developing a programme of action will also be looked at in the series. This includes the question of organising workshops or educational programmes/events, and organising campaigns for the organisation.
- The role of media in organisation will also be looked at in the series.



■ We will also look at the issue of public speaking. This is a skill which can be learnt by any member of an organisation.

Back copies of these articles are available from Learning Nation. If your Study Group is interested in back copies please write to us at the following address.

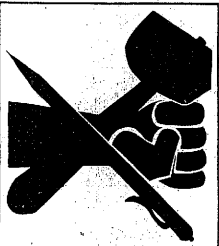
Learning nation  
P.O Box 11350  
Johannesburg  
2000

If you have any suggestions to make on the proposed series on organisation building please fill in the form below and send it to Learning Nation.

These are the organisational problems we are facing in our organisation at the moment:

The "Build Your Organisation" series has helped/not helped our organisation for the following reasons:

# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION



# HOW ORGANISATIONS WORK

Our previous article looked at the role of organisations. We saw that organisations play a role in defending the interests of their members. Organisations also help to preserve the lessons of previous struggles. We further noted that organisations help in preparing the working class to rule in future society. In this article we will look at how organisations work.

- We will look at:
- The significance of democracy
  - Organisational structures
  - The role of leadership

## The Significance of Democracy in Working Class Organisations

Change cannot be accomplished without the active participation of the masses. The task of working class organisations is to encourage the active involvement of the masses in the process of their own liberation. This is why working class organisations must be democratic.

Only if working class organisations are democratic will they reflect the aspirations of their membership. In order to ensure this, the membership must be actively involved in making and implementing decisions. Space must be there for members to be involved in these processes.

For the membership to be actively involved in the decision making process, there must be **proper consultation**. This process affords the membership the opportunity to shape the direction of the organisation. In the process of making decisions the membership will be able to discuss and debate their points of view.

Consultation also ensures that the membership is able to exercise **control** over the organisation. This ensures that the organisation reflects the aspirations of its membership at all times. This process exposes those leaders who are no longer acting in the interests of the organisation. The membership has the **right to recall** such leaders, that is, remove them from office even if their term of office has not expired yet.

The process of democratic debates helps the membership to learn from each other. This is also important in the sense that it gives the membership an opportunity to reflect, collectively, on their experiences and in that process learn from those experiences. In working class organisations, decisions are made to be implemented. Members must have a thorough understanding of decisions that have been taken so that they can implement them to the best of their ability.

In the process of arriving at a position members have the right to put forward **different points of view**. They also have a right to belong to different factions that are bound by the discipline of the organisation. A **faction** is a group of members who share common views within an organisation. Factions have a right to openly propagate their views whilst bound by the discipline of the organisation. Whilst the organisation is in the process of making decisions there must be the fullest debate, but once a decision is taken there must be complete **unity** in

its implementation. Those who had been a minority in the process of debates must be bound by majority positions.

Individual members must be **accountable** to the organisation. Whenever tasks are allocated they must be implemented vigorously. There must be regular **report backs** on the progress of implementing decisions. This ensures that members are able to follow developments closely.

Through debates and discussions, members are able to give **proper mandates** to their leadership and to those who have to perform specific tasks. Mandates give clear guidelines on how the leadership must take forward the tasks facing the organisation. They also help the membership to test the ability of the leadership to lead the organisation. These mandates also reinforce the control of the membership over the organisation.

## Organisational Structures

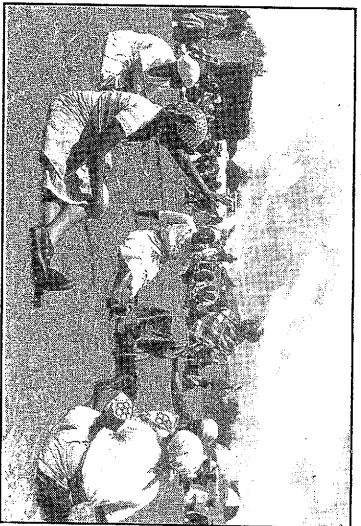
An organisation must be structured in such a way that it ensures the involvement of the widest layer of its membership. At all times the membership must have total control over the organisation through its structures.

For an organisation to operate effectively and efficiently, the role and decision making powers of different structures must be clearly defined. These structures must give the membership the opportunity to exercise **control** over the organisation. Structures are not fixed for all times but change in order to meet new challenges. In most organisations, guidelines on what structures to establish are usually outlined in the constitution.

Decision-making powers of various structures must be clear to members. This must be aimed at ensuring democratic practices within an organisation. So the membership must have ultimate powers to decide on everything that affects the organisation. For example the executive committee must be accountable to the general members.

## The Role of Leadership in an Organisation

In any organisation, not all members are at the same level of understanding. This is due to the experiences that



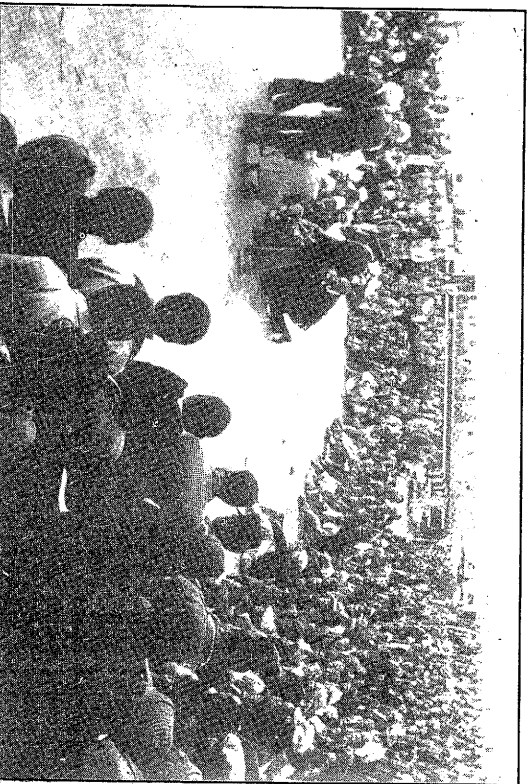
Membership put their views

Individual members bring with them to the organisation. Some members, because of their past experiences in struggle, find it much easier to adapt to the internal life of an organisation, whereas others take time to get used to how an organisation operates.

The leadership is the most advanced layer in an organisation. This is demonstrated by its ability to analyse the situation and give **clear direction** and **co-ordination** to the organisation. This does not mean that those who have not been elected into leadership positions do not have the responsibility to ensure that the organisation executes its tasks.

A democratic leadership does not impose its right to lead on the membership. The leadership must win its positions **through persuasion**. The leadership must explain patiently to the membership. They must always struggle to ensure that the entire membership understands all positions that have been adopted. At times the membership will reject positions that have been put forward by the leadership. The leadership must ensure that such positions are implemented as well. The correctness of these positions will be determined through practice.

In this article we have looked at the significance of democratic practices in working class organisations. We have also looked at why organisations need structures. In addition to this, we have looked at the role of leadership in an organisation. In this process we looked at how organisations operate. In our next article we will look at how organisations are built.



Accountability is important

# GROUPS



## Working in Groups

In our last Groups article we looked at the relationship between the study groups, Learning Nation and other service organisations. We have received letters from readers asking us what study groups are and how study groups should function. In this article we will try to address these issues.

### What is a study group?

One can think of it as a small classroom where a number of people come together to learn collectively. This means that the members of the group:

- have to interact with one another
- share common goals
- have to be committed to the development of the group
- have to give each other direction
- have to share and respect each other's ideas

### Your group will need:

- a place to work eg. a room in someone's house, a classroom or a church hall.
- a programme of work or timetable - your group will have to plan what it is going to do eg. discuss articles in Learning Nation on Monday and school subjects on Thursday.
- Materials to work with eg Learning Nation articles, textbooks, other books or resources.

### How to form a Study Group

A group should consist of preferably 2 - 10 people. If there are more than 10 people a venue will have to be found where this number of people can work comfortably. The group does not only have to be made up of students. You can have workers and students or teachers and workers. These different group combinations can be much more fulfilling as the topics covered will vary. You can also learn much more because the different backgrounds and experiences of each member can serve to enrich the group as a whole. For example if your group consists of workers and students, you don't only have to discuss and debate school subjects, you can discuss political issues as well, eg. Constituent Assembly. So, if you have a few friends, whether they are co-workers, members of your branch, or students in different standards, you can form a study group. One Learning Nation reader wrote in and told us that he was going to take a pamphlet on the advantages of group work and use this to get people to join his group. It must be understood that each group member has something to offer, be it reading materials or an understanding of a topic that can assist others to understand as well. Working in a group can be the most effective way to grow and change and help others to do so as well.

### How can a study group function ?

Participation and leadership must be distributed among members. Everyone should participate and everyone should be listened to. As leadership needs arise, members should take turns meeting them. Equal participation and leadership is necessary to make certain that all members are involved in and satisfied with the group, and that all are committed to putting into practice the decisions made by the group. It also ensures that the skills of every member are fully used, and it increases the cohesion of the group.

It is not wise to have one person making all the

decisions. This will alienate other members and not make them feel they are an active part of the group. Every member should be part of the decision-making process. Involvement and group discussion around issues must be encouraged.

Debates among those with opposing opinions and ideas are to be encouraged; debates promote involvement in the group and serve to develop members' awareness. They also promote creativity in decision-making and commitment to putting decisions into practice.

You do not need to have a teacher for your group to function effectively. Members in the group can and should teach each other. This encourages every single student to be responsible to him/herself and to all other members of the study group.

Dear Learning Nation

1 January 1992

About your letter I received on the 6 December this year, I was happy to learn that the idea of forming structured study groups was spreading all over the African continent.

I do know that it is going to take effort and hard work for benefit insurance from the Learning Nation. There is a problem I am undergoing. There are some friends of mine who are keen to join a study group but the main problem here is that if they did well, they will be in Standard 7. So I don't know what to do to allow them to join or not. They are the people who are really serious about this, advice needed.

As I was saying, I am still reading Learning Nation with lot of commitment to it. I will be very glad if I could be helped in any possible ways. I have formally constituted myself as a study group and ready to face up the challenge of a lot of effort and hard work which I have committed myself to. Thank You...

Yours faithfully  
Moleko Sehloane  
Heidelberg

### Form a Study Group Today!

Learning collectively as opposed to learning as an individual is a rewarding experience. Learning groups can play an important role in assisting you to strengthen and advance the struggle for knowledge and liberation.

Form your learning group today together with other Learning Nation readers in your factory, school or community. Fill in the form below and post it to Learning Nation as soon as possible.  
(Send it to: Learning Nation, P.O Box 11350, Johannesburg, 2000)

Name of Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of members in group: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of men: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of women: \_\_\_\_\_

### Why not form a Study Group!



Dear Sir

14 January 1992

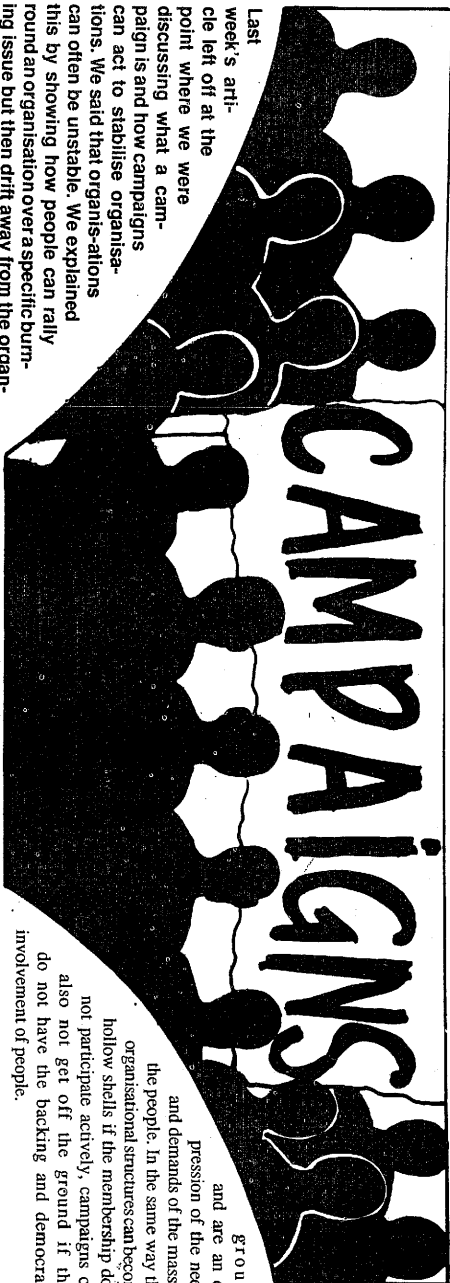
Very very happy sir, for me to have such an opportunity and pleasure writing this letter to you.

As a member of a study group I was pleased to receive a parcel of information to assist our group on how to run a study group leading to its successes. Fortunately our study group is now well organised, each member is taking his responsibilities and work seriously as we are obtaining an assistance from Learning Nation. At this present moment in time we are dealing with educational subjects especially Science, History, Commerce and English. We also used to study courses that each member is interested in.

Our study group now has acquired as much as we need, also we have past exam papers, different types of magazines and study skills. Our members were also pleased by receiving notes on former Soviet Union History. We went further reading these notes and discussed about the country's political situation today, present and further.

Yours Faithfully  
Tinashe Mutsandire  
Rugare Township

# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION



Last week's article left off at the point where we were discussing what a campaign is and how campaigns can act to stabilise organisations. We said that organisations can often be unstable. We explained this by showing how people can rally round an organisation over a specific burning issue but then drift away from the organisation once the issue has been resolved.

With this in mind let's look at how campaigns can weld together an organisation and give it a sense of continuity.

Remember...

Previous articles have outlined the role of organisations and how they develop. Let's remind ourselves of some of the things we learnt about organisations.

- We noted that:
  - organisations emerge out of struggle and take struggles forward.
  - organisations can strengthen democratic practices and accountability.
  - organisations can serve as training ground for the working class, enabling them to take on the task of leadership.
  - in the process of building an organisation, people become more conscious of issues around them and of their own class position in society.
  - through organisations, the membership is educated and armed with information in order to strategise and take action. In this process the confidence of the membership is built.

## Membership and recruitment

We have seen that organisations are nothing without their membership and that people will only form an organisation or be drawn to an organisation around particular issues which are in their interests. What role can a campaign play in this process? The key function and effect of any campaign is that it mobilises people. We all know from the history of struggle in this country that the most effective campaigns have been campaigns which have mobilised the mass of the people. Campaigns such as the anti-pass laws, Living Wage and anti-VAT campaigns had mass support because they struck a chord with the people. These campaigns mobilised people to struggle around a specific issue, raised clear demands and were directed at a specific target. In the process of doing this, campaigns appeal to a wide range of people and draw them into organisations.

Campaigns play a vital role in recruiting new members. As people are drawn into struggles around a campaign they often join the organisation that is campaigning and so increase the organisation's membership.

A campaign provides a central focus around which a wide range of people can rally and mobilise themselves. As far as possible we should try to draw in all the different groupings in our communities - workers, unemployed, students, youth, women. In this process of focussing our struggles around a particular campaign, the current weaknesses of our organisations can begin to be addressed.

## Campaigns show what people are struggling around

We have seen that organisations emerge out of struggle and in turn, take struggle forward. Campaigns, as a clear expression of existing struggle, serve to accelerate and give a struggle more definition and force.

Once a particular struggle has been identified as being a key issue and demands are raised, people are mobilised around the issue and the campaign can serve to accelerate a particular struggle onto a higher plane. An issue may initially be seen as being purely economic or localised, but, during the course of struggle, the issue may become political and national as opposed to just economic and local.

For example, the struggles over wages could initially have been understood as being purely economic. When these struggles were taken up in the Living Wage Campaign and formulated in demands linked to issues such as a forty hour week and a ban on overtime, it posed the question of workers' control of the factories. The campaign shifted from being economic to posing questions of ownership and control and ultimately questions of political power.

In this dynamic process of struggle, organisations can themselves change their nature. They might change from being defensive organs to being offensive organs of struggle. Campaigns can play a role in accelerating this change.

## Links between campaigns and broader struggles

Campaigns will be strengthened if they are not just isolated incidents. They will gather a lot more force behind them if they are taken up on a national level. Smaller campaigns around a specific issue in a specific place, for example, electricity cuts in Aurdigerville or the lack of decent sanitation in Piola Park can be linked to wider struggles. Demands can highlight the broader struggle around electrification and primary health care and so expose the current attacks on the living standards of the working class.

## Democracy and accountability

Organisations can serve to strengthen democratic practice and accountability. Campaigns draw in more people and expose them to democratic ways of working. For campaigns to be successful, they require constant reports back and assessment of the gains made. In this process, membership learns to participate in debates and to express their own opinions. This helps to build democracy and accountability within the organisation.

Campaigns will not be responded to enthusiastically if they are simply declared from above in an undemocratic way. Campaigns usually emerge from struggles on the

ground and are an expression of the needs and demands of the mass of the people. In the same way that organisational structures can become hollow shells if the membership does not participate actively, campaigns can also not get off the ground if they do not have the backing and democratic involvement of people.

## Skills for leading

Organisations act as a training ground for the working class to take on the task of leadership. Campaigns develop the organisational and leadership skills of people who participate. In the course of a campaign, people will develop a range of skills, whether it be how to draw up a pamphlet or make a poster, how to organise a mass rally or how to speak in public. All these skills equip the working class to take up the task of leadership.

## Class consciousness

In the process of building an organisation and in the course of campaigns, people become more conscious of issues around them and of their own class position in society. We've seen how, through organisations, the membership is educated and armed with information in order to take action and to strategise. In this process the confidence of the membership is built and people gain a heightened consciousness of their position and role in society. People develop a clearer sense of the conditions under which they live and compare these to the conditions of other classes in society.

## Something to do:

This article has shown how campaigns are a key to building organisation.

Write a paragraph explaining why campaigns are important for organisation building. If you are finding this difficult you could read this article again or just read the sub-headings to remind yourself of the main ideas.

You are welcome to send your answers in to us at



Learning Nation,  
P.O. Box 11350,  
Johannesburg.

Look out for future articles which will deal with how to run a campaign and the specific skills required to do so effectively.

# GROUPS



# Group Leadership

## Introduction

Over the last few weeks, we have focused on issues of concern raised by readers and the learning groups about group work. This week we want to look at the issue of leadership and the role of a group leader. While we were writing this article, Learning Nation received yet another letter from a group asking about leadership and group leaders.



towards decision making. It also means that all members of the group must take responsibility for the decision taken and for whatever happens as a result of that decision.

## The Role of a Group Leader

Democratic organisation or democratic education does not mean that there can be no leader or teacher. However, the role of a leader or teacher must be chosen so that democracy or collective learning is strengthened. Different people in the group may be good in certain topics or subjects. The group can then decide that this person should prepare and lead the group discussion. This is one way in which leadership is shared and skills amongst the group are developed. Over and above this kind of leadership, the group also needs a leader or leaders who will ensure that the group continues to function well. Some of the tasks that these people will carry out are:

- ensure that the date, time and venue for the next group meeting is set
- ensure that the agenda for the next meeting is done and everyone knows what they are expected to do
- ensure that all group members are informed about the meeting
- act as the link between the group and Learning Nation, although all members of a group are free to write to Learning Nation

Some groups who have written in to Learning Nation, said that they have elected a chairperson, a treasurer and a secretary for their group. Your group must decide for itself if just how formal a structure it wants. Try to avoid the danger of long discussions over how the group should work. There is no one, fixed way of working collectively. Try one suggestion out and after a while evaluate it to see if it works. In the end you may want to stick to this method or try another. At all times though, you must guard against one or a few people in the group wanting to dominate. The group members have the right to make these individuals aware of what they are doing. This must be done in a "comradely" way. If it continues to be a problem, the group will have to discuss the issue and find ways of overcoming the problem.

Here is another view by the revolutionary leader *Amilcar Cabral*, from his book "Unity in Struggle", on collective leadership, which your group can use to enrich its discussion and debate.

To lead collectively, in a group, is to:

- study questions jointly
- find their best solutions
- take decisions jointly
- benefit from the experience and intelligence of each person.
- encourage everyone the opportunity to think and act
- demand that people take responsibility according to their ability
- encourage people to take initiative
- co-ordinate the thought and action of those who form the group
- derive maximum benefit for the group based on the goals set by the group and its ability

## Share Your Ideas with Other Groups

We have given only some ideas on the issue of leadership and the role of group leaders. There are many groups who may have many more interesting suggestions based on their own experiences. We encourage you to write in to Learning Nation with your suggestions so that we can share them with other groups.

We are also glad to receive letters, like the one below telling us what you find useful or not in Learning Nation. We welcome all your suggestions for the building of a better Learning Nation.

Dear Sir/Madam

1/1/03/92

After reading your article on the formation of Study Groups I have decided to start a Study Group and it has a wide support amongst the students. Learning Nation helps us a lot in our research and since its introduction in our college we are up-to-date with global events.

Group name: Young Pioneers  
Number of members: 15  
Group description: students  
Area of study: International history, Trade unions and Theory of socialism.

Yours faithfully  
Lawrence Malaba  
Toronda College of Education  
Botswana

Dear Sir

16/03/92

Inquiries about Study Groups With reference to the Learning Nation published in New Nation dated 13-19 March 1992, I become more interested in Learning Nation Study Groups.

I am doing Standard 10 at Bopedi-Bapedi. We formulated a study group made of twenty members, but we are having a serious problem when coming to the Study Materials and how to conduct the group. Who is to lead the group. We want to deal with English, Biology and Agricultural Science. I request from you the steps to be taken to become your members. I don't know what type of material can you help us or any assistant which can guide and put us through.

Yours faithfully  
Mf M. Kgodi  
Marishane

## What is Leadership?

For most of us, our common experience and understanding of leadership is that of an individual who makes decisions which other people then follow. Very often, a leader is chosen simply because the person is a man, is older than everyone else, person talks a lot, is clever or the person is well known. This kind of understanding of leadership and these reasons for choosing a leader often lead to making a bad choice in who should lead. The idea that a leader decides and the rest of the group follows also allows for the leader to become a dictator over the group.

Presently in South Africa we live under the dictatorial apartheid regime. Our education system, in what we are taught and the way in which we are taught, is undemocratic. In our struggle against apartheid society and apartheid education, we also struggle to build a democratic society and a democratic way of learning. Democracy in society and in the way we learn also means a different understanding of leadership and the role of a leader.

A democratic society, democratic education and democratic organisation of which the learning groups are an example, work through collective leadership as opposed to individual leadership. Collective leadership means that all members of the group have the right to contribute



# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION



# BUILDING ORGANISATIONS IS HARD WORK

Over the last few weeks, our series on building organisation has dealt with a variety of issues. We have looked at

- why people organise,
- the role of organisation,
- how organisations work, and are built.

This week we will look at what makes building organisation difficult. We will look at the obstacles to building organisation.

Before we do this though, we would like you to write down a list of reasons for why you think people have sometimes struggled to build organisations. Think of your own experiences.

A

If you like you can send your list of reasons in to Learning Nation. This will guide us when we write future articles.



## The greatest obstacle

The greatest obstacle facing the working class is the fact that it is oppressed and exploited by the capitalist ruling class. It is the capitalist class which owns all that is necessary to produce the food, clothing and shelter for survival. It also owns the media such as newspaper companies, radio and television which are important tools in shaping the way we think and the values we adopt. The state in capitalist society exists to serve the interests of the capitalists. The police and military sections of the state are there to physically enforce the law, which at the end of the day, is in the interest of the bosses. The state also has control over the education system through which children are socialised into accepting the capitalist way of life. It is against capitalist ideology and the armed force of the state that working class people must struggle in order to build their organisations.

## Ideological Obstacles to Building Organisation

Write one sentence explaining how you think television or the newspapers try to tell you how to live your life.

.....  
.....  
.....

Through the media the capitalists constantly preach to the oppressed classes that capitalism has always been there and that it will always be there. This view might make you feel helpless. This then in turn makes you feel that there is no point in fighting against the system because it is so strong and will always be there.

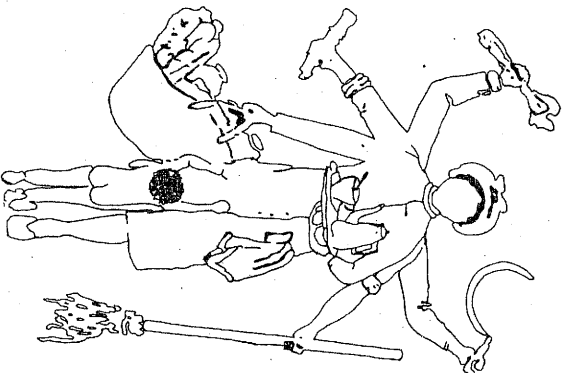
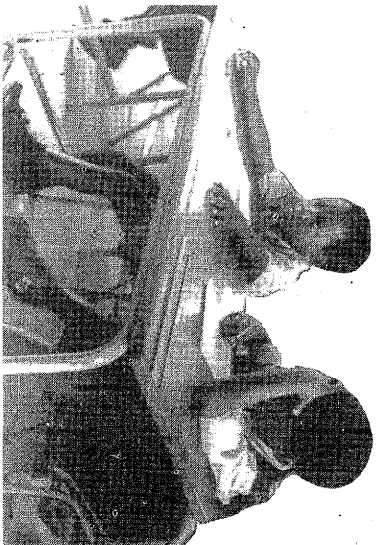
The media also tells you that in order to succeed in life all you need to do is to work hard as an individual. This insists individualism and competition amongst workers.

Workers tend to see their fellow workers as an obstacle to their own individual "progress" and not the capitalist system. People thus see no need to resolve their problems collectively through building organisation.

The capitalist class in South Africa has been very successful in using racism, ethnicism and sexism to sow division within the working class. These divisions within the working class have proved to be serious obstacles to building working class organisations. The history of our liberation struggle is filled with examples of where organisations have split or where unity could not be achieved because of racism and ethnicism and how different organisations see the solution to these problems.

## Something to Discuss You might like to discuss the divisions within the working class with a friend or in your Learning Nation group

Sexism is a much ignored obstacle to building working class organisation. Current ideology promotes the idea that men are the main providers in a family and are better than women. Some people believe that only men can do certain jobs and women others. You might find that men dominate in the organisations that you work in - perhaps the men dominate the key positions. Women are expected to take responsibility for the well being of the family. This means that women have little opportunity or time to participate in organisations without having to sacrifice caring for their families.



A woman's work is never done.

## The Education Crisis

In South Africa, it is clear to everyone that the state as the agent of the ruling class provides the working class with "gutter education". This education is not designed to encourage people to be critical about the world in which

they live and about what they get taught. This also applies to the skills that are taught. These skills are designed to make workers efficient workers. None of these skills enable workers to build and sustain their organisation or enable them to take control over their own lives. This has led to a situation where organisations of the working class have become dependant on sympathetic intellectuals from the middle-class who have had better educational opportunities and access to skills.

Another obstacle for organisations is that members must also be trained to gain the necessary skills such as chairing meetings, basic accounting, media skills and running educational workshops. This acts as a severe handicap to the building of organisations.

## The Impact of Class Struggle

While all of the above ideological obstacles weigh the working class down, the intensity of struggle between the bosses and the workers also reinforces or undermines these obstacles. From our own experiences of building organisations in South Africa, we have seen that during periods of intense struggle and mass action, working class organisations mushroom across the country. On the other hand, when the intensity of mass action drops, organisation collapse. People return to the routine of their daily life. The experience of mass action has a powerful impact on the consciousness of people and so they see the need for democracy and accountability. Members of organisations become more self-disciplined. Corruption, which is a problem in many organisations decreases, and people are willing to carry out tasks and make great sacrifices in time and effort.

When organised mass action dies down, this level of consciousness also begins to break down. Motivation drops, leading to people not being punctual for meetings or worse still, people not attending meetings. Corruption and ill-discipline become common practice.

So we see that the shift in the level of consciousness, which in turn changes according to the level of struggle, can also advance or act as a brake to the building of organisation. When the ruling class has the upper hand, its use of ideology and physical force become even more powerful obstacles and the willingness of the working class to build organisations to defend themselves can decrease.

Next week we will look at some of the more concrete obstacles to building organisations - the state, unemployment and the lack of resources.

# GROUPS



## Suggestions for Effective Group-Work

In the past three weeks, we have looked at setting up a group, how it should function, responsibility, commitment and leadership. This week's article shows how to put these ideas into practice. We can observe and learn from the process of group-work.

These methods of effective group-work are meant to help you structure your work time together in your efforts towards transforming society.

As we discussed in a previous article it is important for your group to have goals. Goals are the things that you want to achieve through group-work. Try this exercise at your next group meeting.

Discuss the goals for your group and list them in the space provided below:

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

Once your group has decided upon its goals you can discuss how your group hopes to achieve these goals. This is called your **strategy** and would involve the following:

1. How often are you going to meet?
2. How long will your meeting be?
3. Where are you going to meet?
4. What issues are you are going to debate and discuss?
5. What skills does each individual require and how are these skills going to be developed, for example charting, reading or writing?
6. How will your meetings be structured?

List all the things your group has identified as part of its strategy:

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

Remember that planning for each meeting is important because it will lead to action. Action can bring about development and change in the group as a whole.

Your group will require an agenda for each meeting. An agenda is a list of items that your group wants to discuss. The agenda for a meeting should be decided beforehand.

Here is a sample agenda:

1. Matters arising from the previous meeting
2. Apologies
3. Reasons for latecoming
4. Additions to agenda
5. Discussion on this week's issue for example The Learning Nation Defence Series
  - a) Why does the working class need to defend itself?
  - b) What lessons can be learnt from the way in which workers have defended themselves internationally?
  - c) How should the working class take up this issue of defence?
6. Evaluation - here you might want to look at the following:
  7. Tasks flowing from the discussion:
  8. Plans for the next meeting



Note that before you begin point 5 first check that everyone has read the articles. It is useful to circulate the material to be discussed beforehand. If some members have not read it then they should explain to the group why this has happened. If there are members in the group who are unable to read then it should be arranged beforehand that the articles are read to them.

Some suggestions for the discussion process:

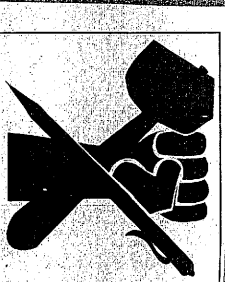
- \* One group member could summarise the key points in the article or each person could summarise a section and then present their section with discussion questions.
  - \* If you have found material that supplements the discussion you could circulate this before the meeting or bring it along and have a short reading period.
  - \* You could have one person writing up the discussion or different people summarising different sections. The same holds for charting the sessions.
- Your group might have to experiment with these suggestions before it decides on the method to use.

- a) Did everyone contribute to the discussion? Find out why certain members don't contribute. It is important to note that people have different levels of understanding and have different skills to contribute. You have to assess whether there has been a common understanding of the issues discussed.
- b) Do you think all the key issues were thoroughly discussed? In this way one can learn the skill of extracting key points in the articles.
- c) Were interest levels of all members were the same throughout?

- a) How to take the discussion forward, for example, in your organisations?
- b) If further reading needs to be done how is it going to be done?

- a) Where is the next meeting going to take place?
- b) Time?
- c) Agenda for next meeting?
- d) Who is to chair and take minutes?
- e) Material to be discussed?
- d) How has the charting and minute-taking process progressed?

We hope this article will assist your group to effectively deal with the problems it might be experiencing. Please write to us and tell us how your group meetings are progressing.



# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION

## MEETING PROCEDURE WHAT IS IT, AND HOW DOES IT HELP US?

Last week we looked at planning and chairing meetings. This week we look at meeting procedure. All the members of an organisation or structure should learn and understand the purpose, aims and method of running meetings. This is what meeting procedure is all about. We will look at the following procedures this week:

- procedural points in meetings
- decision-making in meetings

Sometimes our meetings get stuck and go around in circles. Members can also be undisciplined and disrupt the meeting. Some members like to hear the sound of their own voice in a meeting, and talk often. Meeting procedure can help sort these problems out if the procedure is known about, and is followed. The points mentioned below are the most popular procedural points in meetings:

● **Point of order:**  
This is an important procedural point. It should be used when a member feels that meeting procedure is not being followed, and they want the meeting to return to the correct procedure. For example when an individual is speaking totally off the point another member can interrupt the speaker, saying "Comrade chair, a point of order", and ask that the speaker sticks to the issue being discussed. Remember to talk to the comrade chairing the meeting when making this point. The point of order must not be seen as an attack on the member speaking. The comrade chairing the meeting can and should make this point as well if the member is not talking on the right issue, or following the correct procedure.

● **Point of information:**  
When you want more information on the issue being discussed, but it is not your turn to speak, you can ask the comrade chairing the meeting for a "point of information."

● **Out of order:**  
When a member is being rude, shouting out or misbehaving, or not sticking to meeting procedure, the

chair can rule him/her "out of order". The member must then stop talking and sit down.

● **Protection:**  
If a speaker is being shouted at or interrupted, they can ask for "protection" from the chair.

● **Point of exigency (point of urgency):**  
A comrade who needs to make an important point unrelated to the agenda or discussions taking place, can make a point of exigency. A point of exigency must contain urgent information from the member which cannot wait until the end of the meeting. For example if a comrade finds out that there is trouble or danger outside the meeting itself, they should raise a point of exigency to tell others about it.

If your organisation does not use these procedural points then suggest that they are used at your next meeting. It would be helpful to discuss beforehand what the various points are used for in a meeting. They can help make your meetings more efficient and productive.

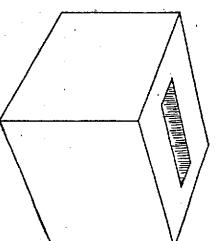
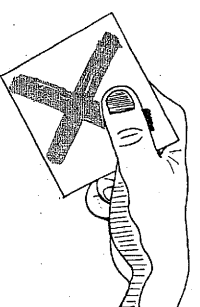
### Decision-making procedures

Arriving at decisions which take the organisation forward is one of the most important tasks of any meeting. Decisions are arrived at through two main ways, either by 'consensus' or by voting.

● **Consensus:**  
This means reaching decisions through discussion and general agreement. Members do not need to vote in this case.

● **Voting:**  
People vote for a particular proposal. Usually one person will put forward a proposal and someone else will support it. If someone supports a proposal we say that they are "seconding" a proposal. Then people will vote for the proposal. If the proposal is accepted by the majority of people, it then becomes binding on the organisation. Voting can either be done by:

- 1) a show of hands
- 2) a secret ballot.



#### New Words

**Procedure:** A way or order of doing things in meetings which all members agree with, and do themselves.

#### Questions for readers

**Question 1:**  
If a member of your organisation shouts at you while you are speaking to the meeting, do you say:  
a) "Point of information comrade chair"  
b) "Comrade chair, protection for the speaker."  
c) "Out of order!"

**Question 2:**  
If you are chairing the meeting and a member is talking on the wrong issue, do you say:  
a) "Point of order"  
b) "Point of information"  
c) "Protection for the speaker."  
d) "Point of exigency."

The answers are at the bottom of this page.

#### Resource List

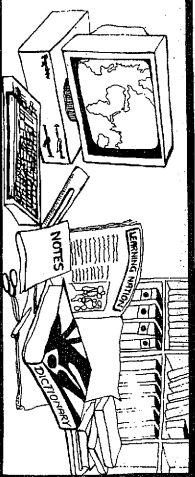
The Human Awareness Programme (HAP) has a lot of information and advice on meeting procedure and on building organisations. You can contact them at the following address:  
The Human Awareness Programme  
4th Floor Conlyn House  
156 President Street  
Johannesburg  
2000  
their telephone number is (011) 337-8716

#### Answers to questions 1 and 2

Question 1: (b)  
Question 2: (a)  
Next week we look at the role and function of Executive Committee's in an organisation.



# RESOURCES



## Help us help you!

This week Learning Nation launches its Resource Page. We are hoping that this page will prove useful to our readers, as well as to a range of organizations and educational groupings. But before looking at details, we need to understand what a resource is, and the important function it has in human society.

### What is a Resource ?

A resource is a source of information. It can take many forms. For example, **Learning Nation** is a resource, but so is a radio programme. We regard a person's memory as a resource - a very important resource in fact, and one which makes all other resources possible! (It is a fascinating fact that every single piece of information in every book in the world was once stored in someone's mind.)

### Collecting and ordering information

Most resources involve collecting information and putting it into an order with a particular goal in mind. Take the encyclopedia for example. Encyclopaedia is a Greek word which means a circle of learning, or an all-round education. People consult encyclopaedias in order to be given a short but adequate introduction to any topic that interests them. This involves a huge amount of information, which is why any good encyclopaedia has many volumes, often 15 or 20, with each volume having hundreds of pages of very small writing. A telephone directory is another resource which relies on the collecting and ordering of information - in this case, telephone numbers. The **Learning Nation Resource Page** too is going to function in this way. In our case, we will be collecting and listing useful information on a wide variety of community issues.

### Information and Communication

We suggested earlier that a person's mind is a type of resource. It is easy to take this for granted. Lets say you see someone walking towards the station, and you warn them that the trains are not running that day. By doing this you are acting as a resource, as a link in a chain of communication. Now that is a very simple example but think of this: every person is searching for some piece of information that is important to them. Sometimes that person does not even know what it is that she is searching for! Take this example: A woman complains to her friends that her husband is always beating her up. She may not say so out loud but if you think about it, she is asking, "What can I do about this terrible situation?" Maybe a **Learning Nation** reader shows her our series on "Battering is a Crime". Reading these articles she would then understand what information it was that she was silently looking for - the practical steps which can be taken against physical abuse. The thing to remember then is that knowledge and information can only be made useful through a process of communication. Two-way communication! Questions must go in search of answers, and answers must go in search of questions. That is how we understand resources and that is how the **Learning Nation Resource Page** is going to work!

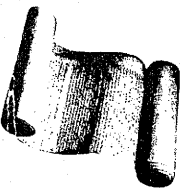
### Resources and Power

Restricting access to information has been and always will be the most subtle and effective way of oppressing

**Do you know where to go when you're needing information on:**

- how many people are unemployed
- the environmental crisis
- your rights as a worker
- women in the third world
- literacy
- health and safety
- rent boycotts
- music
- films and videos
- the constituent assembly
- negotiations
- political theory
- teaching methods
- education
- land issues
- rural development
- organisational skills
- running workshops
- how to make a pamphlet or produce a newspaper
- how to claim your pension or UIF money?

There's lots of information available on all these issues and many more but the problem is that we don't always know where to go to look for it. Each week, this page in **Learning Nation** will look at a particular issue or theme, such as workers' rights, literacy, the environment etc. and will direct you to a number of resources and places where you can find out more about the issue. There will be information which everyone can use, including teachers, youth structures, students, workers, the unemployed, civics, trade unions, women's organisations and people living in rural areas. So, watch this page for the issues that you're interested in and it will direct you to more resources and information on that topic as well as providing contact numbers and addresses of different organisations and resource centres.



a scroll

people. It starts off with rights. If you do not know what your rights are, how can you begin to fight for them? Or take banned literature. In South Africa you are not allowed to read the book which lists all the other books you may not read! At every level, lack of information enslaves people and ties them down. A surplus of information, on the other hand often generates undeserved advantages. There is the story of the American financier in the early 19th century who received advance news that the English had beaten Napoleon in the battle of Waterloo. A friend sent him the news via a specially trained carrier pigeon. The financier immediately invested all he could in English stocks. Ten days later, when the rest of America heard the news, he sold his stocks at a profit of several million dollars. In ordinary life, the principle is often the same. I'm sure every reader can think of some example where a piece of information has given a person an unfair advantage over the rest. Can you?



Information can be exploited as a source of profit!

### The Challenge

The challenge of course is to use information and resources for the advantage of all, for helping to build our organisations as well as taking charge of our own lives. **Learning Nation** is going to start by publicizing information on the different resources available at different Resource Centres, and by encouraging people to use these centres. But we also need your help. Readers, help us! Write in and tell us what sort of information you need. **Resource centres, service organisations, libraries, other groupings ...** write in and tell us what you can offer.

Next week we will make suggestions on how to set up your own resource centre.

### The Library of Alexandria

People began collecting information on a large scale about 2000 years ago, long before the invention of books. In fact, one of the earliest libraries in the world - the famous library of Alexandria - did not contain a single book! What it did contain was about 500 000 hand-written scrolls (a scroll is a writing surface made from animal skins or plant fibres. It is rolled up and tied with a cord). These scrolls were prepared by a huge team of librarians whose job it was to gather together information from all over the known world. All the writings of the Ancient Greeks and many other civilizations found their way into this library which quickly became the most important centre of learning in the ancient world. To this very day we use knowledge that was stored in this library 2000 years ago in the study of medicine, engineering, astronomy. Literature, art, mathematics and politics. No-one really knows what the world would be like if the Library of Alexandria had never existed. Quite possibly we would have no cars, no telephones, no machines, no hospitals - the list could go on and on. And just like so many features of modern life can be traced back to knowledge that was stored in the Alexandrian Library, in the same way, the seeds of the future can be found in the libraries of today.

Cut this out and send to **Learning Nation, Box 11350, Johannesburg, 2000.**

Name: .....

Address: .....

I need to know about .....

.....

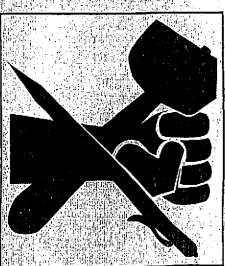
.....

.....

.....

.....

# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION



# MEETINGS.. MEETINGS..

# MEETINGS..

Remember, last week we gave you a summary of the articles we have run this year on the role and problems of building organisation. This week we will begin to look in more detail at the actual skills you need to build your organisation. We will start off by looking at the issue of meetings.

So we will look at:

- what a meeting actually is
- an example of a bad meeting
- the purpose of meetings
- and finally how to plan meetings.

Next week we will look at how to plan and chair meetings.

## What is a meeting?

All of us have sat in a meeting at some point in our lives. Perhaps we have even had to plan and run a meeting. But why are meetings so important? Why do we have meetings? Try and answer these questions before you read the rest of this article? Answer these questions in your group or write down your ideas if you are working alone:

### Why do you go to meetings?

.....  
.....  
.....

### Why do you think meetings are important?

.....  
.....  
.....

A meeting is an important tool in the hands of an organisation. We have meetings so that we can have collective and democratic decision making, planning and follow-up, accountability and other practices essential to running an organisation.

If meetings are used effectively then they can help an organisation to function in an accountable and efficient way. In this way organisations will grow and will achieve the needs of its membership.

Do you agree with the points being made in the two paragraphs you have just read? Why then do we often complain about bad meetings?

Read the following points and mark off the points that you have experienced:

- \* The meeting starts late.
- \* Other people arrive late.
- \* There are no minutes.
- \* There is no agenda so you don't know exactly what the meeting is about.
- \* People repeat each other and they

don't stick to the topic.

- \* Some people don't speak at all
- \* The chairperson doesn't know how to direct the meeting.
- \* You leave the meeting feeling unhappy because you don't know what action needs to be taken.
- \* You don't know what to prepare for the next meeting.

The result of a bad meeting is that it can lead to:

- Lots more boring and frustrating meetings!
- No practical work actually getting done.
- The executive is unaccountable to the membership. Individuals do not feel part of the organisation and don't feel that it is meeting their needs and so they leave. The organisation could collapse.

Without organisations and meetings we cannot have democracy and real involvement of people. Until our organisations really involve people and are democratic they will not serve the people. What we are trying to achieve is democracy and accountability in our organisations.

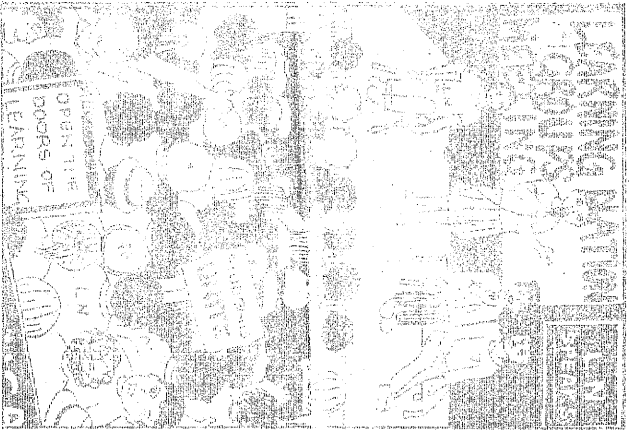
This is not easy but good meetings will take us some way down this road.

### What then should we be aiming for in meetings?

#### The purpose of meetings

It is important that your organisation discusses the purpose of meetings generally. You also need to be clear on the purpose of each and every meeting you have.

List the purposes of the last three meetings you have been to:



You will probably realise the following points when you make your list or discuss ideas in your organisation:

- \* Meetings must not be too frequent or held simply for the sake of it.
- \* There should be regular meetings with the possibility of calling emergency or irregular meetings when the need arises.
- \* There should be decisions about the different types of meetings needed. For example, some meetings could be to discuss policy and others to discuss organisational or practical work. Wherever possible, the members must know what type of meeting they are going to and what the meeting is for. They must know the purpose of the meeting.
- In this way it is also easier to ensure that meetings are generally shorter and people can decide when a longer meeting is necessary. It is possible to have other types of meetings. For example you might like to have an evaluation meeting where you look back on the last year and plan for the next year. This might take a series of long meetings.

Next week we will read about how to plan and chair a meeting. We will also look at the actual procedure of meetings. Sometimes this seems quite complicated and it makes people feel that they can't contribute to meetings because they don't know if they are talking about the right thing at the right time so perhaps next week's article will help sort that problem out.

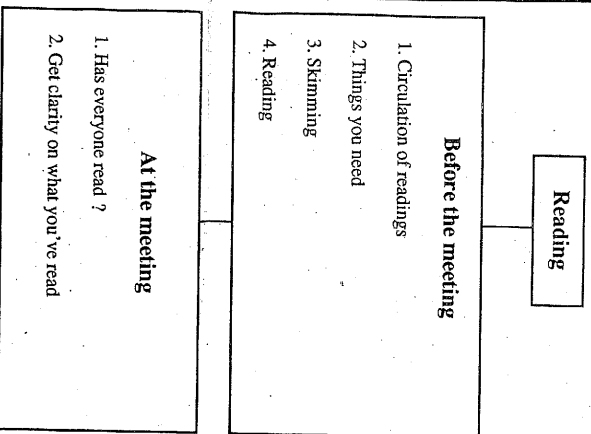
This article was adapted from material written by the Education Resource and Information Project (ERIP).

# GROUPS



## How to Read in Preparation for a Group Meeting

In this article we make suggestions on how to read in preparation for a meeting. The diagram below shows you the steps involved in this process:



### Before the meeting

1. Circulation of readings
2. Things you need
3. Skimming
4. Reading

### At the meeting

1. Has everyone read ?
2. Get clarity on what you've read

### Reading before the meeting

Reading before the meeting is important to ensure that your group meetings are successful learning events. Reading before the meeting allows for greater and more active participation amongst members. Everyone will be in a position to make a contribution to the discussion even if it is simply to ask questions. If everyone has read before the meeting, the group has more time for thorough discussion and understanding of the topic.

Try and follow the steps below when you read an article:

1. **Circulation of readings:** The articles you decide to use must be circulated to all members of your group before the meeting takes place. If copies of readings are to be shared then proper arrangements have to be made to ensure that everyone has access to the readings.

Try to circulate any **additional material** you find before the meeting or bring it to the meeting. The meeting can decide to set aside time for this material to be read.

2. **Things you need:** Before you start your reading, make sure that you have all the readings you need as well as paper and a pen with which to make notes and a dictionary to check the meaning of words.

3. **Skimming:** First skim through the article. This means that you don't read the article thoroughly. Look at the headings, sub-headings, the introductory paragraph and conclusion to get an idea about the article.

4. **Reading:** After skimming through the article read it thoroughly. As you read through the article, you need to make notes on:

- a) Words you don't understand;
- b) Concepts that are unclear or difficult; and
- c) Questions and comments you want to raise at the meeting.



### What if I don't understand the article!

If you don't understand the article, read it again. This time as you read ask yourself these questions:  
**Who or What is the article about?**  
**Who or what does the article deal with ?**  
 If you have additional readings, skim through these to help give you a better understanding of the main article.

We have already stressed the importance of members coming to the meeting prepared. If some members are unprepared, the meeting might have to be cancelled. Remember that a cancelled meeting can mean a waste of money and valuable meeting time. A possible alternative to cancelling the meeting would be to have time set aside for reading put onto the agenda. However, we should also understand that sometimes there are valid reasons for members coming to the meeting unprepared. This must be discussed, understood and dealt with appropriately by the group as a whole.

### At the meeting

If everyone has done their reading and comes to the meeting with notes, then the steps suggested here can be covered quickly. The time saved can be used for through discussion.

1. **Check if everyone has read:** The chairperson must check that everyone has tried to do the reading. If not everyone has been able to do the reading or many members had difficulty with the reading, the group must then decide on how to proceed with the meeting. Either create time to allow for a group reading at the meeting or set another meeting date. **If you decide to read as a group:**

You can decide to have one person reading the whole article or different members reading sections of the article. Those members who are listening must also try to make notes of difficult words, concepts, questions they want to ask or comments they want to make about the article.

2. **Get Clarity:** After members have read the articles, each person will have a different level of understanding. Group members need to share their understanding with each other. This is one way in which you can learn. This is the step at which you look at:

- (a) Words that are new and/or are difficult to understand. Group members should attempt to provide explanations. To get the meaning of some words, you can also make use of a dictionary.

### Are you having problems with words and concepts?

- If there are still problems in understanding words and concepts then you can try the following:
- (c) Refer to the other sources or readings you have brought along to the meeting.
  - (b) Decide as a group that you need to consult someone or an organisation who might be able to help. People you could consult are other people you work with, other students, teachers, your shop steward or the education officer in your organisation.
  - (c) Write, telephone or visit resource organisations or a library for assistance.

Once the group has cleared up words and concepts that were a problem to members or have agreed on a way to solve those things that they are still unsure of, the meeting is ready to proceed into a proper discussion of the topic.

Discussion involves people asking questions which require clear and logical explanations. Discussion also involves people expressing their own opinions on the topic and saying why they stand by those views. It also means other members challenging the opinions put forward in the articles as well as those put forward by some members in the group. In our next article on this page we will look at the issue of how to conduct a discussion in the group.

Learning Nation has published articles on its Skills for Learning page on "Reading to Understand". You should look at these articles for ideas on improving your reading skills. Groups who want to get copies of these articles can send their request to

Learning Nation,  
 Box 11350  
 Johannesburg 2000



# GROUPS

## Learning Through Group Discussion

From your own experiences of being in a study group, you may have found group discussions valuable and helpful or full of problems. When you have a discussion in your group it is not the same as a chat you have with friends during a lunch break. On the other hand, your group discussion is also not as formal as an organisation trying to reach a definite agreement on some issue.

### What then is a Group Discussion?

A group discussion is a learning method. It is a way in which the group:

- \* focuses on an agreed topic eg "What is the role of a trade union?"
- \* sets a clear goal for the discussion eg try to get all members to have a common understanding of the role of trade unions

Group discussion also allows for every member in the group to:

- \* pose questions to other members in the group
- \* freely express her/his opinion on the topic
- \* make comments on the different views in the group
- \* listen to opposing points of view

All these different parts of a group discussion allow you to "test" different points of view before you decide to support a particular view. When you support a particular view it means that you are able to discuss this issue with other people and explain clearly to them why you hold this view. It also means that you can clearly explain why you disagree with other points of view on this issue.

The group discussion method works on the principle of **democratic participation and democratic decision making**. The group discussion method means that you must win support for your point of view by being able to convince other members of your group of the correctness of your views. This method is in direct contrast to an approach which imposes a particular point of view on you.

### Can The Group Discussion Method Work In All Situations?

While the group discussion method is a democratic way of learning, it does have a limitation. There are situations in which discussion alone is not enough to "test" the correctness of different points of view. These situations are especially common when the discussions focus on social, economic or political issues.

When there is no common agreement on an issue, formal organisations use a system of voting to arrive at a decision. Your study group however is not an organisation like a trade union or student organisation. Study groups allow you to widen your knowledge and deepen your understanding of issues. This knowledge can help you be a more effective member in your union or student at school. If in a group discussion you are unable to arrive at a common point of view on an issue, it is advisable to say: "We agree to disagree". In this way you stop discussion even though you might not achieve your goal. This issue can be taken up again in the future. At some time in the future, some members of the group may feel that they now

have more information or have had new experiences which could help the group resolve the issue. The group must decide if it wants to reopen the discussion.

### Some Problems And Possible Answers

The group discussion method can only be successful if members of the group are willing and feel comfortable enough to participate in the discussion. Some common problems that occur in group discussions are:

- \* A lack of participation in the discussion
- \* Personality clashes between members of the group

Here are some possible answers which can help overcome these problems:

#### Lack of participation

A common experience is that a few people end up doing all the talking. The others remain silent. Some reasons for this could be:

- shyness
- individuals who dominate
- lack of knowledge

Some groups have written in to Learning Nation to raise the problem of lack of participation in the groups. Some of these letters also say that it is often the female members of the group who do not actively participate. In these situations, shyness, male members of the group who dominate and a lack of knowledge could all contribute towards female group members not participating fully in the discussion.

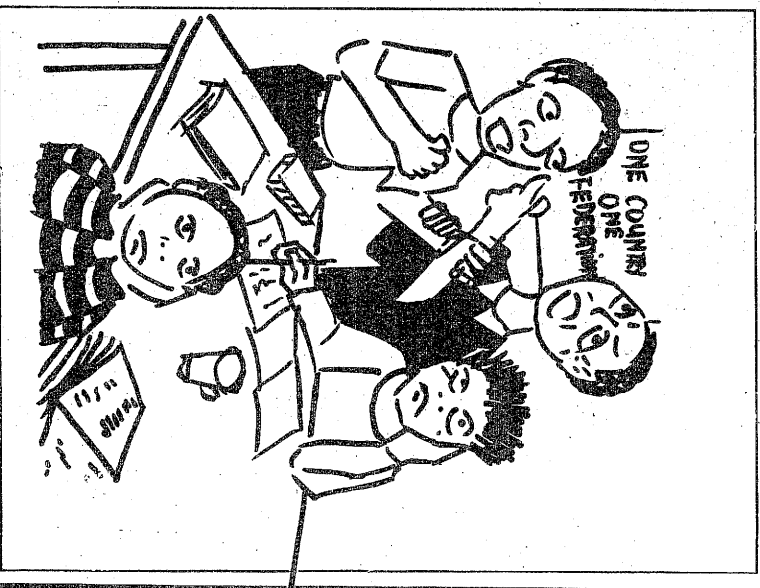
Shyness can be overcome by other members encouraging the quiet members of the group to speak. It is important for the group to show that they take seriously what is being said by this person. In this way the person becomes more confident and willing to speak again.

Group members who dominate the discussion either feel that they must speak on every point or respond to every question raised. You can also dominate by shouting down views you disagree with or by ignoring people when you don't like what is being said. In situations like this it is the role of the chairperson to openly raise the problem of the behaviour of such members. If the chairperson fails to do this, other members of the group also have the right to raise it as an issue. The group must then make a decision on how such dominating members should speak and behave in the discussion.

It is also important to remember that sometimes members do not actively participate (speak or debate) because the issues are new to them. In such situations, these members would rather choose to listen to others in order to gain information and learn in this way.

#### Lack of Direction

This is a common problem. You can use up hours in discussion only to realise that the issue the group was to



have focused on has not really been covered. The idea behind setting a clear goal at the beginning of the discussion is to help remind the group of the direction in which the discussion should proceed. It is a role of the chairperson to keep the discussion to its agreed goal. When discussion moves off the topic, the chairperson must be able to remind the meeting of the set goal and direct the meeting back towards this goal. Other members who may also see that the meeting is losing direction can ask the chairperson to redirect the discussion.

#### Personality Clashes

Group members who do not get on with each other outside of the group sometimes bring their problems into the discussion. Members begin to argue with each other. The argument is not to help group members develop their understanding but rather to "score points" against one another. This is destructive behaviour for the group. The chairperson or other members must immediately raise this as a problem. The group must inform such members that their personal fights must be kept outside of the meeting and that in the meeting there must be comradely behaviour.

There are other possible problems that the group might face in using group discussion as a method of learning. The idea is to try and identify the problem as quickly as possible and to collectively find a solution.

In the future we will look at other learning methods that you can use in your study group.



# BUILD YOUR ORGANISATION

# HOW TO PLAN AND CHAIR A MEETING

Last week we looked at what a meeting is. We gave some examples of good and bad meetings. This week we look at the skills you need to:

- plan a meeting
- chair a meeting

## What does planning a meeting involve?

Planning should involve participation by making sure that discussion is on a single (specific) topic and that members are well prepared for the meeting. Planning does not mean controlling and directing the meeting in such a way that it restricts participation from members.

## Have you planned a meeting before? What were the difficulties?

.....

## Why do you think it is important to plan for a meeting?

.....

Planning a meeting is the responsibility of the Chairperson, the Secretary or the Executive, depending on the type of organisation. We will look more closely at functions of the executive structure of an organisation later on in the series.

## Planning should include the following:

- **Minutes:** Minutes of the previous meeting must be made available to members before the meeting, or read out at the beginning of the meeting.
- Minutes must be adopted at the beginning of the meeting. Everyone must agree that they are an accurate record of the last meeting. Members must be given the chance to add points or items to the minutes which have been left out.

### Agendas:

- An agenda must be presented with the minutes. The agenda is a list of the most important issues for the members to discuss.
- The agenda is drawn up from the Matters Arising from the previous meeting and from the discussions of the Executive or Secretariat.
- Members can suggest additions to the agenda.
- An agenda should include a last item known as "General" or "Any Other Business" to allow members to raise short items not included on the agenda.
- An agenda should also include the item "Assessment of the Meeting" which can take five minutes at the end of the meeting. Members can talk about whether they felt the meeting was worthwhile, and how they felt the meeting was chaired.
- Each item on the agenda must be introduced by someone. This member will either lead a discussion or present a report.



### Discussion:

The member will lead the discussion on an issue and then make proposals to the meeting on a way forward. Members can then comment on and discuss the issue, as well as the proposal.

### Reports:

In the case of a report, the person who is reporting should comment on the following:

- Was it a task that was completed, what were the problems and what still needs to be done.
- Members should discuss the report and delegate responsibility to ensure that the task is completed.

## Issues that need to be planned in our organisation

### Chairing Meetings

Chairing a meeting is very important if we want the meeting to be effective. It is important to have an experienced chairperson for important meetings. It is also important however, to teach people to chair meetings. It is an important skill for people to learn.

### What are the responsibilities of the Chairperson?

- The Chairperson must try to ensure that:
  - Everyone who wants to speak is given a chance to speak.
  - Speakers stick to the topic of discussion and do not raise other irrelevant matters.
  - Speakers are as brief as possible.
- Discussion must aim at coming to conclusions. There must be a clear way forward which everyone understands.
- The discussion is summarised, so that everyone knows what ideas and proposals are being made. However, at the same time the Chairperson must be careful not to repeat everything that has been said. This is a waste of time. If the chairperson thinks the members are unclear, he or she could ask whether members want a summary of what has been said or decided.
- There is agreement on what the decision is, and make sure that everyone understands what decision has been taken.
- Someone must be given the task of carrying out the decision, and know it should be done and reported on.

### Other responsibilities of the Chairperson include:

- Being alert to new things that might happen. For example new members of the organisation should be welcomed and introduce themselves.
- Uniting a meeting rather than dividing it. It is always better if a meeting reaches consensus on issues. Voting on important issues often causes more divisions in an organisation.
- Setting a cut-off time for the meeting - a time everyone agrees the meeting should end.
- Setting a time and a venue for the next meeting.

### Members: does your chairperson know about these responsibilities?

How can you help them to improve their skills in chairing meetings? Give them this article to read, it could help make your meetings a lot better and more efficient.

### Chairpersons: It is often difficult to chair a meeting.

Sometimes mistakes are made but no one says anything in the meeting about it. To fix this problem, make sure that at the end of the meeting you ask for yourself as the chairperson to be assessed along with the meeting. Ask members to make one good point about your chairing, and one criticism of your chairing.

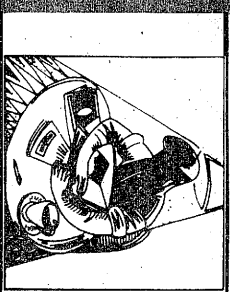
### Next week we will look at meeting procedures, and procedural points most used in our meetings.

### • Resources List •

Do you want more information on planning and chairing meetings, or on building organisations? One of the organisations you can contact for advice and material is:

The Human Awareness Programme  
4th floor Conlyn House  
156 President Street  
Johannesburg  
2000  
Their telephone number is (011) 337 8716

# WORKERS' EDUCATION



## Trade Union History I: Why we should look at history

### Introduction

In the last five articles on the page we discussed general ideas about trade union organisation and working class politics. These ideas did not just come from somebody's head. They came from the experience of struggles of workers across the world. In the next couple of weeks we will look at how workers built their organisations and struggles in Europe at the beginning of this century. After that we will have two articles that look at the history of the workers' movement in South Africa. In all of these articles we will show how the traditions of worker organisation and struggle have been built.

### Why we should look at history

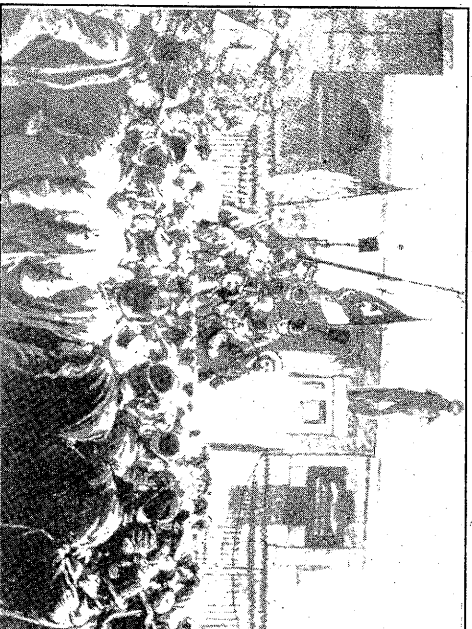
In the history of capitalism we can see times when workers have been confident. One such time was when workers flooded into trade unions and political organisations in Europe at the beginning of this century. This militant upsurge of workers' struggle reached a peak after the First World War and challenged the power of the bosses with international revolutionary socialism. By the end of this period workers had seized political power in Russia, but the socialist struggles in other countries were defeated. In many countries in Europe, bosses brought in fascist governments to smash the organisations that workers had built in their struggle.

What can we learn for our own struggles today if we look so far away and so far back in history? The biggest thing that we can learn is that we do not stand alone. Workers in other countries across the world face the same needs, challenges and struggles as we do. And in their struggles they have built traditions that are the foundations of our organisations today.

In our own trade unions and mass organisations today we often ask ourselves: What can we do to bring more comrades into our struggle. To answer this we must ask: What are the things that bring workers into struggle and into organisations? What are the problems that turn workers away from struggle? And how can we overcome these problems?

These are difficult questions. But they are questions that the workers' movement all over the world has had to answer at various times in history. So we can use history to see how workers faced and answered these same questions. We can see the things that made workers strong and confident and we can see what made them weak and turned them away from organisation and struggle.

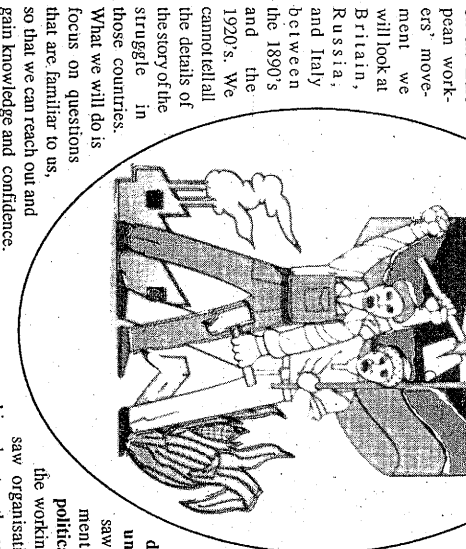
There is another reason why it is important for us to look at the history of workers' struggle. If we stand in the shoes of workers at another time and in another place we can see the questions in front of them. Then we can see how every experi-



The Great London Dock Strike of 1889. The strike inspired the union movement internationally

ence in their struggle gave them the knowledge and confidence to look for new answers. We can see how they changed and grew in their struggle. This helps us to understand ourselves, what we learn through our experience, and how we can use this experience to make our organisations stronger.

In this series



on the European workers' movement we will look at Britain, Russia, and Italy between the 1890's and the 1920's. We cannot tell all the details of the story of the struggle in those countries. What we will do is focus on questions that are familiar to us, so that we can reach out and gain knowledge and confidence.

### The need to organise and struggle

We will have to start the story with an understanding of how capitalism developed in Europe at the end of the last century. The development of a large factory system and the use of electricity and chemicals, instead of coal and steam, brought big changes in production. Bosses forced more and more people into large

factories and urban townships. People were forced off the land, skilled workers were threatened by mass production systems, and large numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled workers increased the size of the working class. Problems such as low wages, bad working conditions, lack of trade union rights and political oppression, pushed workers into organisations and struggle.

Between 1890 and 1914 we saw the first big national industrial unions. We saw the development of strong political parties of the working class. We saw organisations of the working class turn the socialist ideas of Karl Marx into a weapon of mass struggle. We saw workers develop a vision of a new kind of society that would be based on the needs of humanity and not on the selfish desire to make profits.

### Revolutionary struggles

The real challenge to the economic and political power of the bosses came at the end of the First World War. The war

between European capitalist governments brought huge misery, suffering and death to workers and peasants. Every bread and butter issue became a political issue for millions of people. Workers and peasants turned to strikes and protest actions in an attempt to gain political power. The masses in one European country after another carried their new traditions of organisation and struggle into revolutionary action. In Europe, at this time, the working class first showed its muscle and gave shape to history. The millions of people that the bosses tried to keep silent and exploited, came out into open struggle and brought capitalist governments to the brink of collapse.

### Obstacles in the path of workers' struggle

But there were many obstacles in the path of workers' struggles in this period. They had to build organisations with no experience behind them. In their path stood harsh repression. Against all their efforts to build unity amongst the exploited and oppressed, stood the bosses and their governments, trying to divide workers according to nationality, race, religion, and gender. To weaken organisation and struggle of workers, the enemy tried to co-opt their leaders. Against the militant and revolutionary hopes and actions of workers, lay the heavy weight of the class collaborationist politics of their trade union and political leaders.

Conservative and bureaucratic leaderships stood in the path of workers' democracy and workers' control. And, finally, in the early 1920's, workers across Europe experienced a capitalist crisis that brought fascist leaders like Hitler and Mussolini to power.

Facing these tasks and problems, workers in Europe struggled to find answers. Many of the problems we face in our struggle. Many of the answers that workers gave in their struggles at that time are the foundations of our own traditions and organisation.

Next week we will look in more detail at some of the experiences of struggle of workers in Europe at the beginning of this century and the organisations they built.

This series on history is written by ILRIG. You can contact them at: Community House Salt River Cape Town