

## Why protest?

Protesting is perhaps the single most effective tool in the activist's handbook. It gathers people together, creates solidarity, and sends a powerful message of strength to both the opponents and the participants. Protesting is not just about persuading those in power to change their policies; it is a "call-out" to like-minded citizens everywhere, to not just sit at home complaining about the problem but to come together with others and try to fix it.

## How to pull it off

Protests rarely spring out of nowhere. For them to succeed they have several preconditions:

- An existing "community" of people who are potential supporters –people rarely seek out protests made up entirely of strangers. People get involved in political activism through people they know, or through other, related groups and activities they have taken part in.
- An understanding of the issue by many people –so the simpler the issue (or the simpler you make it) the easier it is to mobilize around. It should be as black and white as possible; and your job is to emphasise the right-versus-wrong aspect rather than dwell on nuance or complexity. People are *moved* to protest through stories of injustice and idealism; you must win over their hearts as much as their minds.
- A clear focus on who the villains are!

Organisers' checklist:

- What you'll need: Megaphones, posters, flyers, placards, banners, a meeting point, a rally point. Placards and banners should ideally be made publicly so everyone can join in –for example make them in the college canteen during lunchtime!
- Optional: Guest speakers, sound equipment, whistles, drums, costumes, facepaint, stewards (ie people wearing high-vis jackets to guide the march... depends on the numbers expected).
- Get the word out as far in advance as possible –a few weeks preferably, or possibly more.
- Use all methods at your disposal –facebook, posters, emails etc.
- If you can, go around and talk to people – people can ignore posters but the personal approach is better if you have the time.
- Make sure you inform the Gardai of your route – they may want to meet you beforehand.
- Sort out the logistics first –the guest speakers (if any), the route, the posters, the sound equipment etc. Make sure this is out of the way early.
- Think realistically how long the whole process will take. For example, will people travelling from other counties be late arriving? How long does it take you to walk from A to B?
- If you are gathering in a college, choose a busy area as the meeting point: A crowd often attracts a crowd, and its better to fill up a small space than feel lost in a huge empty carpark.
- To keep the momentum of the campaign afterwards, perhaps invite people for tea and sandwiches in a nearby pub after the march. Then take their emails. Perhaps have a discussion on where they think the campaign should go next.
- Also for keeping the momentum, perhaps hand out petition forms or flyers to participants, to distribute to their friends. Perhaps have a next action arranged.