

## STRATEGIES USED IN SOCIAL ACTIONS

Just as there are many reasons you might take action, there are many different kinds of action you might take, ranging from explaining your situation to policy makers to confronting force with civil disobedience. Some examples:

- Organizing a group to write letters, make phone calls, or send e-mails to policy makers, particularly legislators, in order to make both your position and the extent of your constituency known.
- Persuading the media to cover events or to publish stories that highlight particular issues or embarrass politicians and others in power who refuse to do what's right. You might also plan events particularly to attract the media.
- Attending, as a group (or packing or disrupting, depending on your philosophy and the circumstances), a public meeting at which an issue of interest to your community is being discussed.
- Performing street theater. Street theater, as its name implies, is theater performed in public that is meant to ridicule the opposition and/or to convey a profound message in a way that is easily understood and entertaining. It goes back at least to ancient Greece, continued through the Middle Ages in morality plays and puppet shows, and has been used in modern times, particularly since the mid-Twentieth Century, for political protest.
- Organizing demonstrations, rallies and marches. The “classic” social actions, these often involve signs, speeches, entertainment, and/or elements of street theater.
- Picketing or organizing a strike. These are, of course, time-honored labor tactics, usually applied to a particular plant or corporation or industry. There is also the possibility of a general strike – a situation where

everyone in a group, a community, or even a whole country, refuses to work for a day, a few days, or indefinitely until those in power accede to demands.

- Organizing a boycott. Named after Charles Boycott, a British land agent in Ireland who was ostracized (i.e., no Irish would deal or communicate with him) for his policies, a boycott consists of refusing to deal or trade with a company (or a city, state, or country) that the boycotters believe is doing something morally wrong.
- Organizing a sit-in. Often an act of civil disobedience, this involves a group occupying a space – perhaps the office of an official who made or represents a policy the group is protesting, perhaps a courtyard or a particular building or a park – in order to make a moral point, to assert their right to use the space, or to force the owners of the space (or public officials) to negotiate or meet their demands. The act becomes civil disobedience if the group is trespassing on the space they occupy.

**Civil disobedience** is a particular kind of action in which the group engaged intentionally breaks the law as an act of conscience. They might do so because they are protesting the law itself, or because they want to make the strongest statement possible about an issue. Civil disobedience is only effective as a strategy if those who practice it are willing to accept the consequences of their actions, and face arrest, trial, and possible punishment. Otherwise, they are simply lawbreakers, and their protest loses its moral force.

Social action is probably meant to empower people who have been shut out of the political or social system and help them gain control of their lives and destinies.