



Voluntary Sector Working Paper

Bridging the Gap between Emotion and Strategy:
a study of change in the relationship between
national campaigning organisations and their
networks of local groups

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Abstract

This paper is a study of changing national / local relationships within UK campaigning organisations. It is grounded in a conceptual framework embracing resource exchange, political interaction and change theory as benchmarks for a research investigation.

A case study of the Amnesty International UK Section (AIUK) is at the heart of the paper, demonstrating that whilst change has occurred the organisational value of a national / local partnership remains vitally important. The four key aspects of change that the research discovers illuminate how national campaigning organisations have evolved since their inception during the post-war era, and the study concludes by proposing a hypothesis to explain that lifetime change.

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1. Introduction

The post-war era saw the creation of many new voluntary organisations, established as a result of public concern about a diverse range of contemporary issues. Often described as ‘social movement’ organisations, their aim was to campaign on themes such as civil rights, human rights, environmental protection, nuclear destruction and third world development. They developed a new image for the voluntary sector, a more proactive approach geared towards achieving change as opposed to alleviating problems, which subsequently catalysed campaigning on traditional sectoral issues such as poverty and homelessness (Kendall and Knapp, 1996).

Wider access to education, mass communications and economic prosperity enabled people to take a broader interest in the issues that affected their own and other people’s lives. Social movement organisations captured the spirit of those times, originating largely from the middle classes and soon growing to mobilise large numbers of campaigning volunteers (Kendall and Knapp, 1996); thinking globally and acting locally became a crusading ethos. To accommodate this public desire to take action and the need to apply co-ordinated pressure, many organisations adopted a structure combining a network of voluntary local groups with a national presence.

Once young and radical, these campaigning organisations are now approaching middle age. This paper investigates how their fusion of local and national action has evolved over that time, and whether it remains a robust model for campaigning into the future.

The purpose of this study is:

- to identify any changes that have taken place in the relationship between national campaigning organisations and their networks of local groups;
- to provide explanations for those changes; and
- to propose a hypothesis that characterises the evolution of national / local relationships within national campaigning organisations.

Amnesty International is one of the leading lights of the post-war social movement, and a case study of Amnesty International UK Section is at the heart of this paper.

1.1 An open question

In approaching the study it was not clear what significant changes, if any, would be found in this type of intra-organisational relationship. As the degree and nature of change were unknown, no

set of explanations nor any overarching principle could be tested. Furthermore, whilst a great deal of writing informed the issue, there was a dearth of literature that directly addressed it. Consequently this paper is a voyage of discovery, exploring and explaining hitherto uncharted territory, and at the journey's end is a hypothesis that others may wish to test in future. Having declared this intention to conduct an open study, I should also declare a personal interest. I have been a practitioner in the field of local group development for twelve years, latterly with a national campaigning organisation. Although anecdotal, this experience means that I did have preconceptions which may have coloured the research and findings, and these are presented below:

- Campaigning has become a fast-moving and complex activity, demanding skills and experience as well as time and confidence, and so it may now be less accessible to voluntary local activism.
- Campaign issues are increasingly global by nature, and as voluntary activism arises from people's experience of life these bigger-picture issues may now have less local resonance.
- Campaigning organisations have grown - having more staff could have bred a culture that is increasingly distanced from local campaigning.
- With unprecedented access to information, national organisations may have developed new opportunities to promote their messages and mobilise support, whilst from a local perspective activists may now have less dependence on a national organisation.
- As civil society evolves, people may discover new and more locally meaningful ways to take action, and, as society becomes more individualistic, people may find that acting as part of the local group of an established NGO is less attractive.
- Campaigning organisations have been largely dependent on the middle classes; this active local supporter base may be increasingly cash-rich but time-poor, consequently choosing to take action in different ways.

1.2 Overview

The voyage of discovery unfolds in the following way:

Chapter Two is a review of the existing literature. It provides definitions of 'national', 'local' and their 'relationship', sets a conceptual framework for how this relationship works, and contextualises how changes to the relationship might manifest themselves.

Chapter Three describes the case study. It shows how the research was designed, details how it was conducted, explains the methodology that was used for data analysis, and sets out the principal research findings.

Chapter Four discusses the research findings, providing evidence of a changing national / local relationship. Four aspects of change are described and explained, and the underlying question of whether national organisations still need local groups is addressed.

Chapter Five is the journey's end. In conclusion it summarises the key areas of change and their causal roots, and proposes a hypothesis to explain the evolution of national / local relationships within campaigning organisations.

2. Literature review

The available literature provides a conceptual framework for investigation, and this chapter explores three aspects of that literature. It:

- defines a 'national organisation', 'local groups' and their 'relationship';
- assesses the concepts that underpin national / local relationships; and
- explores how changes to these relationships might be identified and measured.

2.1 The partners and how they relate

National organisations and local groups may share the same overall objectives, but the partners in this relationship come from very different backgrounds. Whilst national organisations are typically hierarchical, employing staff and operating to formal procedures, local groups are typically informal and depend on volunteering. These are separate worlds, the bureaucratic and the associational (Billis, 1989). Furthermore the two worlds have different bottom lines, characterised by their perspectives (national or local) and by their ways of working (formal or informal); alternative approaches are required to gel these world views into cohesive action (Anheier, 1999).

The concept of a national organisation needs little further explanation - it operates at a strategic level, and in the campaigning context seeks to influence governments and key decision-makers. However the concept of a local group is more complex, being associational in form yet straddling two worlds, creating an ambiguous context that is often characterised by tension (Billis, 1989). Local groups typically provide benefits for their members (Smith, 1991), and have to balance these with the longer term interests of the group (Harris, 1997; Knoke, 1990). Given these competing needs and the limit to which volunteers can be directed, it is difficult for groups to agree priorities (Harris, 1997), especially with the added dimension of having to balance local priorities with those of a distant national organisation.

So why do these partners come together? The motivation arises out of mutual need, a sense of interdependence in achieving respective goals. Consequently their relationship is primarily driven by access to resources and influence over them: “who *has* what, and how much it relates to who *needs* what and how much” (Bailey, 1992). The second key aspect of the relationship is the nature of organisational policies and strategies, and influence over how these are planned and implemented (Hudson, 1999).

National organisations vary in terms of their size, objectives and culture, and as local groups also vary depending on the individuals who are involved, it is clear that intra-organisational relationships are defined by a wide range of variables. Consequently there is no single relationship model, but rather a challenge for each organisation to find an appropriate balance between its constituent parts (Hudson, 1999).

Thematically the key determinant in defining an appropriate relationship is decision-making, manifested by the degree of centralisation or decentralisation of organisational control (Bailey, 1992; Brooke, 1984; Hudson, 1999; Oster, 1992; Young, 1989, 1992). To balance overall strategic direction and control with participation by all parties, the premise is that decisions are best taken at the most devolved level. With decentralisation comes the need for organisations to adopt a regulative framework, enabling them to function effectively and meet the mutually agreed needs of the partners (Bailey, 1992; Brooke, 1994; Hudson, 1999; Young, 1992).

Therefore intra-organisational relationships can be plotted across a spectrum that measures the degree of decentralisation (Hudson, 1999). In choosing the most suitable position on this spectrum, the full range of organisational variables needs to be considered (Brooke, 1994) - the respective inputs, outputs and responsibilities of each partner as well as the organisation’s culture, politics and purpose.

Although there is no single model for a national / local relationship, there are three general models in practice¹: a strong centre that directs its groups, strong local groups that are serviced by the centre, and a franchise model. The ‘strong centre’ model is most suitable where local groups carry out clearly defined activities to support the national organisation (Hudson, 1999). The ‘strong groups’ model is suited to federalised organisations, for instance international ones made up of national groups, where power effectively resides at the lower level (Young, 1992). The ‘franchise’ model allows for power to be devolved within a regulatory framework, giving

¹ This section draws on a framework proposed in *Models of Headquarters - Local Relations*, a lecture hand-out from the Centre for Voluntary Organisation, London School of Economics (1995).

local groups autonomy over specific activities; it is the most flexible model in managing or mitigating the tensions that can arise within national / local relationships (Oster, 1992).

2.2 What drives the relationship?

In order to understand the national / local relationship within any one organisation, an assessment of the contextual variables is needed (Brooke, 1994). Three critical areas of investigation can unlock this information: structural forms and how they interact, resources and how they are exchanged, and the sets of values that comprise the organisation's political dimension.

2.2.1 Structural forms

An investigation of organisational structure provides a factual account, effectively defining the underlying foundation of a national / local relationship.

Voluntary organisations typically comprise two structural forms: an administration that carries out the ongoing business, and a governance structure that takes key policy decisions (Knoke, 1990). Whilst administration and governance function discretely and in different ways the two structures are clearly interdependent, and together they define the organisation's internal relationships and authority levels (Thompson, 1967).

There are three dimensions to organisational structure: centrality, complexity and formalisation (Bailey, 1992). Centrality is a measure of power and control exercised through the decision-making functions. Complexity measures the parts that make up an organisational whole, a national organisation with a network of local groups being comparatively complex. Formalisation measures how behaviour is regulated by policies, processes and rules - the greater the degree of formalisation, the less space there is for autonomy or devolved decision-making.

2.2.2 Resources

As access to and influence over resources lie at the heart of national / local relationships (Bailey 1992), an investigation of how resources are managed should provide insight into how such a relationship actually works. Two conceptual frameworks can guide this investigation: resource exchange (Levine and White, 1961) and resource dependency (Thompson, 1967).

In resource dependency one partner has greater control over resources than the other, thereby exerting greater influence over the organisation (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978); thus power is exercised through control of resources. Where an organisation has scant resources, or if supply

of resources is uncertain, then accepting a dependency relationship in return for stability is a way of controlling the outside world and ensuring survival. Applied within an organisation, however, the dependency model is often characterised by coercion and conflict (Bailey, 1992).

In resource exchange the partners work together, recognising that there is a mutual benefit to the interaction. This model is better suited to intra-organisational relationships as interactions take the form of co-operation and collaboration (Bailey, 1992), and so it provides a more fruitful context for the investigation. There are four dimensions that determine resource exchange (Levine and White, 1961):

- the parties to the exchange: their form, function, size and personnel characteristics;
- the kinds and quantities of exchange: for instance information, services, staff or volunteer time and funding;
- the agreement underlying the exchange: effectively the deal between the partners, however formal that may be; and
- the direction of the exchange: unilateral, reciprocal or joint.

2.2.3 Values - the political dimension

As influence over decision-making is the second key aspect of an intra-organisational relationship, an investigation of decision-making practices should also provide insight into how a relationship actually works. Both staff and volunteers are attracted to campaigning organisations by the nature of the work –and by a desire to change something - more than by any material rewards. Their personal values and how these are reflected in the organisation are a major determinant, and so the way that organisations do things can be as important as the actual outcomes (Jeavons, 1994).

Clashes over values are inevitable with personal beliefs at stake, and there is limited space for compromise on such matters of principle (Paton, 1996). These value-driven tensions often focus around the work of the organisation, and notably the policy-making or planning processes (Hudson, 1999). Therefore the challenge is to unite different stakeholder groups, typically the staff, local groups and Board in the case of this study, towards achieving common organisational goals.

The right level of participation in decision-making is the key to agreeing these common goals (Hudson, 1999; Leat, 1995; Paton, 1996), and participative decision-making geared to the organisational context also increases productivity and personal satisfaction (Cotton et al, 1988; Fernie and Metcalf, 1995). By positively managing this expressive dimension, an environment where creativity and innovation can thrive is created (Mason, 1995), and through harnessing

their motivation individuals can attain higher order needs such as esteem, growth, recognition and achievement (Robbins, 2000). Therefore if stakeholders feel that their voice is heard, through participative decision-making, then their contribution to the organisation's goals is likely to be both of a higher order and more long-lasting; conversely, if they feel that their voice is not heard, then these energies may be channelled negatively into internal politics.

2.3 How could we tell if the relationship is changing?

The purpose of this study was to identify and explain 'change', a complicated and haphazard phenomenon. Whilst there are numerous theories for analysing change, each with strengths and weaknesses, "we must abandon the notion that there can be a simple or clear theoretical viewpoint for the study of organisation and change" (Collins, 2000). However there is a conceptual framework that can help in understanding the process of change itself (Collins, 2000, Pettigrew, 1987), comprising four axioms:

- 'Embeddedness'. Organisations are embedded within a wider network of social and environmental relationships, and an understanding of change can only emerge from this wider perspective.
- 'Temporal connectedness'. Change can only be studied as a process over time, and most organisational changes take place over a period of years.
- 'Context and action'. The 'actors' or participants also shape the process of change; their actions become institutionalised over time and influence how others perceive the world. Thus it is important to understand how actors and context interrelate.
- 'Complexity and contradiction'. The true nature of change lies in the detail, in the contradictions that actors manage or create; over-simplification should be avoided.

2.4 How might the national partner have changed?

As resource interactions and decision-making practices are critical factors in assessing an intra-organisational relationship, it is worth assessing how these might have changed over time. The voluntary sector has become an economic force during the post-war era, now accounting for 9.2% of GDP (Kendall and Almond, 1998), and so it is reasonable to assume that UK campaign groups have seen significant growth in resources during their lifetimes. According to Billis (1989), the resulting transformation from associational to bureaucratic forms should create hierarchies, rules and statuses, and an organisation that was founded on voluntary action would now be run professionals.

The iron law of oligarchy (Michels, 1959) proposes that as organisations grow, they evolve from democratic to oligarchic control. Establishing a body of paid staff creates a concentration of

knowledge, and control over the means of communication. The leadership and staff start to further their own objectives, sometimes displacing the original objectives of the association. A high level of participation in decision-making becomes impossible, and so the gap between top and bottom in the organisation grows wider. Whilst Michels' law was based on a study of political parties, it may also apply to campaigning organisations as they both arose from grassroots concern.

2.5 How might the local partners have changed?

As local groups comprise volunteers they are likely to be affected by wider societal trends, and two such trends may inform the investigation. Social capital is one of the measures against which local activism can be assessed: "the propensity of individuals to associate together on a regular basis, to trust one another, and to engage in community affairs" (Hall, 1999). According to Hall (1999) the expression of social capital in the UK has been broadly consistent during the post-war era, although it is largely dependent upon the middle classes and the middle-aged.

A second measure, more directly linked to activism, would be trends in volunteering. The most recent national survey (Davis Smith, 1997) showed an overall decline of 5.9% in volunteer numbers for the period 1991 to 1997, representing 48% of the adult population. However as 44% of the adult population were volunteering in 1981, with significant growth occurring over the intervening period, this 1997 figure is interpreted as a flattening out.

3. The research

The literature provided insight into the nature of intra-organisational relationships, and an indication of potential changes within such relationships. It served as a benchmark, to guide an investigation about change and gauge the findings.

The investigation itself is presented in this chapter. It:

- explains how the research was designed;
- describes the case study of Amnesty International UK Section (AIUK);
- sets out the methodology that was employed for data analysis; and
- provides a summary of the key findings, which are discussed in the next chapter.

3.1 Research design

Organisational change is a complex social phenomenon. To explain it requires analysis of human interactions within an organisation, and of how that organisation relates to wider society

(Collins, 2000). Therefore a qualitative research approach was chosen, emphasising the socially constructed and value-laden nature of reality, and exploring how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

As the purpose of this study was to answer 'how' and 'why' questions, within a real-life context over which the researcher had no control, an explanatory case study was selected as the best strategy for inquiry (Yin, 1994). The inquiry was also instrumental in nature (Stake, 1998), seeking explanations for change which might apply to all post-war social movement organisations through an in-depth investigation of one organisation.

The challenge in devising research questions was to elicit specific information about change whilst exploring the nature of an intra-organisational relationship. Although structural forms define an organisation and its internal relationships, they are symptomatic of the underlying resource exchanges and political practices. Therefore investigating the resource and political dimensions should reveal how the intra-organisational relationship actually operates, and why this might have changed. Consequently the research questions focused on these two areas:

- How has the resource exchange changed, and why?
- How have decision-making practices changed, and why?

Expert interviews were selected as the primary means of investigation (Yin, 1994), so that data collection could be focused on the research questions. Triangulation was built into the case study design; in this way multiple perceptions could be identified and meanings could be clarified (Stake, 1998; Yin, 1994). Consequently interviewees were carefully chosen to provide a balance of experiences, a questionnaire was used as an ancillary source of information, and further evidence was sought from internal documentation.

An interview framework was devised to explore the research questions, and having framed the inquiry in this way to also probe for broader evidence of change (see Appendix Two). Whilst structured, the interview questions were intentionally open-ended as the purpose was to gather individual perceptions, understandings and experiences as well as the facts of the matter (Yin, 1994). A set of prompts was also developed to safeguard against respondents having little to say when posed with open questions; however these proved unnecessary.

The interview questions were field tested with staff and local group members from another national campaigning organisation, and subsequently refined.

3.2 The case of AIUK

Amnesty International (AI) was founded in Britain in 1961. It campaigns for the protection of human rights: “to free all prisoners of conscience, to make sure that all political prisoners are given fair trials, to abolish torture and the death penalty, and to stop all enforced ‘disappearances’ and extrajudicial executions” (AIUK Website).

AI is guided by principles of impartiality and independence, and its ‘home country’ rule precludes national groups from working on domestic issues. Structurally it operates along federal lines (Hudson, 1999; Young, 1992), with each national group having weighted votes on an international decision-making committee.

AIUK is the UK ‘Section’ of AI. It is a complex organisation (Bailey, 1992), comprising: a voluntary Board, a central office in London and two satellite offices, a body of 105 staff, and 297 local groups. The public can also engage in AIUK’s activities through individual actions, e-mail campaigning, professional outreach networks, membership and financial support.

Given this level of complexity, a formalised set of procedures has evolved to regulate behaviour (Bailey, 1992). The internal relationship with local groups is a franchise agreement; group members do not have to be members of AIUK, and groups have freedom to act within a set framework (Hudson, 1999; Oster, 1992).

3.2.1 The case study

Research was carried out over a four week period and data was collected in three ways:

- internal documents provided by AIUK,
- expert interviews, and
- local group questionnaires.

Notes were taken during interviews, and interviews were also tape recorded so that these notes could be checked for accuracy.

The documentary evidence provided contextual information, illuminating AIUK’s culture and ways of working as well as its structure and campaigning. Three documents were specifically relevant to the research: the ‘Core Review of AIUK Local Groups’ (1998), the local groups strategy ‘Groups - Free To Campaign’ (1999), and annual monitoring information contained in the ‘Local Group Profiles’ for 1995 to 2000.

Six face-to-face interviews were conducted with a cross-section of AIUK staff: two Groups Officers, two Campaigns Co-ordinators, a Media Officer and the Director. Staff interviewees were provided with a project brief in advance of the interview. Two further staff, a Media Officer and the Urgent Action Co-ordinator, answered follow-up questions.

Four telephone interviews were conducted with local group Secretaries, who were selected to represent differing aspects of group size, experience and location. Group interviewees were provided with the project brief and also with the research questions in advance of the interview.

To ensure that the research reflected their comparative diversity, twenty questionnaires were sent out to a random sample of local groups. Ten questionnaires were returned, a surprisingly high response rate; whilst two of these were of limited value, giving only yes/no answers, eight respondents provided useful information.

3.3 Data analysis

'Framework' was employed as an applied qualitative research method, to understand and analyse the complex set of data that was collected, and to seek explanations for the findings (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). This step-by-step approach to the data analysis is described below:

- 'Familiarisation'. All of the notes, tapes, questionnaires and source documents were reviewed. During this process of immersion in the entire body of evidence, key themes and ideas were noted.
- 'Thematic framework'. Referring back to the purpose of the study, and also to the themes and ideas that emerged from the familiarisation stage, four issues were identified as distinctive aspects of change.
- 'Indexing'. The data was annotated for references to the four aspects of change, and for the contextual issues too. As thematic comments were not always made in answer to the same questions, and as differing points were often made in answer to individual questions, this proved to be a painstaking procedure. However during this process, the thematic evidence of change became clearer.
- 'Charting'. The indexed data was written up under the thematic headings, and as each of these comprised multiple components it was then sorted under sub-headings. Comments were coded for two variables: the duration of an individual's involvement in AIUK, and whether they were a staff or local group member.
- 'Analysis'. The charted data was mapped for the range and nature of each component issue. Associations between these and the potential variables were explored; no material distinctions were found for length of involvement, but on some issues the staff and group

members had contrasting perspectives. This analysis forms the basis of the findings and explanations of the research.

The use of 'Framework', through its thorough and methodological approach, enabled the data to speak for itself; this optimised the quality and objectivity of the research findings and explanations.

3.4 Key findings

The research findings comprised two principle categories. The first category was contextual data arising from the research questions, which is set out below. Whilst these findings were of interest, they are not described in detail as they inform rather than address the purpose of the study. The second category was the data relating to change; this is summarised below.

3.4.1 The resource exchange

There was widespread understanding of the overall contribution of local groups and of the reciprocal support provided by staff, with broadly similar views expressed by staff and group respondents.

The key local groups contributions were seen as: public education and awareness-raising, campaigning on specific issues and for individuals, promoting the organisation and raising funds, and legitimising AIUK by demonstrating genuine public support.

The key staff contributions were seen as: supplying tailored campaign opportunities and materials, facilitating group development through guidance and training, enabling communications, and providing specific advice or support to individual groups.

In general this resource exchange was perceived a 'fair deal', in that the overall group contribution weighed up with the level of support received was seen as roughly equitable. However the nature of the exchange had changed over time, and the key research findings were largely identified through exploring this area.

3.4.2 The political dimension

The research yielded no appreciable evidence of change in the balance of participation in decision-making practices. However there was a notable contextual finding, in that the way that decisions are made within AIUK was widely misinterpreted.

In the context of national decision-making, the great majority of respondents believed that organisational decisions were taken centrally. However the evidence collected suggests greater local influence over national decision-making. For instance the membership and local groups exercise a decision-making role through the AGM, the Board includes members from group backgrounds who were perceived to take local interests into account, and decisions about campaigns and strategies are also influenced by local groups through a regular series of issue discussion days.

In the context of local decision-making, the great majority of respondents believed that groups have significant freedom to determine their own activities. However the evidence collected suggests greater national influence. For instance groups are provided with an annual campaign planner with which they can opt into AIUK's campaigns; as they cannot work on any other campaign issues, their freedom to decide is constrained within this centrally-determined framework.

3.4.3 Evidence of change

The four key research findings are summarised below.

- The size of the local group network has declined, whilst national membership, individual action and staff numbers have grown significantly.
- The campaigning agenda has evolved, from focusing on the release of individual prisoners of conscience to working on broader, thematic issues.
- The style of campaigning has become more focused, placing less emphasis on awareness-raising and more emphasis on media and political campaigning.
- Local group support has improved, with better internal communications and new resources linked to strategic delivery.

4. Discussion

This chapter explores the four key research findings. Each finding is described and discussed, and tentative explanations are proposed; a summary of perceived future change is also provided. In the light of this evidence, the chapter concludes by asking whether local groups are still an essential part of a national campaigning organisation.

A rich body of data was collected during the research, and to capture that richness the actors tell their own story in this chapter. Thus key points are illustrated with quotes that are referenced to individuals: 'S' and 'G' denote staff and group respondents, each of whom is allocated a number.

4.1 Changing patterns of involvement

Total numbers of AIUK local groups dropped from 338 to 297 during the period 1995 to 2000 (AIUK Group Profiles). Averaging at eight groups a year this represented an overall loss of 12.1%; however the rate of loss had slowed down with only four groups being lost in 2000. Compared to volunteering in general this trend was twice the national average, the most recent data showing a 5.9% reduction in volunteer numbers over a six year period (Davis Smith, 1997).

Amnesty launched 'Individual Action' in 1998, a scheme that enables members to campaign from home through simple actions; since its launch, over 15,000 individuals had signed up to this scheme (AIUK). Another opportunity for individual action is through AIUK's Urgent Action network, which co-ordinates fax and e-mail campaigns, and this network has consistently involved around 10,000 individuals.

Staff numbers have increased significantly over recent years. *'When I started in 1990 there were 34 staff and now we have over 100'* (S6); thus on average AIUK grew by one new staff member a year during its first thirty years, and by seven new staff a year throughout the last ten years. Membership numbers have also increased significantly: by 105% from 1990 to 2000, and by 24.9% from 1995 to 2000 (AIUK).

4.1.1 Why have patterns of involvement changed?

Six interviewees were probed for their views on the decline in group numbers, three group members and three staff. Their comments identified three broad themes:

- a lack of time for volunteering caused by economic pressures;
- the ageing of the membership; and
- a UK culture of individualism, which three respondents characterised as 'the Thatcher effect'; *'people don't want to give time to an organisation when they can do something on their own'* (G4)..

The national volunteering figures show significant growth in the period 1981 – 1991, followed by the more recent 'flattening out' (Davis Smith, 1997), and it may be that Amnesty local groups are following this trend at a later stage. One respondent reported that *'we've weeded out some dead groups'* (S6), and pointed to the slowdown in the rate of loss as evidence that the Core Review of Local Groups (AIUK, 1998) and resulting groups strategy were beginning to take effect.

Perhaps the most interesting findings were in the growth areas. Individual action has boomed since its launch and national membership has grown dramatically, potentially bearing out the suggestions that volunteers experience greater time pressures or that UK culture is increasingly individualistic. Compared against the reduction in group numbers, a change in the nature of social capital is indicated; whilst this is not in decline (Hall, 1999), it is being expressed in different ways.

The growth in staff numbers reflects a meaningful shift in Amnesty's resources, made possible by the substantial increase in the number of members giving financial support. More staffing has meant greater resources for local group support, however by its nature this represents a fundamental shift in the balance of power towards the centre.

4.2 An evolving campaigns agenda

Amnesty's inception was sparked by the case of two Portuguese students, who were imprisoned for drinking a toast to freedom (AIUK website). The founding aims were publicised in a newspaper appeal (Observer 28/05/1961):

- 1) To work impartially for the release of those imprisoned for their opinions.*
- 2) To seek for them a fair and public trial.*
- 3) To enlarge the Right of Asylum and help political refugees find work.*
- 4) To urge effective international machinery to guarantee freedom of opinion.*

Thus the original purpose of AIUK was to campaign for the release of prisoners of conscience. Adopting their own prisoner was the catalyst for local groups to form, and this became the core local group campaign activity.

Forty years on, AIUK's campaigning is themed around the causes of human rights violations - issues such as refugees, torture, the death penalty and the arms trade. 'Action Files', the individual case files for prisoners of conscience, are assigned by AI and fewer are now available. Only 75% of local groups had Action Files (AIUK Local Group Profiles 2000) and these were increasingly thematic, for instance highlighting an individual case to campaign against the death penalty. Whilst thematic campaigning is popular - indeed 85% of local groups had signed up to a torture campaign - changes of this magnitude can be difficult for long-standing local activists.

AIUK was set up around individuals, and since then the trend has been to engage more widely (S4). 15 years ago, Action Files were the backbone of most local groups. Now they're seen as no different to any other campaign and they're mainly thematic

(G3). The old guard think that prisoners of conscience are what the group is about. At one stage we didn't have one - none were available - and there was some tension (G2). However it's simplistic to suggest that this hasn't been popular with groups - they like working on the bigger issues (S5).

This represents a fundamental if gradual shift in the nature of local group campaigning. Amnesty's campaign agenda has moved away from locally-driven campaigning on individuals, where groups had a unique and distinctive focus for their activities, and '*less individual cases means less local ownership*' (S6). The trend is moving towards centrally-driven campaigning on global and thematic issues: '*we were quite prescriptive in asking groups to target their contribution to where it would be most effective*' (S4).

4.2.1 Why has the campaigns agenda changed?

The shift in campaigning emphasis was generally recognised, and a primary reason for this was commonly cited: that the nature of human rights abuses had changed; several respondents cited media demands as a secondary reason. Thus external factors were perceived to have changed Amnesty's campaigning agenda. One long-serving respondent, whilst not disagreeing with this trend, felt that in becoming more reactive Amnesty had also become less adventurous.

Prisoners of conscience were to a large extent a product of the cold war, when developed states used the justice system against anyone who disagreed with them (S7). The nature of human rights violations has changed (G3), we have to respond to new-style conflicts and mass human rights violations such as Rwanda. That means campaigning on themes (S4). However Amnesty used to take more risks and work on more sensitive issues ... we were emotionally stronger (S6).

Arguably this commonly-shared analysis is too unequivocal - torture and the death penalty are not new concepts, and nor are mass human rights violations such as ethnic cleansing. The evidence suggests that three factors have brought about this change:

- a genuine decline in the number of prisoners of conscience;
- a more sophisticated understanding of human rights, and how they are affected by wider socio-economic issues; and
- a more targeted approach to campaigning, that builds on public opinion and takes advantage of media opportunities, yet takes less risk.

Although this change is embedded in wider issues, the organisational context has been increasingly driven by a broader understanding of human rights issues at the centre and by

national media opportunities. A consequence is that some of the distinctiveness of local campaigning has been lost.

4.3 A more focused way of campaigning

Educating the public, through raising awareness and funds, had been the bedrock of local group activities for many years. However Amnesty's campaigning style has become progressively focused, targeting pressure where it is most likely to achieve change and increasingly through media and political channels. The 1998 core review consolidated this trend towards co-ordinated, strategically-driven campaign delivery.

Many groups still saw awareness-raising as their core activity. For instance:

stalls, exhibitions, letters to local papers and talks to schools and churches (G10) as well as fundraising, which also publicises Amnesty locally (G12).

However –

since the 1998 review Amnesty has become more strategy lead (S3). Our job is to change policies, practices and public opinion. We must use our resources effectively and devise the best tactics to ensure strategic delivery. Groups are a delivery mechanism (S4). Groups understand the importance of media work and lobbying, and it's true that there's a greater focus on this now. Some groups are better at it than others (G3).

Local groups largely commented on two aspects of this change. Firstly, the group fundraising target was dropped from £750 to £72, which provided a clearer focus on their campaigning remit. Secondly, an annual campaign planner was introduced from which groups could opt into national campaigns; this provided clearer direction for engaging in and prioritising campaigns, although some groups found it overwhelming.

The reduced financial target is beneficial to groups that don't want to fundraise (G2). £750 was difficult for us (G12); now we are able to spend more time and energy on campaigning (G11); This has freed up a lot of energy, and it feels positive (S3).

The annual campaign planner helps us focus on what we might work on (G4) and we can prioritise with our limited manpower (G6). However we opt-in for too much ... there's always a feeling of 'we should' (G2), and we felt guilty if we didn't try for everything (G1).

Staff largely commented on the strategic aspects of this change, on how the organisation could campaign most effectively; a common perception was the need for more media and political campaigning locally. The 1998 core review and resulting local groups strategy facilitated this: group materials had improved and were focused on key campaign messages, media support had become more responsive, and evaluation was introduced to further improve support. A closer working relationship was evolving between staff and local campaigners, effectively a *quid pro quo* for groups that deliver on focused campaigning.

There's more support coupled with a greater focus on effective campaigning ... less 'for the sake of it' campaigning (S3). Group media calls are taken more seriously - there's more respect for them - the prima donna vs coalface culture is changing (S2). On the Saudi Campaign, the quality and effectiveness of how this went was evaluated with a view to providing better and more focused support to groups (S3). Staff are more thoughtful about working with groups strategically (S1).

With this combination of strategic drive and greater central resources, local groups were no longer being involved in every campaign. To achieve focus, Amnesty's campaigning had become more directed, and on the whole this was seen as a pragmatic response to the burgeoning campaigning workload.

I think that we give groups less information and fewer options. This makes them more effective as they're more focused (S5), but by controlling the flow of information we give groups less space to choose their own activities (S6).

A recent Israel crisis provided an example. Whereas formally this would have involved all groups, it was managed centrally:

targeted groups were invited to lobby their MPs. They understood the opportunity and participated, but some other groups felt left out (S3). This is a good thing - we shouldn't involve groups in every campaign, that could be too much (S6).

4.3.1 Why have the methods of campaigning changed?

This change was the most commented upon aspect of the research, both by groups and by staff. Undeniably, a strategic approach should optimise the organisation's campaigning opportunities and achieve the greatest beneficial change, and this was commonly understood. However public awareness-raising remains important - local groups can directly influence public

opinion whilst the media only has an indirect influence, and it's public opinion that politicians ultimately respond to. Therefore there is a challenge in balancing these two approaches.

Nationally, AIUK needs groups to deliver more media coverage and political pressure on its issues, but the awareness-raising side is important too and we should play to groups' strengths ... it's an issue of balance (S3).

In developing this focused approach to delivering organisational objectives, Amnesty has been driven by the national needs of modern-day, professional campaigning. It was notable that groups and staff highlighted different aspects of the change and that they used different language to describe it.

As one respondent tellingly put it, in the context of the Israel campaign described above:

perhaps the issue is communication - bridging the gap between strategy and emotion (S3).

More than any other issue, this trend towards focused campaigning characterises AIUK's evolving intra-organisational relationship:

- It is embedded in wider sectoral and societal change; campaigning has to be more focused and sophisticated nowadays in order to succeed.
- It is connected over time - a history of human rights awareness-raising, increasing financial resources, a growing body of staff and new approaches to campaigning.
- It links context with action; as the centre has grown it has increasingly shaped the organisational direction.

Together with the evolving campaigns agenda (see 4.2), this provides evidence of Michels' law (Michels 1959): a concentration of knowledge at the centre and control over communications have resulted in an organisation that is strategically lead by the staff; this alone may not have displaced the original objectives, but it has certainly refocused them.

The whole picture is complex and contradictory. Staff and groups highlighted different aspects of the change, and whilst strategic campaigning and awareness-raising were commonly seen as important, a shared understanding of the balance between these approaches had yet to be reached.

4.4 An improved service for local groups

The 1998 core review had led to improved staff support for local groups and new staff had been recruited to facilitate this. There was evidence that a better understanding of local group needs had developed at the centre, and that staff had become more responsive to those needs.

We've sharpened up the service and support to local groups (S1). The relationship has become more positive - it's like customer care and we're getting better at it (S3). The 1998 review was best thing to happen in a long time (G3).

Two aspects of this change were generally commented upon - that campaign materials and internal communications had both improved in response to local group needs. The campaign materials were better targeted and typically sent out with adequate notice; together with the annual campaign planner and monthly mailings which include simple actions, national campaigns had become more accessible to groups.

The campaign materials were easier to use, they're more bite-sized and manageable (G2), better produced and less turgid (G6), and there was prompt receipt of these and of the Newsletter (G4).

Response to group enquiries had improved and there was an increasing degree of contact between staff and local campaigners. Growth in the use of electronic communication had contributed to this improvement, and had also contributed to wider access to information.

There's more communication - group calls are returned and acted upon (S3). We get prompt replies from staff ... and feel that they're there (G4). The way that we talk to each other has changed with e-mail - it gets things done faster, and there's more contact both between groups and with the office (S6). There was more use of e-mail and websites for networking and informing (G11), and for contacting staff e-mail gets the best response (G3).

A growing sense of mutual respect between the centre and local groups was also noted.

Staff are more aware of groups' needs and talk to people more (G3). Amnesty seem to take being a group and group organisation more seriously (G4); there's more respect for groups ... more trust than before (S3).

4.4.1 Why has local group support improved?

These improvements have facilitated better joint working around Amnesty's campaigning agenda; effectively they are a *quid pro quo* that both rewards and incentivises effective, co-ordinated action. Improved communication has contributed towards a greater mutual understanding, and consequently working relationships between local activists and staff appear to be growing stronger.

Amnesty's 1998 core review brought the changing intra-organisational relationship into sharp relief. It consolidated a focused and strategy-lead way of campaigning that is driven from a national perspective, whilst valuing the fundamental contribution of local groups with improved support and additional resources. The issues that have brought about change are embedded in a wider context and they have gradually evolved over time; however the 1998 review marked a watershed. Although it is still early to judge, this may signal a new national / local relationship that is focused on achieving the most effective and co-ordinated campaigning around common organisational objectives.

4.5 Future change

Respondents were also asked what future changes they could envisage. This evidence was largely conjectural and was not used in drawing conclusions; however it supported the evidence of historical change and so the key themes are summarised below.

Amnesty's 'Mandate' (effectively AI's mission) was under review, and it was commonly believed that this would change to encompass wider social and economic issues. Respondents felt that this could create new opportunities, notably for media and political campaigning, although it could also alienate long-standing activists should it represent too great a break with the past. A more collaborative approach to campaigning was also envisaged, with a hope that together these factors might rejuvenate the organisation and attract new activists.

Information technology could open up new possibilities. Online or virtual groups were seen as development opportunities, whilst fragmentation of the media was seen as a campaigning opportunity. Groups in particular spoke of the potential for IT to facilitate better local campaigning.

AIUK's structures could become less hierarchical, and more responsive to need. Its Devolution and Regional Strategy (AIUK, 2000) was generally seen as a significant development, making the organisation less 'London-centric' and more accessible. Staff commented on the need for more rational structures - for instance centralising local group support functions in one area as

opposed to across departments - whilst three groups commented on the need to further improve governance and decision-making.

One vision of the future was outlined by a staunch advocate of focused campaigning:

I'd make AIUK an oligarchy and a meritocracy. I'd focus on quality not quantity, targeting the key policy arenas and strategic hotspots. I'd invest in impactful groups ... increase their influence in decision-making and work on our mutual expectations (S4).

4.6 Do national organisations still need local groups?

One long-serving activist, when asked if they'd have local groups if they were launching AIUK now, commented:

Probably not - I'd have individual local campaigners supported by e-mail, and they could form groups if they liked. Of course we're going to stick with local groups; AIUK needs that profile, and a way of explaining human rights on the ground (G3).

The changes that this research has identified demonstrate a shift of resources towards the centre, new opportunities to engage the public in activism, a bigger-picture campaigning agenda and a more professional way of campaigning - potentially, all of these changes diminish the need for a local group network. However no respondent conceptualised a future without local groups, and groups were commonly seen as integral to the organisation. Four dimensions of local groups' essential role can be identified: legitimacy, raising awareness, campaigning, and output.

First, local groups **legitimise** AIUK. Being a grassroots organisation that reaches into communities gives Amnesty its campaigning leverage, as well as being an embodiment of its human rights ethos. Local groups:

Prove to the public and decision-makers that there's a popular support base for our work (S2), and link communities with human rights, ensuring that we don't just campaign from above (S6). We practice what we preach, as human rights defenders (G4); we are the lifeblood in effect (G6).

Second, local groups **promote AIUK, and raise awareness** about its messages. The wide range of group activities, from education and fundraising to soft campaigning such as petitioning and letter writing, represents a visible and consistent profile for AIUK. In terms of a credible

public presence, local groups are as yet irreplaceable. Groups are:

a fusion of energy and dynamism behind human rights awareness-raising (S5). A community presence (G3), that spreads the word (G9) and communicates distant and removed messages ... making them relevant locally (S5), developing a culture of human rights (S1).

Third, local groups **campaign**. Groups have exclusive access to the media, politicians and other opinion-formers at the local and regional levels, making AIUK's campaigning effective by combining local and national pressure for change. They are also a conduit for engaging future activists. Local groups:

are essential for our campaigning (S2) and give us clout; for instance this can get us meetings with ministers (S1). They can inspire Amnesty nationally (S6) and personalise human rights violations (G3), giving the public the chance to do something (G4). We couldn't possibly do this in any other way, and we'd be parachuting in if we tried (S2).

Finally, local groups represent a **significant proportion of AIUK's overall output**. In 2000 there were 297 local groups, with on average 10 active members attending meetings and 19 members participating occasionally (AIUK Group Profiles). This represents a substantial percentage, if not the majority, of the organisation's overall output.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify changes in the relationship between national campaigning organisations and their networks of local groups, and to provide explanations for those changes. This chapter summarises how the research achieved these objectives, and then proposes an overarching hypothesis to explain intra-organisational change within post-war social movement organisations.

5.1 Summary: research findings and explanations

Local group decline

The number of local groups has declined, in this case at twice the rate of decline in volunteering nationally (Davis Smith, 1997). Concurrently there has been significant growth in action taken by individuals, in national membership and in staff numbers.

The research could not conclusively explain this decline, but there are three probable causes: greater economic pressures on volunteer time, an ageing membership, and a more individualistic culture in the UK. Concurrent growth in financial support and individual action indicates a shift in the way that social capital is expressed (Hall 1999), and can be interpreted as further evidence of these three factors. However the rate of decline in group numbers has slowed down. This may be the result of the centre becoming more responsive to group needs, or a mirroring of the national trend in volunteering; either way, a flattening out to a position of stability is most likely.

These issues merit further research. However one trend is clear over time: the balance of resources, as in people, time and money, have shifted from the grassroots towards the centre, and consequently there has been a shift in the balance of organisational power.

Evolution of the campaigning agenda

The campaigning agenda has evolved. In this case the emphasis has shifted from fighting for individual prisoners of conscience to campaigning on the thematic causes of human rights abuse, and increasingly within the wider social and economic context.

There are three reasons for this change: fewer prisoners of conscience to campaign for, a more sophisticated understanding of the causes of human rights violations, and increasing pressure to respond to the media and public opinion. These factors largely result from the external environment; however the internal context has changed too, as the growth in staffing at the centre has enabled the organisation to develop this campaigning agenda. The business of campaigning has become more complex and more diverse over time, and whilst local groups recognise the need for this new agenda, it has diluted their original, individually-oriented core campaign activity, allowing less space for local ownership or control.

Change in the nature of campaigning

The nature of campaigning has changed. In this case the emphasis has shifted from awareness-raising towards a strategic approach that delivers on organisational objectives, focusing on areas where the greatest leverage can be exerted and notably in the media and political arenas.

The concept of professional campaigning did not exist when post-war social movement organisations were founded, yet nowadays it is an acknowledged career, across and beyond the voluntary sector. More concerted efforts are needed to convey campaign messages and achieve real-world change, and organisations have grown and become more professional in

order to achieve this. Modern-day campaigning requires specialised knowledge and careful management of communications; it is driven and co-ordinated centrally, and local groups are increasingly seen as a delivery mechanism. In this case, two changes have enabled local groups to adapt: a reduction in fundraising targets that focuses them on campaigning, and targeted materials and planning tools that make those campaigns more accessible.

However strategic campaigning cannot succeed without demonstrable public support, and so the continued involvement of local groups and of public awareness-raising activities remains critically important. Whilst local groups largely recognise the need for a targeted approach, the emergence of centrally-driven, strategic campaigning represents a shift in the intra-organisational relationship, and presents a fresh challenge of balancing old and new ways of working to achieve organisational objectives.

Improvement in support for local groups

Local group support has improved. In this case the range of local group materials and internal communications have both become more effective, facilitated by additional resources and a more responsive attitude at the centre.

This change consolidates upon the three trends described above, constituting a new national / local relationship; the organisation has effectively evolved, from its origins in grassroot concern to a modern campaigning entity. The new relationship, whilst driven from the centre by a strategic agenda, is built on greater mutual understanding of the respective contributions of each partner - their success is predicated on both national and local campaigning, and best achieved if synergy between the two is achieved.

Local groups remain fundamental

Local groups are still a fundamental part of the organisation. As a formidable and demonstrable public support base they legitimise its campaign messages. By reaching into communities they build greater awareness of those messages, and of the organisation itself. As campaigners they take the messages to influential places that are otherwise inaccessible, and in so doing create the leverage for effective national campaigning. As a collective, they both embody the organisation's values and represent a significant amount, if not the majority, of its overall output.

The nature of national / local relationships has changed through the lifetime of social movement organisations; however the need for both a local and national presence in order to achieve campaign outcomes remains as important as in the beginning. Whilst new opportunities to mobilise public support are emerging, these can only supplement local voluntary activism, and

there is no evidence that they can as yet replace the unique contribution of a local groups network.

5.2 Can one theory explain this overall change?

The changes that this study has identified are the result of a diverse and complex set of factors. In seeking an overarching explanation of change for intra-organisational relationships within post-war campaigning organisations, more generic sense of this evidence can be made by aggregating it in reference to change theory (Collins, 2000; Pettigrew, 1987).

Change embedded in wider network of social and environmental relationships

The change is embedded within a wider network of social and environmental relationships. The organisation's core business has changed, reflecting both a decline in the number of prisoners of conscience and a more sophisticated understanding of the linkages between human rights and wider socio-economic issues. The concept of campaigning as a profession has emerged, bringing with it a more focused and strategic way of doing business. Society has changed - time is more precious, technology has advanced, there are new and diverse opportunities for activism and at least a perception of a more individualistic culture, and the media increasingly drives both public opinion and campaigning agendas.

Change links context and action

The change links context and action. The growth in the body of staff and the emergence of a strategic campaigning agenda are clearly linked. This provides evidence of Michels' law (Michels, 1959): knowledge and communications have concentrated at the centre, the staff further professional objectives, and the original campaign focus of the organisation has been largely displaced; on the other hand the gap between top and bottom, having expanded, is now showing signs of contraction. However the extent to which this internal change has been driven by the actors, as opposed to by external factors, is hard to judge from the evidence, and the intricate interplay between context and action would form an interesting topic for further research.

Change is connected over a long period

The change is connected over a long period of time. Although the factors that comprise Amnesty's history of change cannot be conclusively interlinked, they can be charted as follows:

- public concern lead to the creation of the organisation - effectively an emotional reaction to a perceived wrong, coupled with a desire to do something about it;
- awareness of human rights issues grew;
- the organisation's profile attracted increasing levels of funding;
- funding enabled a body of staff to be hired;
- knowledge and the means of communication began to concentrate at the centre;
- a new and more professional way of working evolved;
- the core campaigning business developed, reflecting internal and external change;
- during the 1990s the growth in funds and staffing increased significantly, shifting the balance of resources and power towards the centre;
- new opportunities for mobilising public support arose;
- the number of local groups declined;
- the 1998 core review formalised a focused and objective-lead way of working, and the fundamental value of local groups to the organisation was reaffirmed;
- a more responsive service to local groups was introduced;
- a new and mutual intra-organisational understanding is emerging;
- the organisation is increasingly focused on the strategic delivery of its campaigns.

5.2.1 Hypothesis

The challenge, in seeking one theory to account for the diverse evidence of change that this paper has presented, was to find a simple explanation that cuts through the complexities to illuminate an underlying truth. Two breakthroughs made this possible.

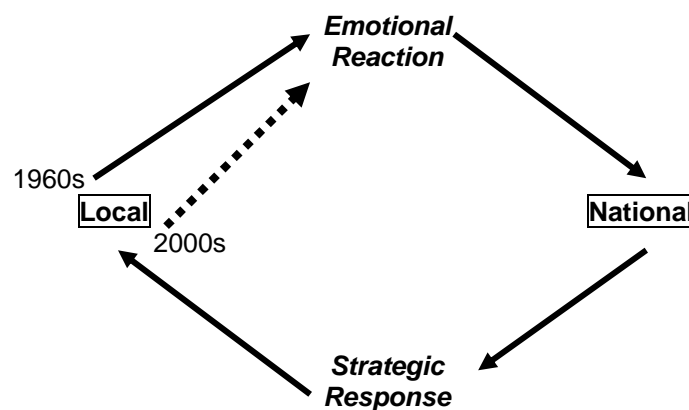
The first breakthrough came in stepping back from the data and reconsidering the original purpose of this study: to undertake a voyage of discovery. Journeys are defined by their beginning and their end, whilst incidents along the way give them a unique quality. Therefore an examination of the start and end points of this process of change would be the most illuminating; the incremental steps along the way effectively describe rather than explain the overall change that has taken place.

The second breakthrough came during immersion in the data, sparked by one particular comment: *"bridging the gap between strategy and emotion"* (see 4.3.1). This comment hit upon a fundamental explanation which can characterise the motivational dynamic of a national / local relationship: that local groups are driven by their emotional engagement with the campaign issues, and that the centre is driven by a more rational, strategic approach to winning those campaigns.

In purely organisational terms, the principal change that has taken place over time is a shift of resources and power from the grassroots towards the centre. This factual evidence, combined with the two breakthrough factors, leads to a simple yet overarching hypothesis that can explain intra-organisational change:

- that post-war campaigning organisations were created from an emotional, grassroots reaction to a perceived wrong;
- that they are now driven by a strategic, central response which is focused on righting that perceived wrong; and
- that this fusion of local, emotional engagement and central, rational delivery remains critical in achieving overall organisational success.

The hypothesis can also be expressed in a model:



Thus the starting point for post-war national campaigning organisations was public concern over a contemporary set of issues, catalysed by the spirit of the times. These organisations were largely dependent on voluntary support, and were driven by the passion and enthusiasm of their memberships. Through local groups, they provided a practical outlet for this emotional reaction that engaged the new public consciousness.

Today, the issues that national campaigning organisations work on are no longer new, and those issues have become more complex. The organisations themselves are established, as is the field of professional campaigning. Public consciousness has also changed, and whilst there is still an emotional reaction to the campaign issues, individuals are less inclined to make a significant commitment to act upon it.

Over time, as the external environment has changed and resources at the centre have grown, the organisational context has evolved. The emotionally-driven, grassroots culture that created

post-war campaigning organisations has gradually been superseded by a nationally-driven, strategic culture that is focused on achieving organisational objectives. However these objectives typically call for societal change and they cannot be achieved without demonstrable public support, without citizens who both engage with the issues and take action in their communities. Therefore the mutual dependency within these organisations, that enables them to co-ordinate campaigning at both local and national levels, remains just as important as it was in their early days.

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