

# READING GUIDE

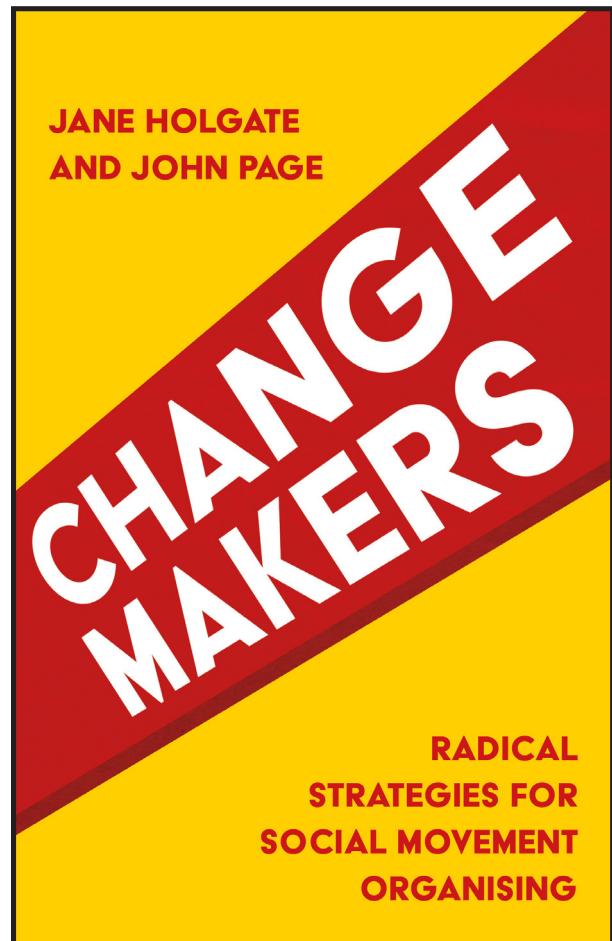
## CHANGEMAKERS: RADICAL STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANISING

**Welcome to the reading guide for *Changemakers: Radical Strategies for Social Movement Organising* by Jane Holgate and John Page (Policy Press, 2025). This guide is a resource for individuals and reading groups who want to think through the issues and discuss topics raised in the book.**

Following an introduction to the book, the guide contains summaries, lists of case studies, keywords and discussion questions for each chapter.

Written by two experts in activist education and community organising, it draws from their frontline experiences in trade unions, environmentalism, animal rights and social justice movements. The authors have a combined history of trade union, environmental, anti-racist and community activism of over 80 years.

As well as the experiences of the authors the book draws on key books and articles on organising over the last 40 years to illustrate how knowledge of strategies and tactics used in previous campaigns can inform our choices when seeking to direct our limited resources to effect change. It is a refreshing take on movement building, empowering changemakers of today to forge new paths towards a more just world. It explores essential themes including leadership and the art of negotiation and asks crucial questions about organising and social movements in the 21st century. Avoiding easy prescriptions, it guides readers to where theory meets practice. The book is in some ways a response to Saul Alinsky's 'Rules for



Radicals' (Vintage, 1989), celebrating his contribution, but questioning his legacy. In contrast, the authors suggest that there are not, in fact, any rules, merely 'reflections' and approaches that lead to key questions about strategy and tactics. Rather than suggesting that there are fixed rules on how to organise or campaign, the book seeks to engage the reader with key questions as to how we create social change. The questions may well remain the same: how is the unjust status quo sustained, what power protects those perpetrating injustice, who are our

people, where can we build power, how can we use the resources we have in a more strategic and targeted way? But the answers constantly change over time and depend on the movement involved, the extent of its ambition, the forces raged against it, and the resources it has available.

In order to change the world, it's important to think about the reason it is the way it is, what has shaped it, and what forces continue to shape it. Whether it is climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, racism in the workplace, the use of animals in research laboratories and intensive farming, the casualisation of work, or the unaffordability of housing, there is a reason why the world is as it is. In fact, it's often because of the balance of forces where some powerful groups benefit and, not surprisingly, seek to maintain their benefit, while others suffer, and equally, not surprisingly, seek to organise to effect change.

Find out more on the Bristol University Press website:  
[policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/trade/changemakers](http://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/trade/changemakers)

## About the Authors

**Jane Holgate** is Professor of Work and Employment Relations at the University of Leeds and a Trustee of the Ella Baker School of Organising. She has been a long-time trade unionist, serving in elected positions and a community activist.

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*"A must-read for anyone at any point in their journey as an organiser. It's the exact kind of accessible text we need to understand the connections between national and global justice movements and to bridge the gaps between organisers in the anti-racist space, working-class-led movements, LGBTQ+ organisations and climate justice."* **Hannah Francis**

## CHAPTER 1

# THE TWO SOULS OF ORGANISING – ABOVE AND BELOW

There's a saying rooted in the African American freedom movement: 'there are two forms of power in the world, organised money and organised people'. We don't have the money, so our job as organisers is to organise the people.

The question is then to find the most effective way of organising that will encourage our people to find their sense of agency and their innate ability to create change. The authors draw on a distinction made by Hal Draper in his 1966 essay 'the two souls of socialism' in which he argues that organising from above merely mimics the command and control that we experience in our working lives and does not unleash the latent potential of our people; , instead our efforts must be directed towards building a confident grass-roots movement. Rather than being the self-appointed 'generals' perhaps the organiser's role is more like that of a team coach?

### Examples and Case Studies

- Citizens UK
- Highlander folk school
- Clyde Shipbuilders' 'work in'

### Questions for discussion

Think of an organisation or campaign that you are involved in:

- Where do the choice of tactics emanate from: a highly centralised leadership, or from discussions at the grassroots?
- What are the pros and cons of this approach?
- What percentage of the movement's energy is used on educating and developing supporters to develop their leadership potential?
- Is this enough, and if not, why is this area under-resourced?

### Key Words

- Agency
- alienation
- Mobilisation vs education

## CHAPTER 2

# UNDERSTANDING THEORY OF CHANGE AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO EFFECTIVE ORGANISING

When people are first motivated to act to change the world, they tend to either copy what other people are doing or do what is already familiar to them. Very seldom is any thought given as to why the problem exists and what forces sustain it.

There are two main competing theories of change. The first is the information deficit model of change which implies that injustice is just an oversight, and that if the people in power realised just how bad things were, they would act to eliminate it. Very few people actually believe this, but if you look at what they do, their actions are consistent with this model of change. The second model of change is the 'power deficit' model. In this model, injustice exists because it meets the needs of a powerful lobby who have proven adept at preventing reforms to eradicate the injustice. Effective strategy then becomes a question of how we fight our opponents on the battlefields that they are weakest on. How do we bring new forces into the battle, and how do we persuade supporters of our opponents to withdraw from the battle?

### Examples and Case Studies

- Mississippi Freedom Summer
- Countering racism used by politicians
- Hunt Saboteurs
- An Equal Pay campaign

### Questions for discussion

Think of a campaign you are involved in and analyse the campaign tactics:

- To what extent are they seeking to build power to force change?
- To what extent are they hoping to educate decision makers about the problem?
- What can you do strategically to reduce your opponent's source of power to make it harder for them to shore up the injustice you wish to change?

### Key Words

- Marshall Ganz
- John Kelly
- Myles Horton
- Jane McAlevey
- Power analysis
- Theory of change
- Mobilisation theory

## CHAPTER 3

# WITHOUT POWER WE HAVE NO MOVEMENT

Understanding power and how to leverage it is vital when considering how to effect change, because, as many key changemakers have noted, power is seldom conceded without a struggle. If, as the authors assert, change happens when the balance of forces shift, then in any campaign, you need a strategy to disrupt and reorder the balance of power. The starting point for developing such a strategy is to consider who the key actors in the particular situation are, and what power they currently have.

Power isn't a 'thing': it doesn't exist outside of relationships – it is a relationship. Like all relationships, power relationships are complicated: power can be difficult to understand, it can be both positive and/or negative, it can be authoritative and controlling, but it can also be liberating. It is dialectical and changeable – it's all these things (and more) and dealing with it can be messy.

### Examples and Case Studies

- OutRage!
- Chickens' lib
- Poll Tax campaign
- Hackney newsagents stop the BNP

### Questions for discussion

Consider a campaign you are involved in:

- What is your strategy for building a more powerful movement?
- To what extent is your campaign aimed at gaining public support?
- Do you use 'propaganda by the deed', and to what extent is it aimed at activating the agency of supporters?
- Who are your potential allies who have yet to be activated?
- Review Saul Alinsky's Rules for Radicals and consider what insights it might provide into your approach to campaigning.

### Key Words

- Ideological power
- Value frames
- Propaganda by the deed
- Building alliances

## CHAPTER 4

# ORGANISING AND MOBILISING: WHY UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE MATTERS TO YOUR CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Jane McAlevey has persuasively argued that deep organising is the way that big change is effected. By this she means that, by winning the hearts, minds and actions of at least 70% of any defined constituency, it's possible to force through progressive changes against the wishes of decision-makers. She dismisses mobilising as merely activating your existing supporters, and as we already know, if our supporters had enough power to change things, then they would probably already have done so

In contrast, John Kelly's mobilisation theory (1998) argues, again persuasively, that trade unions can put into motion their membership through a combination of framing and leadership.

This chapter explores the concept of mobilising and in what circumstances it can work, and how it differs from organising. Equally, how do you start to organise unless you gather together your existing supporters and enthuse them with an organising vision?

### Examples and Case Studies

- A local government union branch fighting cuts in pay and services
- CLR James library

### Questions for discussion

- What do you understand to be the difference between the concepts of organising and mobilising
- What, if any, do you think are the problems with this characterisation?
- When would a mobilising approach be most appropriate, and in what circumstances would an organising approach deliver?

### Key Words

- Hahrie Han
- Transformational organising
- Spontaneity and organisation

## CHAPTER 5

# EQUALITY AS CENTRAL ORGANISING PRACTICE

Most organisers will identify themselves and the change they seek to effect as being part of a social justice movement. They may be acting against racism, sexism, climate change, the housing crisis, exploitation at work, or a range of other manifestations of what Audre Lorde refers to as the same disease. Yet, too often, within organisational structures and practices there are examples of the very same patterns of oppression that people are seeking to end.

Campaigning organisations can be really poor at demonstrating inclusivity and diversity in their practice, yet genuinely diverse leadership teams can be superior simply because they bring different perspectives to the decision-making table. Equality in our organising is not just a moral obligation; it can also be the key to winning. Yet too many organisations develop a culture that is inclusive to majority cultures, and exclusive to minority ones. This chapter explores how to create inclusive organisations that have the best chance of winning.

### Examples and Case Studies

- A campaign for equal pay.
- How a union addressed a deficit of women reps
- How an animal rights organisation worked with the Young Indian Vegetarians
- How an anti-racist organisation diversified its workforce and increased its influence.

### Questions for discussion

- To what extent do the organisation/campaign groups you are involved with fully represent the groups affected by the issues you focus on?
- What steps have been taken to increase diversity and representation?
- What more could be done?

### Key Words

- Tokenism
- Saviour syndrome
- Liberation approaches
- Intersectionality

## CHAPTER 6

# LEADERSHIP AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERS

Thinking about leaders and leadership development is essential to any campaign seeking to win because, without leadership and a strategic direction for the cause, organising will be unfocused and unproductive. However, there's a wealth of difference between the traditional 'managerial' concept of leadership and the role of leadership within social justice movements. The chapter contrasts the experience of the authors in direct-action groups, particularly the hunt saboteurs where everyone is expected to plan and deliver actions, with more traditional groups such as trade unions, where people are often expected to follow a call to action from 'leaders'.

Some organisations claim to be 'leaderless', but in reality, they have merely rejected the traditional 'leaders and followers' definition of leadership. Leadership involves sharing responsibility for delivering the group's aims.

The authors consider McAlevee's theory of 'organic leaders': who they are, how we find them, and how to 'bring them onboard'.

### Examples and Case Studies

- Hunt Saboteurs Association
- Workplace trade union organisation

### Questions for discussion

Consider an organisation you are involved in:

- To what extent does it operate a 'command and control' approach to mobilising members?
- How does it find and develop leaders within the communities that it represents?
- While the concept that 'everyone is a leader' is attractive, it does raise questions about how an organisation or campaign begins, establishes its culture and reaches its first recruits. How do you resolve the conflict between the need for a small group of self-selecting campaigners to start and establish a group or campaign, and the need to cede control if the campaign is to build sufficient power to win?

### Key Words

- Messianic leadership
- Distributed leadership
- Command and control
- Ella Baker



## CHAPTER 7

### DEVELOPING A 'STORY OF US'

We are told that there is 'no such thing as society', and are encouraged to distrust, dislike and even hate people who are not 'like us'. The chapter uses Marshall Ganz's theories of 'Story of Us' while considering Karl Marx's concept of a class in itself and a class for itself. Marx's distinction explores how people move from latent to actual collective power, but equally importantly, it recognises that there is a difference between those who are subjectively in agreement with or against us, and those who objectively should be with us, and whose interests converge with the changes we want to see.

There are plenty of people seeking to promote narratives of division, including Elon Musk, the world's richest man. But how do we create a new narrative, a new, inclusive story of us? This is related to the concept of super-majority organising: you can't build a supermajority if you implicitly accept the othering of significant sections of your community.

#### Examples and Case Studies

- A community response to local government cuts in services
- Rewriting the narrative of 'smoggies'
- Barack Obama

#### Questions for discussion

Think about a cause that you care about:

- Which groups in society should agree with you because their interests align with the cause you are advancing?
- Why is there not greater active support from one of the groups you've identified?
- What could you do differently to engage with this group?

#### Key Words

- Public narratives
- Who are your people?
- Solidarity
- Gramsci: 'hegemony'

## CHAPTER 8

# COMMUNICATION AND THE CHANGING OF DOMINANT NARRATIVES

The chapter explores the importance of narrative and how it can be used to change minds – an important skill in organising practice. You may have heard of the phrase ‘controlling the narrative’. where people and organisations want to prevent people from forming their own opinion. Instead, they want us to interpret ‘facts’ according to their own messaging.

Perhaps the most toxic and dangerous narrative today is pedalled by the far right that immigrants, minorities and ‘liberals’ are a corrosive influence on society. It’s a calculated strategy designed to divide and disorientate our communities, and get us voting for, or accepting, policies that impoverish us all. If we want to successfully challenge those influenced by these narratives, then, rather than ‘proving’ them wrong, we need to ask, ‘is that something you have seen or experienced yourself?’, provoking them, not into an argument, but rather to think a little deeper about their views.

### Examples and Case Studies

- Martin Luther King: “I have a dream”
- Public ownership of the railways
- Defeating Nigel Farage in South Thanet

### Questions for discussion

- How often do you actively listen to someone who disagrees with you on an issue that you care passionately about? Active listening is taking the time to explore how they come to their existing conclusions.
- Why do you not do this more?
- What can you do differently in your community that might help to create a new, inclusive, local story of us, given that in the UK and elsewhere, narratives of division are growing?

### Key Words

- Emotional reasoning
- Big organising
- Bias blind spot
- Cognitive liberation

## CHAPTER 9

# THE ART OF NEGOTIATION

Almost all disputes and campaigns end in negotiations, for example the end of apartheid in South Africa. The only times they don't is if one side has sufficient power to impose its will on the other; even when they do, there is often value in avoiding a unilateral attempt at 'closure'. Negotiating skills are therefore essential for changemakers.

Classic negotiating theory argues that there are 'bottom lines' beyond which people will not go. But often, whether this is in negotiating with an 'opposition' or a potential ally, it is unclear where such an overlap sits. Being a good negotiator can get you closer to the maximum your opponent will give. However, the key is to move their bottom line towards you, and this can be done by combining a negotiating strategy with actions outside the negotiating space that shift the balance of power and consequently their bottom line.

### Examples and Case Studies

- Network Rail Matrix management reorganisation
- Gate Gourmet dispute
- Industrial Areas Foundation training

### Questions for discussion

Consider the example in the chapter where the choice was genuinely either a cut in wages, or the closure of the factory:

- If you were placed in that position what would the moral and power implications be of each choice?
- Think of a situation you have been in where a union, community or other campaign has built sufficient power to effect some change, but not everything you want:
- What are the limits to the compromises you would be prepared to accept
- Is an 'all or nothing' approach justified if it leads to you achieving nothing?
- When is it right to say nothing short of our full demands will be acceptable?
- To what extent do partial wins amount to a sell-out?
- To what extent do they teach your supporters that if they want more they will need to build more power?

### Key Words

- Intra-organisational bargaining
- Inter-organisational bargaining
- Attitudinal structuring
- Integrative bargaining
- Power balance

## CHAPTER 10

# DISORGANISING: HOW OPPONENTS SEEK TO DISRUPT

Those with a vested interest in the status quo will, almost inevitably, use their resources to seek to thwart efforts to effect change. Evidence from the archives of former secret services agencies provide a shocking picture of how the State acts to disrupt opposition. Records are kept of the circles people mix in, the conversations they are having and the plans they are making. 'Agent provocateurs' are used to disrupt organisations, individuals are targeted and harrassed, and personal rivalries are exacerbated. On a more mundane level, , if you seek to organise for any social change, people with power will often seek to send someone along to meetings to hear the plans, or try to create a narrative that your proposals will hurt the very people you are trying to support etc. Therefore, if we want to win, we need to consider the disorganising that our opponents may seek to inflict on our campaigns and movements.

### Examples and Case Studies

- The Shrewsbury pickets
- Police riot at Orgreave
- Blacklisting union activists within construction
- Public health; smoking and asbestos campaigns

### Questions for discussion

- Think of a campaign you are involved in:
- Who would want your campaign to fail?
- What could they do to undermine and disrupt your actions?
- What can we build into the DNA of our organisations that minimise the effectiveness of that disruption, given that it is inevitable that our opponents will seek to disrupt us, and the more power we develop as a movement the more urgent their attempts will be

### Key Words

- Spycops scandal
- Bob Lambert
- John Dines

## CHAPTER 11

# RETHINKING AND REMAKING ORGANISATIONS

Not only does the choice of organisational structure impact our ability to marshal and channel the resources we have, but it can also redefine who 'we' are. The way we organise, the relationships we build and the care we show to each other are all choices that have a material impact on the outcomes of our campaigns.

This chapter asks the puzzling question: how is it that organisations with the least resources sometimes do the most effective work? How do we avoid the so called 'iron law of oligarchy' which suggests that all organisations, sooner or later, become agents of their own bureaucracies rather than agents of change.

The chapter considers some of the insights of social movement theory and in particular the study of the African American Freedom Movement, to explore how organisations stimulate movements (and conversely, how they can stifle them). Specific examples explore the distinction between 'starfish' and 'spider' organisations.

### Examples and Case Studies

- Momentum (UK)
- Obama 2008 election campaign
- Great Get Together

### Questions for discussion

Think of an organisation with which you are familiar:

- How would you describe its structure? Is it spider like, or starfish like?
- How did its current structure come into existence?
- What is its primary function (research, advocacy, strategic litigation, direct action etc.)?
- Is its current structure optimal for the delivering that function?
- When did the organisation last review its structure and effectiveness?

### Key Words

- Ecosystem of influence
- Sheila McKechnie Foundation
- Bill Moyers: Movement Action Plan
- Deepa Iyer: Social change ecosystem framework

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

Despite the heroic efforts of campaigners over the last half a century, are we really any further forward in bringing into existence a fairer, more equal and caring society? While we could easily have different views on this point, it is absolutely clear that we stand at a crossroads in history. Around the world, from Russia to the USA, to India, and Turkey, and in several European countries, the far right are in the ascendancy and authoritarian populists are asking us to abandon the concepts of equality and human rights, and instead trust a strong leader to 'take care of us'.

In the UK we may well have only until 2029 to prevent the election of a Trump-like government if the mainstream political parties don't receive a majority and Reform win more seats.

### Questions for discussion

- Why are increasing numbers of people becoming convinced that our problems are caused by the very presence of 'minorities'?
- What can you take from this book to help organise your community to isolate narratives of division?

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