

When change in government policy becomes desirable or necessary, many people respond with one of two attitudes: They claim that nothing can be done, or they look for a quick fix. Both alternatives are mistaken. There are always things that can be done, but change doesn't happen overnight. Trying to promote change before people are ready rarely succeeds. So what is the process by which long-term, stable change actually occurs?

CHANGE

How is it brought about?

1 What about lobbying?

Associations, member organizations, and interest groups have traditionally sought to bring about political change through **lobbying**, a word originally used to refer to favour-seekers who waited in the lobbies of various legislative assemblies, hoping to be the last to speak with the legislator before he went in to vote.

Lobbyists attempt to change laws or policies by persuading **politicians**, not the **general public**—often overlooking the fact that before change can occur in democratic societies, there has to be a significant measure of public support. A lobbyist might be able to convince a politician of something, but that doesn't mean the people who vote that politician in or out of office will be convinced.

When the public is poorly informed about an issue, or when their beliefs are based on incomplete understanding, convincing politicians about the rightness of a position rarely changes the policy. For that to happen, a better understanding has to be achieved—like **adding weight to one side of a seesaw**.

2 What about protesting?

When there is **little widespread public support** for change, some suggest it can be driven by demonstrations, protests, rallies, and media stunts.

These things can draw attention to an issue, yet rarely influence what people in general actually believe. Demonstrations can even polarize issues—hardening opposition and making change more difficult to achieve.

Demonstrations tend to be short-term attention-getting events rather than initiatives that drive stable, long-term change.

On the other hand, when there **is widespread public support** for change, it will be difficult for even the most determined politician to resist.

But in a democracy, the majority isn't always clear about what it wants. Sometimes there is broad public support for a bad idea or a policy that is generally misunderstood. Politicians will often go along with these ideas, implementing laws they believe the public wants. This is how poor public policy gets established.

3 Tipping the seesaw

Clearly, lobbying efforts and protests can bring about desirable and effective change only if there is **already widespread public support** on an issue from a **well-informed public**.

Without widespread public support, the efforts of lobbyists and protestors are generally unproductive. What is needed at such a time is to add more weight to the other side of the seesaw—**to help foster a better public understanding**.

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Legislative policy may be passed by elected assemblies, but the shaping of cultural values and ideas occurs *outside* the legislature on an ongoing basis. In free societies, this is the responsibility of independent organizations. This is why well-run independent organizations can become an informal, yet integral, part of the governing process.

INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Part of the governing process

4 What is power?

Power is the ability to impose, extend, or enforce one's will—usually upon the actions and behaviour of others. It originates from three primary sources (personality, property, and organization), and is applied by one or more of three different levers: **the capacity to punish**, **the capacity to reward**, and **the capacity to change beliefs**.

The first two levers (punishment and reward) can be used to **motivate** people to do another's will. For example, if you don't obey the government's rules, at some point, a police officer will show up at your door and haul you away to be punished. Similarly, employees are motivated to do the will of their employers by the promise of pay (reward).

5 The third lever: Shaping beliefs

The third lever of power is **the capacity to define, change, or shape other people's beliefs**. Of the three levers, this one is likely the most significant because it shapes not only what **motivates** people, but **who they are**.

Since the earliest days of the twentieth century, Canada's political left has understood that the battleground on which to advance their agenda was not primarily the legislature or Parliament.

Instead, for over a century, they have advanced their agenda within the broader culture, establishing publications, media, and independent organizations that continue to define, change, and influence the beliefs and opinions of Canadians today.

The secret of real, significant, lasting change:

Cultivating the grassroots

At Grassroots Alberta, we recognize that having the right political policies established in our province is not simply a matter of electing the right political party. Desirable and effective change will only come from a **well-informed public** whose **understanding and support** of key issues becomes so **embedded in the culture** that legislators are unable to ignore it.

In other words, for any of us to see real, significant, lasting change at the **political** level in Alberta, change and understanding must be nurtured at the **grassroots** level.

Change Ahead

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