

Case Study in Direct Action in a Northern Community

"The Boston Action Group vs. Wonder Bread"

Purpose:

1. to demonstrate how a community organized for direct action to obtain jobs for Negroes.
2. to increase depth of insight into community structure

Motivation: From experience of students -

1. Do Negroes have difficulty finding well-paying jobs? Why?
2. Are there companies that don't hire Negroes? Do you know of any?
3. Is it a problem not to have money? a job? etc.?

NB: Try to get students to give reasons for these situations.

Approach: Introduce the case study after brief (3-5 min.) discussion of above, i.e. - "Well, this is one way that more jobs are being opened up for Negroes in Boston, etc."

Factual Background

1. Boston Action Group (B.A.G.) started a year ago (Fall 1962) by a group of college students (mostly white) who felt many companies discriminated against Negroes and wouldn't hire them unless pressured. They believed that the best way to put pressure on a business was with money (i.e., a company is in business to make money, it hurts the business if profit is cut).

2. B.A.G. knew that a group of ministers in Philadelphia had opened a lot of jobs for Negroes by telling their congregations not to buy from companies that discriminate. That was called "selective buying" or "selective patronage" (explain - selecting the companies you buy from).

3. Every Saturday for 4 months the members of B.A.G. knocked on doors in the community and talked to people about the idea of selective patronage. They told how it worked in Philadelphia and other cities and they used statistics (i.e., the average Negro only makes 52% - just about half - of the salary of the average white; 1 out of every 3 Negroes makes less than \$2000 a year; etc.). This was called the information stage. People they talked to were asked to be block captains, - i.e., distribute information, etc., to their neighbors.

4. At the same time that the I. & E. stage (information & education) was going on, B.A.G. met with the personnel manager (the man who hires people) of a bread company and found out that the company only employed Negroes in 8 jobs of the 250 that they had. All of the Negroes worked in the baking plant. None of them drove trucks, sold bread, worked in the

office, or demonstrated the bread in the supermarkets. The company said they didn't discriminate though.

Question: Did the company discriminate? (after all they did have some Negroes working there)

5. After thinking it over, B.A.G. decided that the company did discriminate (they hired Negroes, but only for some jobs, not for others).

6. B.A.G. met with the company again (1 month after the first meeting) and requested that the company hire 12 Negroes (5 driver-salesmen, 1 long distance truck driver, 4 clerks, and 2 production workers in the baking plant) within a 30 day period. The company protested that they could not do this because they had no jobs open.

7. At the end of 30 days the B.A.G. met with them again - the company had not hired Negroes for any of the requested jobs (they had hired a Negro athlete to do sales promotion).

Question: What is sales promotion? Is this a usual job for Negro athletes? Why? Could an average guy without a reputation do this job? Whom are we most interested in getting jobs for - the famous athlete or the average guy? Why?

8. The following Sunday many of the ministers in Roxbury, the South End, and Dorchester cooperated with B.A.G. and told their congregations that they should stop buying the company's bread.

9. B.A.G. distributed leaflets telling people not to buy Jim Crow bread (what is Jim Crow?), and sent a letter to all of the people who had volunteered to be block captains and asked them to tell their neighbors.

10. B.A.G. had a picket line one Saturday that walked all through the community and told people not to buy the company's bread. Ministers, college students, social workers, housewives, and other people from the community marched that day with B.A.G.

11. B.A.G. asked store owners to cancel their orders with the company and picketed stores that refused.

12. B.A.G. sent press releases to the newspapers every week about the "selective patronage" campaign against the bread company.

13. More and more people learned about the campaign and stopped buying the company's bread.

Question: Do you think that hurt the company? Do you think they changed? How? Why?

14. Within 29 days after the campaign began, the company had hired 8 Negroes and promised to employ more. Negroes had never been employed for any of these jobs before. The com-

pany agreed to meet with B.A.G. in 6 months to discuss their progress, and B.A.G. called off the "selective patronage" campaign.

Summary and Conclusion: "That was the way a few college students, young people like you, and a few of their elders here in Boston forced the largest bakery in the world to hire Negroes in jobs they'd never been hired for before. They organized the community and helped people to see that they could use their dollar (called "buying power") to get jobs for Negroes. They called it using "the big club made out of money" - everytime your mothers didn't buy that company's bread, or you didn't buy it when you went to the store, you used the "big club made out of money" - you helped to get jobs for Negroes.

Questions

1. What about people who liked to eat that brand of bread - should they have stopped buying it? Why?
2. How do you think a Negro housewife felt everytime she didn't buy that kind of bread? What do you think she thought then? Why?
3. Can this be used against other kinds of companies? What other kinds? (Answer: soft drinks, milk, cereal, etc.) What kinds of company can't be forced in this way? (Answer: airlines; reason: not that many Negroes fly.) How can these kinds of companies be pressured?