# STREET VIDEO

GRAHAM WADE


## AN ACCOUNT OF FIVE VIDEO GROUPS

# STREET VIDEO

*Street Video* is about community video activity in the UK using relatively low-cost, portable video technology. It aims to give a picture of why and how small bands of people all over the country — mostly on very low incomes — have decided to use this medium to fight for a wide range of radical causes. Its main focus is the people who use video and the subjects they choose to make video tapes about — it is not a technical handbook.

As power — and particularly the power of communication — becomes vested in fewer and fewer hands, so the ability of people to speak to each other about issues which concern them grows smaller. If you cannot communicate effectively then you become powerless to influence events — to organise and protest.

Community video, along with other community media such as newspapers and photography, is an attempt to reverse that trend. All of those media stand for genuine communication between people. Unless care and thought is given to their development most people may end up without any voice at all.

The author is a freelance journalist based in London. He is co-author with Heinz Nigg of a study called *Community Media* — described by Peter Fiddick in the *Guardian* as "an eminently undogmatic, thoughtful comment and very helpful account of how six British community media groups have approached their work."

£1.80 ISBN 0 907340 00 8 Blackthorn Press

# STREET VIDEO

## Graham Wade

**"This society is tending towards the reduction of everyone to isolated consumers, between whom communication has been made completely impossible. So everyday life is private life: the realm of separation and the spectacle."**

**From *Daily Life*, a situationist pamphlet published by the Society for the Liberation of Daily Life.**

STREET VIDEO ISBN 0 907340 00 8
First published in 1980 by Blackthorn Press,
74 Highcross Street, Leicester, UK
Telephone 0533-21896



Photoset by Range Left, London 01-739 0296
Printed by Blackrose Press (TU), 30 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 01-251 3043.

Cover illustration by Bernard Wade
Photographs by Nick Smart and Graham Wade

Trade distribution by
Southern Distribution, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1
01-251 4976
Scottish & Northern Distribution, 4th floor, 18 Granby Row,
Manchester M13 061-228 3903
Scottish & Northern Distribution, 45/7 Niddry Street, Edinburgh
031-557 0133

Mail order (single copies) by
Blackthorn Books, 74 Highcross Street, Leicester 0533-21896

# CONTENTS

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

Video is about communication. It is a way of recording synchronised pictures and sound on magnetic video tape. Television stations use it to record their programmes on before transmission. Community video groups up and down the country use it to record their material on. The medium is the same, but the scale of the two sets of operations is very different. So is the nature of their messages.

Television is often about entertaining people. It is highly centralised and offers few opportunities for interaction between the public and the programme makers. Essentially it supplies a passive experience to viewers — they just sit and watch it.

On the other hand, community video is about involving ordinary people in the process of making video tapes. It is highly decentralised and offers many opportunities for participation. It is not controlled by some inaccessible élite, which is why it is significant.

As power — and particularly the power of communication — becomes vested in fewer and fewer hands, so the ability of people to speak to each other about issues which concern them grows smaller. If you cannot communicate effectively then you become powerless to influence events — to organise and protest.

Community video, along with other community media such as community newspapers and community photography, is an attempt to reverse that trend. All of those media stand for genuine communication between people. Unless care and thought is given to their development most people may end up without any voice at all.

*Street Video* is about community video activity in the UK using relatively low-cost, portable video technology. It aims to give a picture of why and how small bands of people all over the country — mostly on very low incomes — have decided to use this particular medium to fight for a wide range of radical causes. Its main focus is the



people who use video and the subjects they choose to make video tapes about — it is not a technical handbook.

Radical uses of video have surfaced under a variety of labels. The most used is probably *community video*, which underlines a concern for local neighbourhoods which are usually working class. The issues of housing, unemployment, education and environment form the bedrock of this type of work. The community video worker often appears to be similar to straight community workers — and there are certain similarities as well as differences.

## Xerox television

But community video — or street video, political video, xerox television, punk video, local arts video or guerrilla video — has many faces. It can be used to promote international causes, like the Chile Solidarity Campaign, tape punk bands, record street theatre performances or fight against the closure of a hospital. The common theme is its progressiveness.

All of these uses — which are explored in detail later — are concerned with building up people's awareness of what is going on around them — constructing a picture of the real world, often with a view to changing it. It is about getting people to help themselves and decide their own futures rather than having their lives controlled for them by external forces.

But video is only a technology, a medium for communication. It may be effective at communicating progressive ideas, but it is also effective for communicating negative ones or is capable of being put to negative uses. Video surrounds us. Television is the most obvious example — and broadcast television is hardly devoted to raising the nation's critical awareness.

Video also watches us as we travel through the city streets and along inter-city motorways. Its cameras, perched on high buildings and poles, have been put there to "control traffic". Most stores and supermarkets, airports and railway stations, museums and art galleries, football grounds and banks have electronic eyes peering round them. You're never alone in the video age.

Video — the ability to record images and sound electronically onto a piece of tape — is merely a conduit through which all manner of messages, information and thoughts can be stuffed. Like print or film or theatre it is a carrier. As literacy can be used as a weapon of

progressive social change, so can video. On the cover of Paulo Freire's book, *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (which deals with literacy teaching in the third world), appear some quotations.

One says: "I want to read and write so I can stop being the shadow of other people." The second runs: "No longer part of the mass, but one of the people." These sentiments apply to other means of sending and receiving information, including video. As the following chapters indicate, radical video practice can create a sense of self-identity and self-control which is so easily crushed in modern society.

## Beginnings

Although video tape recording became viable in the 1950s, it wasn't until the later 1960s that technology was developed to provide low-cost, portable video tape recorders and cameras which used low-gauge (that is half-inch) video tape. The technical advances which made this development possible came as an off-shoot of US military research connected to their Vietnam war effort.

The radical potential of the new *portapack* — a portable pack of video tape recorder, which could be slung over the shoulder, and camera with built-in microphone, which could be held in one hand — was quickly realised by early users. Nam June Paik, a Japanese-American, who became a leading exponent of video art, said in the mid-1960s: "Television has been attacking us all of our lives, now we can attack it back."

Another American, Michael Shamberg, wrote a video handbook called *Guerrilla Television*. In the UK, a group named TVX, announced its existence in the alternative newspaper *IT*, issue number 55, April 25, 1969. The front page carried the slogan: "We are the people our parents warned us against." TVX wanted to assemble all kinds of video tapes for the Camden Arts Festival Fringe. The brief article said: "We'll also be bopping about with portable video grooving on whatever happens (media-hungry revolutionaries please note). It's really a fun trip."

In *IT* 58, June 1969, appeared a longer article on video by Bradley Martin. Part of it ran: "So I got down to thinking. Here it is at last: you can make your own TV and it's so easy to operate anyone can do it. All that crap about directors, producers, camera crews — forget it. If there's a groovy movie on TV you can tape it. Copyright ends



here, as Castro pointed out some years ago, though with books rather than TV."

The initial euphoria over video's possiblities was not always borne out in practice. For a start, in 1970, portapacks cost about £1,000 each. In order to make viewable video tapes made up of several sequences you needed an editing video tape recorder. For some scenes you might need lights and several microphones. It was not all quite as simple as one person wandering the streets with a portapack switched on.

The idea that a few urban guerrillas armed with portapacks could outwit the corporate TV networks was a romantic image which appealed to many who identified with the alternative society — but in reality it was a non-starter.

However, several video groups established themselves, mostly dependent on Arts Council grants, and began experimenting with what was to become more widely known as community video. One of the first products of this movement ever to gain a broadcast television screening was seen on the BBC news magazine programme *Nationwide* in 1973. It was used as news material to show evictions taking place in the major squatting community of that period centred on Prince of Wales Crescent, north London.

Video also found a niche in several multi-media based community arts organisations — such as Action Space and Inter-Action. But it was those groups which devoted themselves more completely to video which made most progress in its use, although they were consistently hampered by severe shortages of funds. Several bodies were attracted to video by some of the more outlandish claims made for it and used it badly. They didn't bother to employ people with video experience or even seek their advice with inevitably disappointing results.

Unfortunately a number of instances where video was used badly were then cited by a few poorly informed critics who said all video work was equally ineffective. This caused something of a crisis of confidence in video, particularly on the part of funders, which in turn pushed the financial position of many groups into an even worse state.

## Cable TV

Another element which led to this lack of confidence was the experience of local cable television stations which were set up from

1972 in Greenwich, Bristol, Sheffield, Swindon and Wellingborough. These stations experimented to a varying degree in the provision of local community television, but their basic motives were far from philanthropic.

The stations were owned by commercial giants like British Relay and Rediffusion (and some smaller companies) with interests in cable networks — originally set up to give viewers piped broadcast TV signals where ordinary roof aerial reception was very poor. These networks wanted to be allowed by the government to run profitable services like pay-TV. The local television services were launched as a way in to profit-earning activities as a kind of loss-leader.

Because of political changes (Labour won the 1974 general election) the cable companies were never given permission for pay-TV and as soon as they realised they were not going to get it they began pulling out of the local TV projects. Again the image of community video activity suffered, although some of the stations had shown signs of success.

Another local cable TV station — Channel 40 in Milton Keynes — was set up in 1976, financed by local authority and Post Office money. Its mode of operation was not dissimilar from some of the earlier experiments and it claimed to run a community service, but its video side was closed down in 1979 (a cable radio element continues). Its failure was caused largely by internal disagreements between the TV workers and the management. The workers wanted a more radical approach to community television, and the management refused to take their suggestions into account. (See *Channel 40 — Towards A Co-operative Structure?* by the Channel 40 staff, June 1978, and *Strike Challenges Community TV Concept* in *Broadcast*, 7 August, 1978.)

## Organisation

In 1974 a small pressure group called the Association of London Independent Video Groups was formed. Soon afterwards it changed its name to the Association of Video Workers. AVW, mainly through its national magazine *Video Work*, acted as an agency for information exchange as well as a voice pressing for more financial support for video activities. In 1977, AVW issued a leaflet headed *Video: Death Before Birth?* It said: "Suddenly the commercial video field has blossomed into a multi-million pound industry, yet since the beginning of the year public funding for independent video has virtually ceased."



Although AVW had a measure of success it was dominated by a few London groups and never achieved anything like national representation. It ceased to function in 1977, when a new body, the London Community Video Workers Collective started up. The collective, which is still going strong, only admits groups which are involved in grassroots community video activities. It holds meetings where video workers can discuss their projects and it produced, in 1979, a *Directory of Video Tapes* — the only semi-comprehensive publication on UK video yet to appear. Of the five video groups looked at in this study, three found their way into the directory's pages.

Another organisation to appear in 1977 was the Community Communications Group, usually known as Com Com, which was an attempt to create an umbrella under which several community media interests, including those of video, could come together. Although several regional video groups participated in early meetings — the London Community Video Workers Collective mostly stayed out — it quickly became clear that Com Com was not an effective force. As far as video groups were concerned, interest rapidly evaporated.

So at the present time video workers remain largely isolated from each other with no co-ordinating body to give them any kind of coherent national voice. The damage done to radical video activities in the mid-1970s by such scurrilous attacks as Caroline Heller's *The Resistible Rise of Video* (originally commissioned by Roy Shaw as Arts Council research) is still mostly unrepaired.

## Focus

It was largely because of this unsatisfactory state of affairs that I set about this present study. Having observed the trials and tribulations of radical video activity as a journalist since the early 1970s (and also as a liberal studies teacher specialising in video, film and photography), I felt it was very wrong that such activity should be so easily and cheaply dismissed.

It also appeared grossly unfair that video workshops outside the south-east of England whose work had received little publicity and no screenings (or extremely few) beyond their regional boundaries should be tarred with the same brush as a few inadequate, short-lived

video projects in London. My first objective was therefore to give some platform for that regional work — which is why the chosen groups are based in Sheffield, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester and Belfast.

Each of those groups — with the exception of Glasgow, which is an exception in more ways than one — has been established for several years, and each is heavily committed to working with video, although all of them see the relevance and need to employ other media.

Glasgow is the only example of video use to fall outside the category of independent media workshops — which all the other four examples belong within. That chapter looks at the attempts of a community worker within Glasgow Social Work Department to use portable video as part of his job. It enables some comparison to be made between community video and community work, and especially those grey areas where the two overlap.

Each chapter aims to give a pretty accurate impression of how a group works, its history, its workers, its premises, its equipment, its finances and so on. In order to build up a fuller overall picture, one or two of these aspects is given greater emphasis in different chapters. For instance, the history of the Cardiff workshop is dealt with at some length, and funding receives more attention in the Manchester chapter.

But one aspect commands special attention in all of the chapters: the video tapes produced by the workshops. After all it is what a workshop produces that will indicate better than anything else the worth of its activity. Each chapter takes two or three video tapes and explains them at length.

## Support

The study has been financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation which granted me £3,200 "to write a book about video in the UK directed at the general reader." That sum enabled me to spend between three days and a week with each of the five groups, carry out other background research and write up the result. The bulk of the material was gathered in 1979. The Foundation gave me an absolutely free hand in the way I approached the subject. However, things changed once the manuscript had been delivered to them.

At first officials of the Foundation were most enthusiastic about it. Immediately they began preparations for its publication, including making requests to me for certain "more delicate" passages to be changed. Some of these changes I agreed to, mainly to speed up the whole process. Publicity was discussed along with various other details such as print-run, numbers of photographs and so on. Then quite suddenly everything changed. The manuscript — as a surprise final check — was submitted to a firm of leading London solicitors. Their response to *Street Video* was not enthusiastic.

In a long letter to the Foundation the solicitor made several points including this one on the Belfast chapter: "Neither such video material nor its implicit endorsement in such a book as this are creditable unless supported by an independent investigation of the ex-detainee's complaints." This comment referred to a video tape which featured an interview with a man recently released from an interrogation centre in Northern Ireland. In the penultimate paragraph of the letter the lawyer observed: "...the nature of (the author's) political motivation may have so coloured his support for radical video as to distort its true advantages and prospects which deserve, I am sure, more objective promotion."

After asking for my comments on the solicitor's letter, which I found somewhat politically biased, the Gulbenkian Foundation quickly, but politely, told me that "it would be inappropriate for the Foundation to publish the work." Their letter added: "The approach you have selected is entirely valid in its own way but it imposes upon us the obligation to take into account the likely views of our Board in Lisbon." Clearly they thought Lisbon would not approve. Fortunately, I have been able to find a more sympathetic publisher.

The last thing I wanted to do was produce an academically respectable study with countless statistical tables and lengthy questionnaires about the use and effectiveness of video. That would be a short-cut to boring the reader and missing exactly those points I wished to convey. In making a very similar comment in his book *Starting School* (about education and culture), Brian Jackson said: "Yet the very elements which would help us feel and understand, relate and explain may not be collectable or extractable (by surveys) at all."

In order to "feel and understand, relate and explain" about community video you need to see it at work. And that is precisely what I did — I went to see it on the ground in its everyday working clothes. Necessarily what I have written has been seen through my

eyes and no-one else's. Nevertheless I have tried to be as honest and accurate as possible.

I would like to thank each of the five groups for allowing me to watch them at work and especially for being so frank and open about what they were doing. All of them allowed me access to their files and their video tapes without any restriction. In the final analysis, though, the reader must judge for her or himself whether the accounts ring true, or not.

## Chapter 2

# Sheffield Video Workshop

Essentially the video workshop in Sheffield is the creation of one person, Nick Smart. Since its establishment in the summer of 1977 he has devoted most of his time to the project, which he views largely as one of research and experiment into alternative forms of communication based on video. He openly describes his approach to video as "anarchy" and is highly critical of the way society is presently organised.

After a spell in the Royal Navy and university, he found a job in broadcast television as a freelance and later with Granada where he worked as a researcher on various current affairs programmes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He describes that period as being "a wet nurse to the presenter Bill Grundy" and one through which he became increasingly disillusioned with broadcast television.

He spent some time working on a citizen's advice programme called *This Is Your Right* and on *On The Spot*, which he recalls tried to deal with real issues on the ground. The viewer ratings went up, "then Granada chopped it." His disenchantment with the monolithic structure of Granada and its apparent contempt for its audience led him to a new job as news editor with one of the five local cable TV station experiments authorised in the early 1970s, Sheffield Cablevision.

Cablevision was owned by one of the British cable giants British Relay — now owned by Visionhire — who were, and still are, very interested in making cable networks more profitable. They saw the local television service as a convenient way into pay-television — big events like sporting championships and current feature films on the cable networks only — which they thought would make a lot of money.

When the Labour government returned in 1974 and it became

clear they were not going to give the go-ahead to pay-TV, most of the experiments closed down, including Sheffield Cablevision. Although the station had many shortcomings – "It was first run by an ex-refrigerator salesman, and then was taken over by an actor who reckoned he was a TV director," recalls Smart — it also showed signs of being different.

Some of the material produced there was made with the genuine participation of local people and it pointed the way to a kind of television activity quite different from the normal pattern of messages created centrally by a professional élite for a mass audience which had no way of influencing what they received. The period of Sheffield Cablevision, which began in late 1973 and closed at the start of 1976, convinced Nick Smart that video used in a local context could achieve healthy results.

## The beginning

The closure of Sheffield Cablevision prompted the formation of Sheffield Community Television Committee, a loose-knit grouping of organisations and individuals who wanted to see the idea of community television kept alive in the area. The concept of setting up a video workshop came out of debate within this group and Nick Smart began working on the practicalities.

By borrowing some video equipment, including a damaged portapack from the local arts association and giving over the attic room of his council house as premises, the video workshop became a reality. But there were problems. The arts association soon asked for the loaned gear to be returned. Nick Smart recalls: "They saw what we were using it for and basically they didn't approve. What we weren't doing was making independent films in the well-worn arty sense as an independent film maker in Yorkshire. The film officer didn't have a clear idea at all about video and probably wasn't interested.

"He came to visit the workshop and having looked at all the tapes on the shelves wanted to know who was the audience. He didn't understand that we were only at the start of research. We were about media being introduced into communities and exploring the many ways it can be used. To ask about audience right at the beginning of such a project was naïve and showed a distinct lack of understanding." After some argument the workshop retained and still retains the equipment.



The basic aims set down for the workshop are fourfold: to provide portable video equipment to people living or working in Sheffield who are interested in using it to explore their lives, including their work; to provide basic training in video so that people can use it on their own terms; to explore the possibiilty of re-opening the local British Relay cable network for the transmission of local video tapes; and to become financially self-sufficient.

## Self-sufficiency

This element of earning its own keep has been one of the workshop's most interesting aspects. Although much of the equipment has been obtained on loan, the video workshop has only had to rely on grants of a few hundred pounds. In 1978 its earned income from a variety of sources was about £3,800. This is not a grand sum and certainly does not allow the workshop to re-equip or undertake large projects, but it does keep its one full-time worker and allow for the purchase of tapes and ancilliary equipment like microphones.

The workshop has found that too much time can be spent on preparing applications for grants to various bodies which in the end don't materialise. Many groups in the community arts field have become adept at churning out the kind of acceptable applications which are likely to be positively received by arts associations. Unfortunately, convincing applications are no guarantee of worthwhile work — and a £10,000 grant for one or two years is unlikely to be continued for ever more. Because video tends to be the responsibility of no single funding body — or because no funder wants to take on that responsibility — the problems of continuity are even greater for video.

The workshop's earnings come from all sorts of activity. The largest single employer has been the education department. Work for them has ranged from a project with unemployed school leavers to a special project in health education on the heart in a primary school. Straightforward training, a tape for the local art gallery and projects with community groups have helped increase the total.

Nick Smart is particularly enthusiastic about doing work for local political groups: "They always pay immediately — like tenants' organisations, the Anti-Nazi League or the Chile Solidarity Committee. They might ring up and say that they're a bit stuck that

night for a performer and could the workshop come to screen a tape at some fundraising event or other. Often they request a particular tape about some local struggle and are prepared to pay £10. When you get two or three calls like that a week you begin not to worry about conventional funding."

## Discovering work

In the early days Nick Smart spent a lot of time investigating ways the local authority might want to use the workshop's resources. "I suggested some things to them even though they didn't share my politics." He was particularly concerned with using video to give disaffected youngsters a voice — those who have gained little or nothing from compulsory schooling, who enter the adult world as unemployed, and those who are doubly persecuted because they are black.

One of the most important projects he undertook in this field focused on the Bow Centre — an experimental scheme housed in the middle of Sheffield where unemployed youngsters can drop in for leisure activities like pinball and music as well as having professional workers on hand to give advice on study opportunities and job prospects.

Smart was employed there on a part-time basis to use video as an alternative activity with the small group of young people who were carrying out conversion work on the building to be used for the Bow Centre as part of a special Manpower Services employment scheme. The 17 pre-edited video tapes shot as part of the project are now being edited together into a final tape.

Nick Smart believes they are a significant document because "they show the education authority, knowing it's failed so many youngsters through its education system, still trying to provide sheltered accommodation for the young unemployed during the daytime. I want to make a video tape about that and show how it actually is. I want to say: this is what a crisis looks like — this is the truth."

At one point the local authority approached the workshop saying that it had a problem "communicating to our clients" in the field of housing. Nick Smart says that they really meant they were having trouble keeping some tenants quiet. He told them that the video resource was not there to protect the authority's interests, but rather



to fight for the tenants. In the end, the approach was quietly dropped.

On the whole the workshop's relationship with the local authority has been good in as far as individual departments have hired its facilities and expertise for projects which both find acceptable as far as aims are concerned. But Nick Smart realises that this does not constitute a general acceptance — rather it reflects the willingness of various individuals within the structure, particularly in the education department, to use the workshop. "Sometimes they want to support and contribute towards our aims," observes Nick Smart, "Sometimes it serves their own ends."

## Individualistic style

Although the workshop has always operated on the lines of a loosely-knit collective of whoever happens to be interested in working with video at any one time, the dominating and only consistent influence has been Nick Smart. The bulk of the workshop's considerable library of almost 200 hours of video tape has been shot by him, either as part of paid work or as part of voluntary activity with different community groups.

In many senses the tapes document his life as a community activist, a role he has chosen to adopt simply because it suits him and his beliefs. But it would be wrong to dismiss his work as self-indulgent. Many of the best tapes produced by the workshop achieve their considerable quality precisely because they were shot by someone who has managed to build up considerable links within the Sharrow community of Sheffield and who rarely goes about without a portapack in his rucksack.

An excellent example of a tape shot on the spur of the moment — because he happened to be in the right place at the right time — is called *Bail*, made in 1977. The action took place in The Hub, a Caribbean youth club in Sharrow that had become a popular place to go for young West Indian people in the area. Nick Smart has been a regular visitor since it opened and has established solid relationships with both the staff and members. He has been asked to provide video facilities for several projects and events staged by the club.

One evening he happened to be in The Hub's general office when he began shooting what turned out to become *Bail*. In itself the situation was not that unusual. A couple of the club's members had come to ask for help for a friend who had just been arrested and taken

into police custody. The youth worker agreed to try to get the friend out on bail.

The tape simply records her long conversation with a policeman over the phone (his voice cannot be heard) as the detainee's friends sit around waiting. Their few comments and weary facial expressions speak volumes for the position so many black youngsters find themselves in today — that of victim.

## Dialogue

The phone conversation opens with the youth worker simply offering to stand bail and asking: "Is it neccessary for him to stay in custody overnight?" You can almost visualise the unseen police officer at the other end of the line and hear his unheard replies and further questions — ever so polite, of course. A few more exchanges and then the youth worker says: "Well, I'm not the probation officer and my contact with him (the arrested person) is not because he's been in any trouble. It's just that I've known him for some time."

The to-ing and fro-ing goes on and a note of strain enters the voice of the youth worker. "What I was really anxious about was that, if it was possible, he shouldn't remain in custody as that makes me very anxious at the moment." The policeman asks more questions. The youth worker replies: "I understand he was picked up in Attercliffe Common this afternoon and suspected of either selling or attempting to sell property that didn't belong to him, but belonged to his landlord."

There is more waiting. Finally the phone is put down. The youth worker turns to the waiting West Indians and explains: "He's opposing bail. He thought about it very carefully.... but he's said that because the landlord has apparently said something about a conditional eviction and that the property he had was from a room he had no right to be in (the listening youths contradict this information) and because he's already on bail for another offence, that that's the reason he's opposing bail."

The youths voice their objections in their own dialect and then make arrangements for going to the court the following morning to see whether their friend will manage to obtain bail. The tape ends there. In its own modest way it manages to capture a few minutes of what it's like to be black and young in contemporary Britain. It doesn't offer any solutions, but clearly presents the role of the police and the role of the well-intentioned youth worker in the context of some young blacks trying to inarticulartely defend one of their imprisoned friends. It is a point of view that is rarely given an airing.



## Right-wing views

A video tape of quite a different type, but one of considerable educational value, is entitled *A High Tory*. The story behind it is an interesting one. Occasionally, to supplement his income, Nick Smart undertakes video work of a distinctly non-community nature for a middleman who offers various types of broadcasting and video services, including TV interview training. He describes the work in these words: "I turn up in various college studios, sometimes with a suit on, and I pretend to be a radio or TV interviewer, or work the equipment. The clients are managers of concrete companies and area health authorities and all the rest of it."

On one such occasion Smart found himself operating the camera for a special training session in which a millionaire industrialist was being interviewed immediately prior to a real interview he was to have at Tory Central Office, London, as a potential candidate for the Conservative Party in the European Parliamentary elections. The practice interview sessions proved to be something of an eye opener as far as the political views of this Tory industrialist were concerned.

Smart, realising the tape would appeal to a wider audience, kept the original intact and placed it in the workshop's library. Whether one agrees with how the tape was obtained or not, *A High Tory* is often highly amusing as this businessman stumbles his way through the questions posed to him. But behind the laughs lies something much more serious and sinister. The man's views take on a frightening dimension when one realises he is not just a saloon bar pedant, but is an influential industrialist who has been a Tory councillor and aspires to hold a seat in the European Parliament.

The most revealing section of the tape is worth quoting at length. In response to a question on which subjects would he wish to concentrate if he were elected, he replies:

> "The other committee I would like to sit on — whatever title it goes under — is how the younger generation is going to be employed throughout Europe.... We've got the real problem in this country of 1½ million unemployed, and probably another one million underemployed. This is the first time in the history of

Europe that there's not been a war — and I *mean* the history of Europe. There's not been a war to occupy young people and somehow get rid of their animal instincts.

If this was a TV broadcast on an open circuit, I wouldn't dare give you the solution I have in mind. My private solution is that we should come to an agreement with the Egyptians, and the Libyans if you like, that a part of the western desert be reserved for a permanent war. And that any one that was condemned for robbery with violence, hooliganism and so on should be sentenced to as long as the crime sort of warranted.

They could join either the reds or the blues and the permanent war would be kept going obviously with conventional weapons. I think that this would deal with the problem of hooliganism in Europe forthwith, and to some extent with the problem of unemployment. . . . You could solve the semi-skilled unemployment problem by building up the services straight away."

## Anti-Red

Another large part of the interview is taken up with "Reds under the bed" scare stories. Although the tape is unconventional in that it was obtained through an unusual set of cirumstances, nevertheless it should be viewed as belonging within the circle of radical low-guage video activity. Its distribution beyond its originally intended audience is entirely dependent on the limited alternative video networks that exist. If it was not for Sheffield Video Workshop, the tape would never have seen the light of day.

In terms of left-wing propaganda there are many possiblities for the hi-jacking of similar tapes made by capitalist organisations and individuals for their own internal consumption. Management training material and internal company video newsletters also provide unusually perceptive insights into how capitalism works and what its real motives are. The power of such liberated tapes and their usefulness is indicated by the prefacing remarks in *A High Tory*, when he says: "If this was a TV broadcast on an open circuit, I wouldn't dare give you the solution I have in mind."

By making these private thoughts and messages committed to video tape more accessible, the activist has a powerful educational weapon at her or his disposal. In one sense this type of activity properly and accurately deserves the often loosely used term "guerrilla video".



Also there is a role for simply recording programmes put out by the broadcast television companies. These may be useful to community groups because they relate relevant information in themselves — *World in Action*, *Grapevine* or a *Play For Today* for instance — or they could be used as part of a discussion on the way television distorts reality — *Coronation Street*, the news and *Starsky and Hutch* might be more useful for this purpose.

## Subject matter

The best way of conveying the breadth of subjects dealt with by Sheffield Video Workshop in three years of existence is to list the names of tapes stacked on one of its library shelves chosen at random:

Cuts demonstration (1976)
The Hub (Caribbean youth club)
*Panorama* on Chile (BBC1)
Sheffield campaign against racism demonstration
Lowfield School — health project on the heart
Meynell TV club (part of educational EEC project)
Ian Dury (BBC1)
Women talking about inflatables
Pearl Street Adventure Playground
A day at school — Park House School
No Hopers (part of educational EEC project)
Dread Beat and Blood — Linton Kwesi Johnson (BBC1)
Sharrow Streets
Interview with Pakistani bridgroom on his wedding-day

Taken as a body of video tapes, the workshop's library is a unique record of some aspects of life in one Sheffield community as well as covering wider issues. And although the tapes are available for viewing, and are seen by different groups, Nick Smart would be the first to admit that those with a wider relevance do not get seen by nearly enough people. At best a tape over a number of replays will only draw an audience of hundreds. This distribution problem which affects all video groups, he sees as being solved at least in part by the reopening of the Sheffield cable network for local programming.

To this end, the workshop has maintained contact with what is happening to the cable network and at various times has floated the

idea of a local television service supported by a variety of bodies including trade unions, the education authority and commercial companies. The minimum amount of cash needed to establish such a station would be in the region of £50,000, which is unlikely to materialise from those sources in the present economic climate.

The more likely possiblity is that the network will be reopened for local programming as part of a purely commercial pay-TV exercise. Nick Smart believe that to make such a scheme acceptable in moral terms, the government would insist that the big draw pay-TV events and films should be balanced by a local community TV service. He hopes the workshop's experience in this field would be sufficient qualification for it to be drawn into such a project.

## Commercial conflict

However, previous experience of local cable TV stations has shown that difficulties about policy easily occur between the idealistic station workers and those who hold the financial strings above them. Nick Smart says he does not want local programming determined by the technology, but by the community. "We don't want a record-your-own-flower-show type approach, that is what caused the contradictions at Channel 40, the cable station at Milton Keynes." Nevertheless, the problem of how you get committed local progamming remains a very real one.

A more immediate possibility of breaking down the distribution problem for Sheffield Video Workshop would be the purchase of a video projector — or eidophor — which can throw a large image several feet across onto a screen as a film projector does. Nick Smart feels that such an additional resource would make the workshop's tapes available to a much wider audience — but again the cost runs into several thousand pounds.

In summing up the workshop's activities Nick Smart says: "We don't regard ourselves as any old charity — we regard ourselves as a valid, recognised group of people working in our own neighbourhood. In some instances we work simply to make money commercially. In another sphere we're interested in using video to help people understand their lives and their work, to promote self-respect and confidence among groups and individuals.

"We also use video as a propaganda medium and this work covers groups like tenants' associations, trade unions, political refugees, kids' playgroups, workers in factories and so on. Finally, we use video as a toy, as a useful means of playing, which is a very constructive and healthy way of spending time.

"And in social action terms much of the work shows that video is the only medium able to bring a group together on a long term basis over a particular issue, hold that group together and help it grow, and articulate the precise nature of the group's ambitions to both its supporters and adversaries."

Above all, the example of Sheffield Video Workshop is one of relative independence and self-sufficiency. It proves that a video group can exist, creating meaningful links within a community, while receiving little direct subsidy, but rather selling its skills without compromising its principles too much. That is not to argue that direct grants are not needed — for equipment they are still virtually the only source of finance — but the workshop does show that other sources are available, particularly as a contribution to running costs. As Nick Smart comments: "Some people approach money as a major problem, saying they need £25,000 before they can start. If that's the case then how on earth are they ever going to get off the ground?"

## Chapter 3

# Community Video Workshop Cardiff

Cardiff's Community Video Workshop occupies the ground floor of a shop on a main road in the Riverside area. Two signs are painted on the windows. One says Riverside Rag — the other Local Community TV. When the group moved into the shop at the end of 1977, they wanted to express an identity with the area which translated itself into the name Riverside Rag. Since then they've retitled themselves the Community Video Workshop — a less exciting, but more accurate name.

Earlier still, the group called itself Cardiff Street TV. If nothing else, all of these name changes illustrate the fact that the video presence in Cardiff has a considerable history and at different times has pursued different strategies. Terry Dimmick, one of the group's co-founders, echoes the open-ended nature of the project when he says: "The video workshop tries to be a lot of things — it probably tries to be too many all at the same time."

He describes the workshop's basic aim as being a media resource with the accent placed on video. "When we started off we were concerned to give predominantly working class people a voice. Video appeared to be a powerful way of doing just that. Ordinary people are quite capable of expressing themselves in their own way — women do it quite adequately by rapping to each other over their back walls. But when it comes to speaking to larger groups, the means for doing that — the media, are inaccessible to broad sections of the population."

Terry Dimmick isolates "the very direct quality" of video, its ability to do away with professionals and its intimacy as good reasons for using it in community settings. Since 1974, when he and Steve Gough had a chance encounter with a portapack during the



Adamsdown local festival, the Cardiff video group has been searching for ways to successfully implement those ideas.

### Video on 50p

Both Terry Dimmick and Steve Gough had been interested in film as students. After their studies they returned to Cardiff where they became involved in various community activities. It was while working with a community arts group — the mainly theatre-based Transitions Trust — on the local festival that they discovered a portapack owned by the Welsh Arts Council which was rented out at only 50p a day.

Terry Dimmick recalls: "Because of our interest in community politics — we were involved with *Cardiff People's Paper*, for instance, — we immediately recognised the uses that this little machine, locked away in the Welsh Arts Council building for most of the time, could be put to. After that we were down there almost every day saying we wanted to hire it out. The woman on the desk always asked us: 'What are you going to use it for? Is it art?' We would reassure her."

The first considered video tape they made was about housing. At that time the major issue in Cardiff was the central redevelopment plan, the biggest in Europe, proposed by the giant developer Ravenseft. The topic was a natural choice. "We put together this modest tape — very crude and boring in lots of ways, but full of the idealism of youth. The limitation of having to edit everything in the camera as we shot it really showed." But at least they had made a start. And eventually, after immense community pressure, the Ravenseft plan was rejected.

Soon afterwards this tape was seen by a residents' group in nearby Tremorfa. They were impressed by the potential of video and said they would like to use it to highlight one of their campaigns about the encroachment of industry on residential reas. A tape was made with their members determining its shape and doing the camerawork. The idea was to show it at a public meeting organised by the council on development in the area.

Terry Dimmick has clear memories of the occasion. "All the local planning officials were there with this amazing visual display. Blow-up aerial photos covered one wall. But when we trundled in all this sophisticated-looking video gear to put the residents' case, it freaked them out completely. The whole thing worked out very well."

## Setting up

Having satisfied themselves that video had an effective role to play, the next step was to obtain their own equipment. An application was written and circulated to various grant-giving bodies. The net result was £1500 from the Gulbenkian Foundation and £60 from the Welsh Arts Council.

In 1975 the Welsh Arts Council bought an edit deck and Cardiff Street TV suggested to them that it would be a sensible idea for all video equipment to be kept under one roof. Fortunately the Welsh Arts Council agreed, gave all the gear into the care of Cardiff Street TV and found them premises in a local arts centre, Chapter Arts. With the move came two Job Creation Project wages. When these ran out the arts centre continued paying them.

The video group stayed at Chapter for two years. With more gear, two wages and premises the amount of work undertaken naturally increased. A lot of time was spent working with children on summer playschemes, performances and on school projects. Tapes were made for a gypsy support group and local residents. The arts centre also suggested activities such as using video with actors.

But the video workers had reservations about becoming over-identified with Chapter Arts. They didn't want to be seen as purely artists. The social and community aspects of their work they felt to be important. So it became a priority to find a base of their own.

The projected move also gave the group the opportunity of working within a well-defined community, something they believed would bring a new dimension to their activity. Eventually they found the shop premises in Riverside, a mainly working class district close to Cardiff's centre. It is the area where the largest immigrant group in Wales — made up of Asians — decided to settle. It has its fair share of inner-city problems

## Riverside Rag

Riverside also has a community centre, active on welfare rights issues, which is controlled independently of the local authority. This was seen as a valuable asset which the video group could use to pick up on local problems and issues.

But initially the group tried an approach which failed to pay off. *Riverside Rag* was planned to be a local video news and views programme. In practice, the group found — as others have done — that such a local news project posed too many problems. To produce sufficient interesting material for a regular slot entailed too much time and effort. Also the difficulties encountered in setting up and maintaining a satisfactory string of playback venues were great. So the idea was quickly dropped.



However, another initiative adopted by the video workshop to foster closer links with the neighbourhood has been more successful. This was to employ a community worker as part of the workshop team. So at the end of 1977, Eileen Crane, a trained community worker who had used video as a student, joined the workshop with the brief of involving herself in whatever community issues seemed to be the most important. Several of the major video tapes the workshop has made since moving to Riverside have developed out of the community worker's activities.

Currently there are two other full-time workers. George Auchterlonie joined in 1978 from a mainly community theatre background and Terry Dimmick has been with the group since it started. The shop premises basically consist of two areas. The front part has the three workers' desks and a small exhibition space for posters and photographs as well as room for a playback monitor. The back room has a permanently set up half-inch reel-to-reel editing system. In addition the workshop possesses six portapacks, some of which are quite old.

## Major functions

In Terry Dimmick's view the workshop has two major jobs: to service community groups and individuals throughout the south-east Welsh region and to be active on local Riverside issues. The regional responsibility derives from the funding they receive from the Welsh Arts Council. But there is a third function which he believes needs to be more fully developed — to act as a general media resource. He would like to see the workshop become multi-media based, expanding to include tape-slide as well as film. Already the workshop has been heavily involved in pulling community groups together for a successful application which was made for a local commercial radio franchise.

The main users tend to be organisations and groups rather than individuals. A typical request would be from a playscheme which wanted to document its activities or from a voluntary group which

wanted to make a promotional video tape to advertise its services. A large amount of the video workers' time is spent running training sessions — they usually insist that newcomers have at least a morning's supervised familiarisation with the equipment before they go off on their own.

The workshop has a sliding scale of charges for hiring equipment. The low rate is for groups unsupported by grants. The next level is for grant-aided groups and the top rate is for "statutory" organisations. A portapack for one day's hire on the bottom rate costs £1. No equipment can be used for commercial purposes. Needless to say the income from these charges only comes to a fraction of the real cost of the facilities and overheads which are mostly paid by the Welsh Arts Council, Chapter Arts and independent foundations.

One of the most pressing problems the workshop faces — apart from constant financial worries — is the allocation of resources to different projects. All of the workers expressed a desire to tighten up on the way projects were allocated time. So far only the most general guidelines have been worked out — groups should be favoured rather than individuals, an end-use should be anticipated for the tape and single issue projects affecting a large part or all of the community should have priority.

Terry Dimmick explains: "We have to toughen up our policy. If someone made a tape last year and then didn't show it, they have to be told they can't borrow the gear the next time they come round. Maybe less use of portapacks is the answer. Administering six of them is a full-time job in itself. We need time for deeper production involvement on individual topics. The here-today-gone-tomorrow attitude has got to give way to a long term educational strategy."

## The health cuts

A good example of a single issue video tape, which was made possible largely because of Eileen Crane's presence as a community worker, is one protesting against the closure of a casualty unit at west Cardiff's St. David's Hospital. The issue was raised at a Riverside housing action meeting and subsequently Eileen Crane and the local community centre organised a series of public meetings to discuss the effects of the closure — which was already temporarily in force.

In order to make the closure permanent the local health authority needed to hold a number of public consultation meetings so that they



could explain their intentions and hear the public's response. One of these consultative gatherings was video taped along with a demonstration staged outside the hospital. When the campaign committee decided it would be a good idea to widen the protest to take in the whole of west Cardiff it seemed a natural choice to use video as a publicity tool. In just two days the raw video material was edited down to a 30-minute programme called *St. David' Hospital Campaign.*

A commentary was unnecessary as the contributions from the floor and platform at a public meeting explained the issues more than adequately. It is not a visually stunning tape — it was mostly shot by a volunteer camera operator who hadn't handled a video camera before the evening of the meeting — but it still manages to be compulsive viewing. The reason is simple: it captures the feeling of the meeting with fine accuracy.

The strength of the public's arguments builds steadily as the meeting proceeds. Simultaneously the weak position of the area health authority's representatives on the platform grows visibly weaker. It portrays the victory of common sense over bureaucratic deviousness. A woman in the audience asks: "I know a woman who was turned away from St. David's after the casualty was closed. She had a severed vein and was told to take a bus to the infirmary. How can you get on a bus when you're pumping blood? And which taxi drivers will allow you to bleed all over their cars?" No answers were forthcoming from the platform.

There are moments of real anger when someone snaps at an official: "I don't like being patronised and I feel that's exactly what you're doing to us." At one point the authority's leading spokesperson, a doctor, explains the closure of the unit in terms of the difficulty of recruiting a consultant to work there. Immediately the assistant community relations officer jumps up to his feet and shouts: "If you advertised for one in India you'd get applications and they'd be first class ones too!"

The tape ends with a clear statement from a young man: "We want to help this community stay together and we don't want this casualty unit closed." Applause echoes round the hall. The video tape was shown at several public metings and also in the street — here it was used to interest passers-by in signing a petition. This last tactic proved successful as a few minutes spent viewing the tape was enough to explain the issue. At meetings the tape encouraged people to speak

more easily and quickly. The fight to keep the casualty unit open has gained widespread support and is continuing.

Eileen Crane comments on her use of video in general: "I've been surprised of its success at showing tapes to large audiences at public meetings. I would walk in thinking it's going to be a real flop — yet if the tape is relevant to the audience as with the St. David's one — then they're much more tolerant." Another campaign she has spent a lot of time working on, including the production of an information video tape, is the renewal of leaseholds in Riverside. Many people who thought they owned their houses had a shock when several hundred old leases expired on houses in the area. The Welsh Leasehold Campaign began locally and has since gained considerable publicity. There are plans for a further video tape.

## Battered women

Anyone who doubts the ability of amateurs to make a video tape which is both highly watchable and informative should see *They Pretend We Don't Exist* by Cardiff Women's Aid. Shot in 1977 it has been screened to several groups of women interested in setting up refuges for battered women. At one point the BBC were going to broadcast it regionally, but some of the women in the tape didn't want it shown to a general audience.

The tape provides an all-too-realistic account of the problems faced by battered women. The central element of the tape is the Cardiff refuge started by Women's Aid for women and children desperate to escape their husbands. Many of the women at the refuge explain how they've come to be there, including the misery of having to walk the streets with hungry children and being directed to bed and breakfast accommodation by social security.

One woman remembers: "This place I was sent to was supposed to be a home for the homeless, I think. . . . It was like a concentration camp. You couldn't leave in the morning unless you had an appointment with social security. Then you were allowed out before 11am. You had to report as you were going out and report when you came in."

Another tells how she felt on her first visit to the social security office after arriving at the refuge. : "It was somewhere I'd never been before. . . . I just felt out of place. There were a lot of questions they didn't need to know, that weren't relevant to why I was there. I don't think they have the right to pry into your private life. I get £22.30 a week off them. I pay rent, electricity and have to feed and clothe the little boy out of the remainder. I had no information given me at all about what I was entitled to when I went over to the social security. It was only the people in the refuge that put me right and put my mind at ease as to what I was entitled to."



The women fill in the details of their past naturally and without fuss. The most powerful aspect of the tape is the way it relates a strong sense of the women's solidarity with one another. As one remarks: "When I went to the refuge they brought me out a lot there. I think if they're determined enough they will make it on their own — they can make it on their own — because I have." She was one of those who had managed to find a home of her own having stayed in the refuge after leaving her husband.

As well as dealing with basic problems of finding a bed and obtaining social security, the tape also tackles the legal aspects of restraining violent husbands and starting divorce proceedings. All in all, *They Pretend We Don't Exist* manages to construct a well-rounded picture of its subject — mainly because it was made from the inside. It has also proved itself to be an effective tape for raising support.

## The Valleys

One of the most time-consuming projects yet tackled by the video workshop resulted in *The Valley City* tape, made in conjunction with the South Wales Anti-Poverty Action Centre (SWAPAC). This is a programme on the grand scale — at least in terms of low-gauge video productions. It approaches broadcast television standards, particularly in the way it was edited, and was eighteen months in the making.

Both the workshop and SWAPAC admit that had they known it would demand so much time and energy they would have settled for something far less ambitious. The idea originated with SWAPAC, an organisation set up in 1975 with EEC anti-poverty programme money — and currently working to draw closer links between community action groups and trade unions over issues such as housing, social security and pensions.

The Valley City Campaign was partly conceived as a major initiative designed to win the same status for the South Wales valleys as that given by government to deprived inner-city areas. Urban deprivation had been recognised as deserving special financial aid —

yet the valleys, while suffering from similar problems, failed to qualify for these funds although the campaign's aims stretch far beyond just achieving special status for the valleys.

As one of the Valley City Campaign leaflets puts it: "Take away the mountains that separate strings of villages and towns along valley bottoms and sides. Add in the coastal towns. Push them all together and you have one of the most deprived urban areas in Britain. With 1.8 million people it is also one of the biggest. It is a city in its own right — Valley City."

SWAPAC wanted to mobilise organisations such as Trades Councils, Workers' Educational Association groups, Health Councils and the Socialist Medical Society to spread the Valley City idea so that more people could understand why the region was in decline and then move on to do something positive about it. Early in the campaign's life they decided video should play a key part.

SWAPAC already had some experience of using the workshop's video gear — they had made three brief tapes on welfare rights topics. Two were specifically aimed at showing people how to give advice effectively and the third was for pensioners pointing out the benefits they are entitled to. However, these were relatively simple exercises compared with the Valley City programme which intended to explain complex economic and social questions as well as allowing several trade unionists and others to put forward their views on what was happening over the whole region.

Unfortunately the complexities of the Valley City project — much of the material having to be shot in awkward locations — created technical problems for the SWAPAC workers who started out taping on their own. Terry Dimmick, looking back, explains what happened: "Their confidence in using the equipment didn't actually materialise in practice. Because they were aiming for slick, high standards, a rigorous training programme for the operators was needed early on. It was both sides' fault that it hadn't happened."

A large part of two months' shooting had to be junked and this was then re-taped by Terry Dimmick who carried out the bulk of the subsequent taping with SWAPAC's assistance. The editing of many hours of tapes down to a final 30 minutes was also undertaken jointly. Asked whether such large undertakings were perhaps not suited to this type of video production, SWAPAC's Jeremy Gass who worked on the tape all the way through, said: "Possibly if we'd talked about what we wanted to achieve more at the beginning and been given more tips it might have been easier. Although we lacked a tight script, in a way we had to do it in the hit-and-miss style we did."



Despite these problems the finished video tape is an impressive achievement. It focuses attention on four main areas: employment, health, transport and housing. The decline of the iron industry in the 19th century is compared with that of coal and steel in the 20th. A union officer comments: "What has been done in Ebbw Vale is too little too late and this is the situation in South Wales generally.."

The closure of the coal pits, quickly followed by the closure of shops and the migration of young people to towns is a process described as "purely a capitalist exercise which says to hell with the people." A National Union of Mineworkers' official catalogues the horrors of pneumoconiousis — chronic bronchitis caused by coal dust — among miners. The region accounts for 4.4% of the British workforce, but suffers 8% of industrial accidents. In the Rhondda Valley it is virtually impossible for a woman to obtain an NHS abortion.

The facts which the tape relates on transport are no more comforting: low levels of private car ownership, rail closures and poor bus services. What little railway investment there has been has gone on prestige services such as the high-speed inter-city rail link to London. Housing policy is dubbed "a residue of neglect". One in three dwellings in the eastern valleys is classified as "unfit for human habitation."

All of this information is backed up by on-the-spot interviews and visual confirmation. So far people who have seen it have responded positively. The WEA and National Union of Mineworkers have said they intend using it on their courses. But Jeremy Gass is critical of the lack of playback equipment in South Wales: "We have to come to the workshop in Cardiff every time we want to play a tape. Agencies like social services have machines for internal training, but won't allow them out for community use. While video is potentially a democratic medium it is practically difficult to make use of that potential."

## Audience

The Cardiff Community Video Workshop is very aware of the importance of audience. As Terry Dimmick says: "I'm not interested in wasting my time on making tapes that sit in the cupboard with no

one seeing them. A central element is the amount of back-up a tape will get in terms of publicity, public meetings and creating interest generally, all of which is a pretty labour intensive process. We've got enough experience to judge that element and part of our service is to suggest what needs to be done to get people to watch a video tape instead of broadcast television."

Nevertheless, even watchable, relevant tapes like *St. David's Hospital Campaign*, *They Pretend We Don't Exist* and *The Valley City* only achieve, at best, total audiences which run to several hundred. Terry Dimmick believes that access to broadcast television outlets would revolutionise attitudes to low-gauge video — but that breakthrough might also bring negative influences on producers who could be enveloped by élitist broadcast ways of thinking.

"I can think of various strategies of breaking out of our ghetto," he says. "We could go via the fourth TV channel by doing a deal with the television unions by turning it into a political issue. If you argued that everyone has a basic right to communicate and anyone that went against that was anti-democratic, then after a couple of years you might get concessions. The door in Wales would be particularly easy to open because there's such a commitment to Welsh programming, which is a desert of ideas at the moment. You perhaps wouldn't be accepted using half-inch black and white video tape, but U-Matic portapacks (using three-quarter inch cassettes) would be acceptable."

The Cardiff workshop is an example of a video resource which has successfully catered for both its neighbourhood and its region. It has also taken the unique step of employing its own community worker to promote local contacts. The three workers would never make the rash claim that video is the ideal tool for solving all the issues they face. They already use posters a good deal and hope to branch out into tape-slide in the near future. But as Terry Dimmick says: "I've been involved in all sorts of activities — local newspapers and theatre — but I still believe in video. I think it can sow some important long-term seeds in communities like Riverside."

## Chapter 4

# Glasgow Social Work Department

The idea that a book about radical video should even consider looking at the medium's use by some arm of a local authority may strike many readers as odd. After all, in that context how could video possibly be used radically? And to a very large extent this critical view of local authorities and their function is justified. One London borough adopted video as part of a public relations exercise to smooth the way for its proposed schemes. But there are grey areas where the real interests of local communities and the activities of local authorities come much closer together, although they may not coincide completely.

One of these fringe areas is community work. Without getting caught up in a web of complex definitions, community work is basically an offshoot from the broad field of social work. Whereas social workers are often limited to casework — they are assigned to particular individuals or families who are considered to be in need of help and guidance — community workers have a far more open brief.

The job description of a community worker in the locality dealt with in this chapter — the south-east section of Glasgow — says such a person should "help the community to come together, identify problems, identify solutions and strategies, and implement action." They should help stimulate the growth of new community groups, support those groups and promote self-help activities.

Clearly this set of tasks is open to interpretation. If you happen to believe that most of society's ills are the direct result of the capitalist system, then it would appear you could happily combine the job of paid community worker with that of full-time revolutionary.

Needless to say most local authorities do not welcome left revolutionaries as community workers. The point is simply that the

role of community worker can be seen in a radical light without twisting official descriptions of the job. In a document reviewing its own community development services, Strathclyde Regional Council, whose responsibilities include the Glasgow area, states: "Clearly, the community worker *may* find himself (sic) working in politically sensitive areas, especially if he is working for a local authority which he regards as part of a malign system maltreating the community. There is no easy answer to this. Each community worker has to make his own honest decision about how he maintains loyalty to his employer, loyalty to the community in which he works and his own self-respect."

This passage sums up in a nutshell the different pressures placed on a community worker — pressures which are often difficult or even impossible to reconcile with each other. It also underlines the marginal nature of the work. Is one an agent of the state, or a radical catalyst on the side of the people?

## Castlemilk

The south-east Glasgow area, as carved out by the social work department, includes Rutherglen, Camberslang, Castlemilk and Toryglen — fine, solid-sounding, conservative names which are mostly inappropriate for the districts to which they belong. The area stretches from the old tenemental inner-city out to the large peripheral housing schemes.

These huge council estates were mostly built after the second world war to re-house people living in extreme slum conditions in old tenements nearer the centre. But the old problems did not disappear with the move outwards. All too quickly what were dubbed "the slums of the future" became the slums of today.

The large estates, often acommodating tens of thousands of people, are like small towns with virtually no amenities. Local industry, shops and leisure facilities are notable for their absence. "A desert wae windaes," is how Glasgow comedian Billy Connolly aptly summed up one such peripheral housing scheme.

Most of the activity described in this chapter revolves around Castlemilk, a peripheral estate six miles from the city centre. Almost 40,000 people live there in a mixture of tower blocks, new tenements, and some terrace houses. Male unemployment is very high, approaching 30%. It is a depressed and depressing place.



John Legg is a community worker in his mid-twenties, one of a team of four which covers south-east Glasgow. His office is in a converted block of flats in Castlemilk which also houses other social work services for the neighbourhood. He feels that the Strathclyde Regional Council, his employer, is one of the more progressive authorities in its attitude towards social and community work, even to the point of adopting a policy which is ahead of the attitudes held by the average basic grade community worker. But he does admit that: "When you get down to the nitty gritty political areas of the job, the authority's intentions may become a little watery."

In the realms of theory he sees little difference between his own view of community work and the authority's. "But in particular cases of action, where the appropriate steps may involve your own department, or your own councillors, then that's when the grey areas start appearing."

## Starting with video

It was largely through John Legg's suggestion that the social work department purchased a Sony portapack in January 1977. Some money left over from an urban aid grant for a joint project with a tenants' association had to be spent quickly and the original idea put forward within the department was for some film equipment. He suggested that video might be more suitable as it was a more accessible medium in terms of its instant playback and relative ease of use, that tapes could be used over and over again and that in the long run it would be cheaper.

His own experience of using video was very brief and he recalls there was only one project in the whole of west Scotland that he was aware of at that time — the local video experiment at Bonhill. That had received only minimal publicity, so his enthusiasm for buying some video gear was based more on a basic theoretical understanding of the medium than vast practical knowledge. But everyone has to start somewhere. Unfortunately it is still often the case that the decision to go into video is made on the slightest evidence, which is not the fault of the people concerned as there is so little reliable material and advice around.

However, he did his best to draw up a brief account of what video was and how it might relate to the work of the department. The main thrust of his argument was that community development work was

essentially about communication between local government and the community. As television was the most powerful medium available for communicating then it should be taken up in the form of the video portapack. Some specific uses were also mentioned including the making of tapes highlighting the need for more community resources and video's role as an initial stimulus to different types of activity. The four-page submission is certainly no radical manifesto, but it fulfilled its purpose by credibly outlining in professionals' jargon why video would be a good thing. Such documents may not be very meaningful in themselves, but they do fulfil a necessary purpose in the bureaucratic world.

## More justification

Soon after the equipment's delivery another bout of justification was needed to set the minds of the district and divisional managements at rest. They were completely ignorant of what video was and initially jumped to the conclusion that some of their employees were setting up a grand scheme in mass audience television. Video was defended particularly in terms of its training potential for staff, always an acceptable use in the eyes of bureaucrats.

The first video tape made on the portapack was in the mould of a conventional TV broadcast documentary with catchy bits of music and the reporter (a community worker) doing pieces of commentary to camera as he walked around some broken down housing estate. Although members of the local tenants' association were involved in the production, it was very much directed by the community workers and John Legg admits that at least half of its purpose was to convince the hierarchy that video served a useful function.

However, that kind of programme-making in the context of local authority video can easily become the norm. Video may be introduced on a publicity wave of community participation and two-way communication between people and council, to become a convenient weapon in the local authority's armoury to sell its worn-out policies electronically rather than through reports of boring speeches in the local commercial newspaper.

John Legg firmly denies that this has happened in his department's use of video. "Everything we do either comes up from a community idea or at a public meeting. If we think of something then we consult the community activists concerned. We're not into the game of public relations work. I could see a housing department, for instance, going into that area, but lack of knowledge of video and too little money stops that at the moment."



## Claimants' union

One of the more interesting examples of John Legg's use of video as part of his job as community worker is with Castlemilk Claimants' Union. The need for such a group in an area where over a third of the population is drawing unemployment or social security benefits is undisputed and John Legg saw it as a proper part of his function to help get one started.

Claimants' unions are good examples of community self-help organisations as they are usually operated and controlled by claimants and not by outside professionals or volunteers. John Legg rates Castlemilk Claimants' Union as one of the most politically conscious groups in Glasgow, an estimation which several of the members would also agree with. As a community worker who has gained their respect, his advice and help is welcomed, but he is allowed no say in the union's internal decision-making process which gives each claimant one vote.

The Glasgow *Evening Times*, in an article describing the formation of the union in early 1978, quoted one of the members as saying: "The union was born out of frustration — long waits for service at social security offices and abuse from counter staff." John Legg says: "The Claimants' Union tactics are at first the gentle touch and thereafter harassment and direct action."

Castlemilk Claimants' Union first came into contact with video when a student on placement with the social work department wanted them to appear in a video tape she was making on the subject of unclaimed benefits. The first half concentrated on the official attitude and the second was devoted to the claimants' point of view.

When first approached the union response was sensibly guarded. Why did someone from social work want them to be in a tape about unclaimed benefits? What would happen to the tape after it was made? Maybe their contribution would somehow be distorted or fundamentally changed in the editing of the material. It was within the realms of possibility that the exercise was to get the union to talk about its mode of operation so that the tape could then be used as a means of training counter staff in anti-Claimants' Union tactics.

They were given assurances on all these points and it was agreed they would have complete control over their section of the tape. So they scripted a brief discussion around an interview and oversaw the way the sequence was shot. Although their views in this initial tape come over quite clearly, the form of a scripted discussion (reminiscent of similar efforts made during the early days of BBC TV) appears highly artificial and stilted. However, in the particular context, it was important for the union to ensure that it was not being taken advantage of.

Their second experience of video came when they borrowed a portapack to shoot parts of a national Claimants' Union conference held in Glasgow. Again they had complete control and their own members operated the equipment. In many ways it was an acclimatisation exercise with much of the material recorded in a rough and ready way. Nevertheless the resulting, unedited tape gave some intimate glimpse of what those gatherings are like.

At a screening of this tape at a Claimants' Union business meeting the response was lukewarm. There was a lot of criticism of its lack of shape and the fact that it didn't convey any clear message. However, John Legg explained that such a tape was only the beginning of their possible use of video. At this stage they suggested they might like to make a tape showing their range of activities in order to attract more members, and John Legg pointed out that a few minutes of well-chosen material from the conference recording could be a valuable addition to an eventual programme about themselves.

At the time of my visit to Glasgow the Claimants' Union had just agreed to send one of their younger members for a brief spell of training with the portapack so that he could explain in more detail to the rest of them what it was all about. Their original suspicion was beginning to break down and several members displayed enthusiasm for possible video tapes. A current issue at the time was the decision of the housing department to spend a £200,000 grant for the area on flowers and shrubs. The union viewed this as disgraceful — yet another example of the authority directing scarce resources into a project which wouldn't in any way affect the two basic problems of poor housing and chronic unemployment.

## DHSS

One member suggested: "With video you could go and confront the man who made that disgusting decision of how to spend that money.



Then you could set up a TV outside the rent office and let everyone see what this one man says and is doing to the people of Castlemilk." Other suggestions centred on the possibilities of using video to back up the union's main policy of confronting officials at the DHSS with the wrongs they were doing to claimants.

They felt the very presence of a video camera at the scene of an argument between a claimant and a DHSS official would automatically change the balance to favour the claimant. The union's meeting went on to consider the wider implications of grassroots working class organisations like their own adopting modern communications media to help their causes.

Overall, the arguments polarised around one view, basically sympathetic to video, and another, slightly less popular one, which was essentially antagonistic. John Cooper, a union activist, said he had mixed feelings about whether the group should put much energy into video. "It's always been pushed as far as I know by social workers, or other authority departments, as being a useful community resource. I'm sceptical of that because most community groups and working class people at that level have neither the understanding nor the means to use video technology at the moment.

"There are so many basic points that working class people have not got straightened out yet, without spending their time playing about with video. It's a bit trendy and I don't think it will help working class folk. The professionals push it and I find it difficult to think of any way in which they can aid a working class struggle.

"Another point that bothers me is how working class organisations get access to the equipment. It always comes through social workers or whatever. It was not our initiative. The only worthwhile things that have helped the working class are those which they've come up with themselves. I've never seen professionals or middle class liberals doing them much good."

## Counter argument

Eddie Graham, another Castlemilk Claimants' Union militant, argued against this indictment: "Because video is not readily available, I don't see that as a valid argument against it. I think it's only by working class organisations taking up such new things that they'll get anywhere. It's not the equipment in itself that's wrong. Used in the same way as community newspapers it could be effective

in making people more united and aware of what is going on.

"Video is factual. It gives concrete evidence of what has taken place and people can draw their own conclusions from what they see. If it was taken into meetings such as we had with the rent office, it would put the officials in a terrible position because they would have to justify their stupid decisions. They would have to try to appear democratic and reasonable. Any equipment that can do that is essential to working class groups."

The two views, in fact, are not mutually exclusive. The first correctly underlines the importance of control of equipment — if it is offered by the authorities who maintain overall control, then that is going to affect the way it is used. The second view simply puts the case for the use of video by working class people and it is an argument that is difficult to counter. The discussion at the Claimants' Union meeting drew to a close with both factions reaching some agreement: the use of video was to be pursued, but the role of the local authority agency involved — in this case Glasgow social work department — should be viewed with suspicion.

The ideal solution to this problem of control over equipment was for the union to purchase its own video equipment and the promise of a grant for an information resource centre in Castlemilk run by the union itself held out the possibility of this becoming a reality.

## Tenants' demands

An example of more bread and butter video work carried out by John Legg can be seen in a tape he made with tenants in the Mitchellhill area. This was stimulated by the tenants' demands for better laundry facilities on the estate. Five tower blocks had no laundries at all and tenants frequently used dangerous verandahs off the flats to hang out their washing to dry. The straightforward tape, edited as it was shot in the camera (in other words built up as the filming went along), presented these facts.

But it did more than just that. For it also presented a very clear account of what facilities could be campaigned for. The *steamie*, a Scots word for laundry, holds a more important place in Scots life than it does further south. Traditionally, steamies — huge wash houses — have been more than just places to do the washing. They became centres of social life where the women would go for a good chat with their friends as well as do their chores.



The video tape presented examples of modern steamies in other parts of Glasgow which provided various types of laundry provision. This method of using video has distinct advantages over more conventional ways of going about such campaigns for better facilities. Without video, John Legg believes that a handful of tenants would have come forward and only they would have been able to tour the steamies to see what was available. With video, however, anyone who attends the estate meeting will be able to view the tape and see for themselves.

## Open University

The Toryglen Playgroup's experience with the video equipment highlights the way it can be used to build up people's confidence. Based in the local community centre, the playgroup is run on a cooperative basis by some mothers with pre-school age children. It is grant-aided by the local authority, but the mothers have control.

The playgroup coordinator suggested to the mothers that they might like to watch a series of Open University television programmes which make up part of a course on the pre-school child. This also had print and radio elements to it. The video recorder was used to tape the TV programmes when they were broadcast (at awkward times), so that the group of ten women could come together to watch them in the community centre at a more convenient time.

As the series progressed, the mothers' criticisms of the presentation grew. The radio programmes turned out to be virtually incomprehensible. Without any lip movements to follow, the southern middle class accent of BBC English proved impossible to understand. The television section also had its shortcomings. Mothers were shown in kitchens which had small play spaces conveniently off them, a feature uniquely absent from the council estates of Toryglen.

One of the ways the mothers hit upon to make their feelings about the course more evident was to use the portapack to create their own counter-version based on local experience and facilities. The result was the *Toryglen Pre-schoool Child Tape*. This includes information on how the playgroup was set up and shows the activities that go on there. It was entirely shot by the unemployed son of one of the mothers — a job he got a great deal of satisfaction out of and one that he wanted to pursue on the same voluntary basis.

Another by-product of all this activity was that staff at the Open

University became interested in the mothers' comments, and after several exchanges the BBC is planning to record the radio programmes again with the Toryglen women. These will then be used for broadcasting part of the course just in Scotland. In this instance, the use of video enabled a group of working class women to effectively articulate their own experience of setting up a pre-school playgroup — and along the way they managed to alter, at least to some extent, a broadcast radio programme, something which does not happen every day.

## Overall

It is worth noting that most of the community groups which have taken advantage of video have been organised on a non-hierarchical basis. They have found this medium particularly valuable because of its democratic nature. This element not only extends to the production processes employed — where anyone who bothers to turn up can have their say about what is included on a tape — but also takes in the actual screening of it. Video can relate information and personal experience more immediately than any other medium.

The tapes make that information freely available to whoever sees them. One of the strongest grassroots movements in Glasgow, the Jeely Piece Clubs, have found video relevant to their activities. The words *jeely piece* are a rough equivalent of the Liverpudlian jam butty, and the term was felt to be appropriate as a name for the clubs which organise summer playschemes for children in Glasgow.

There is a local song which has the line: "You cannae throw a jeely piece out a 20 storey flat." The four Jeely Piece Clubs currently active are run by about 200 women (and some men) and cater for almost 2,000 children. Their structure is completely open with no committees which act for the rank and file. A video tape has been made which documents their activities and video has also been used extensively to replay a BBC2 *Grapevine* item made about them. This has proved very popular in the area, not least because it gives an extremely accurate account of the schemes. Again, this proves that not all broadcast TV programmes are bad.

The impact of video on this area of Glagow has been extremely limited in that only a very few people have been able to use it. Yet where it has been used it has achieved a certain measure of success. The Castlemilk Claimants' Union, the tenants of Mitchellhill and the Toryglen Playgroup have all shared some positive experience from its presence.



John Legg believes that video has a positive role to play in the community, but that that role is a supportive, servicing one and is not the be all and end all solution to basic social problems. In addition, the warning note sounded by some of the members of Castlemilk Claimants' Union about the motives of social workers and local authorities trying to introduce video is an important point to bear in mind.

The *Grapevine* account of the Jeely Piece Clubs includes these two comments from local people (one of whom also happens to be an active member of the Claimants' Union), both of which have a lot to say about the value of self-help community initiatives in general and about the potential of video in particular:

Man: "It's back to the confidence thing. If they can have the confidence to do things like this, then they can go out to do other things. . . . take their own lives into their hands."

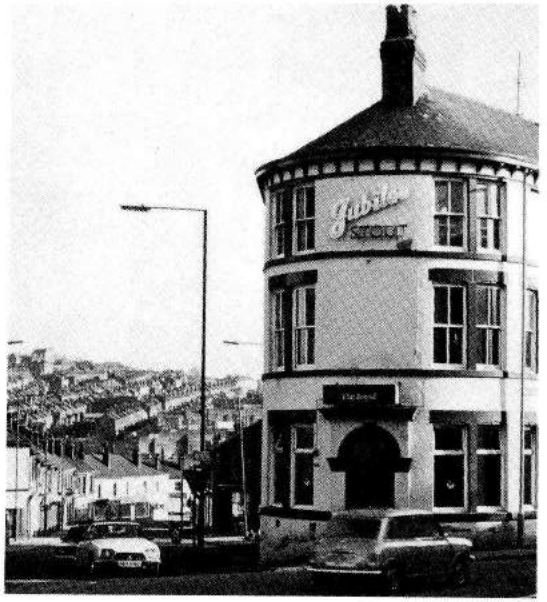
Woman: "I think the Jeely Piece Club gives the lie to what all the professionals say about us — that working class people are apathetic and don't care. We're prepared to fight for these clubs because they're the one thing that's been successful not only in Castlemilk, but in the west of Scotland. . . . We're actually running it, we have the say and we're the ones in control."

## Chapter 5

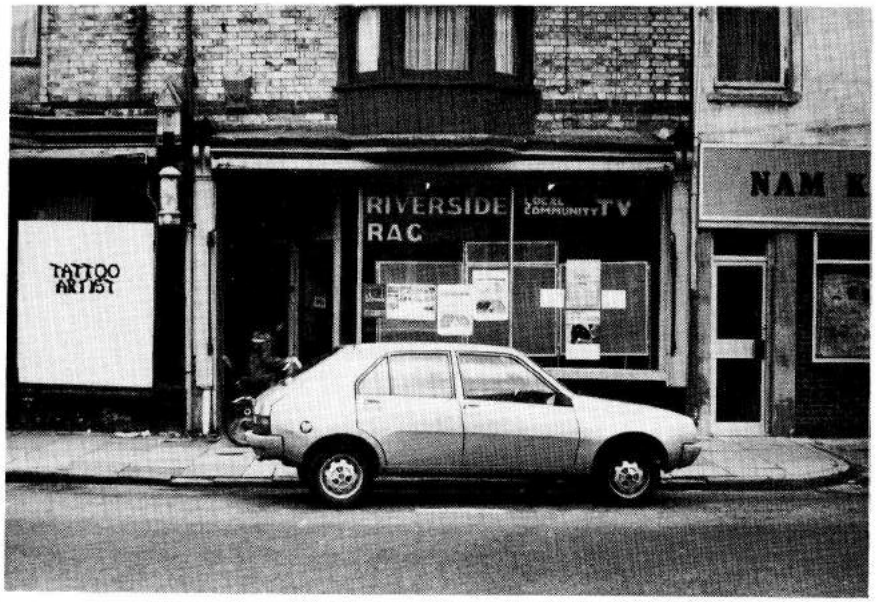
# Illustrations

Sheffield: Nick Smart with unemployed school leavers during a video project





Sheffield: the streets in the neighbourhood

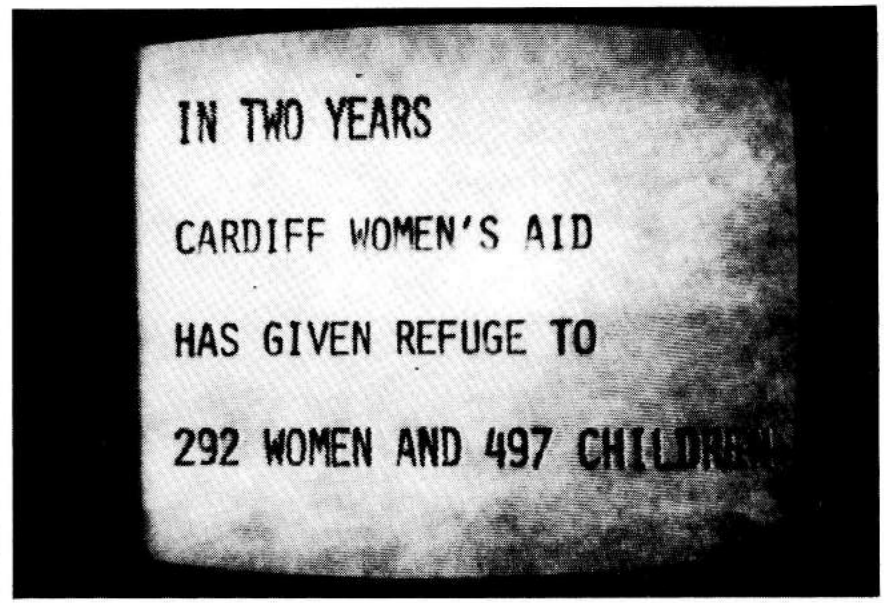



Cardiff: the workshop's premises

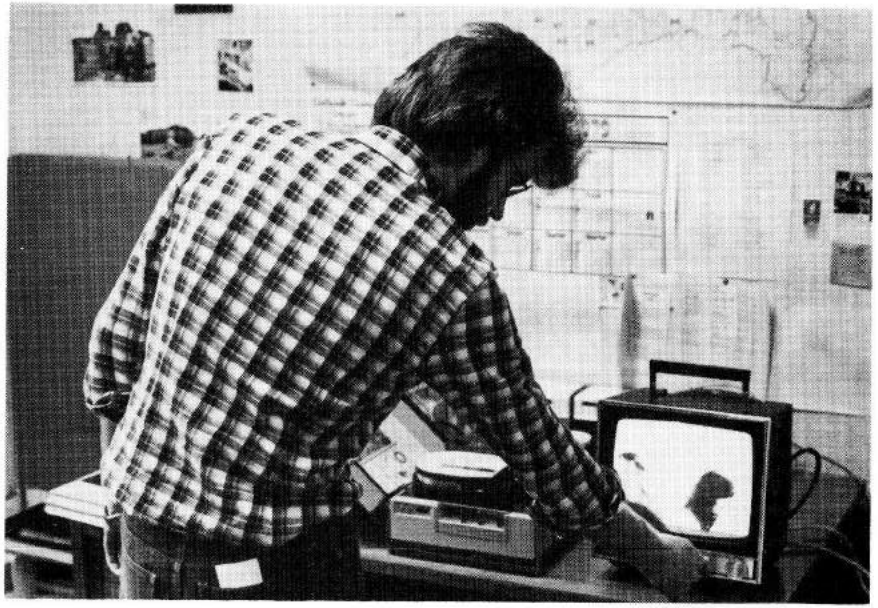
Cardiff: Terry Dimmick editing *The Valley City* tape


Cardiff: still from *The Valley City* tape






Cardiff: stills from *They Pretend We Don't Exist* by Cardiff Women's Aid



Glasgow: John Legg in his office

Glasgow: a post-war Castlemilk council tenement



JULY 1977

CASTLEMILK TODAY

ISSUE NO. 28 PRICE 5p

JEELY PIECE CLUB

ARE YOUR CHILDREN HAPPY?

MIXED FEELINGS

Most parents in Castlemilk must have mixed feelings about the summer holidays, now close at hand. Of course you and your kids look forward to the feeling of freedom. You hope for good weather, and hope to take days away here and there. But this year, can you afford many such days? And what if you're working? And even if you're not, after the first few days, what is it really like?

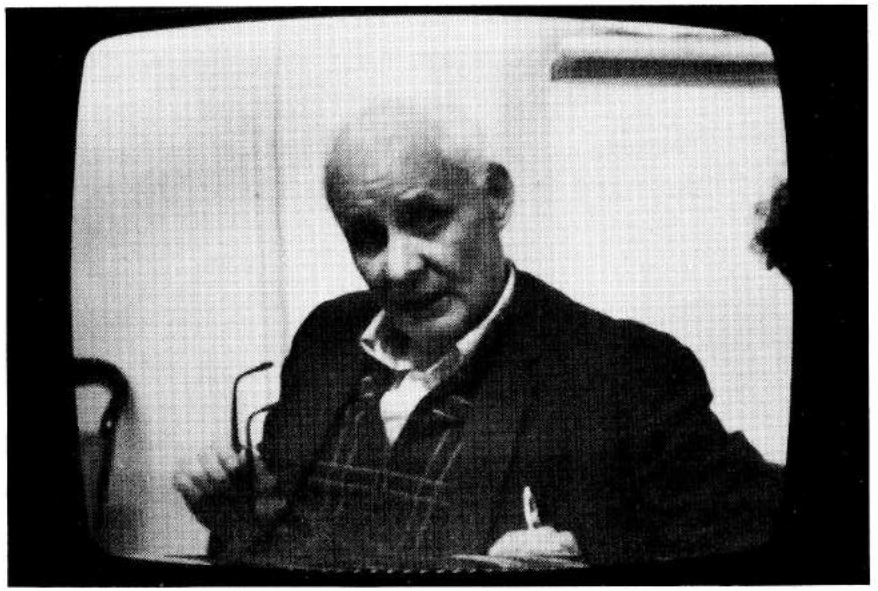
"The houses are really too small to let them play freely, when they're the size of my kids... They need a lot of room for to get rid of their excess energy that they've got."

CHILDREN ARE PRECIOUS

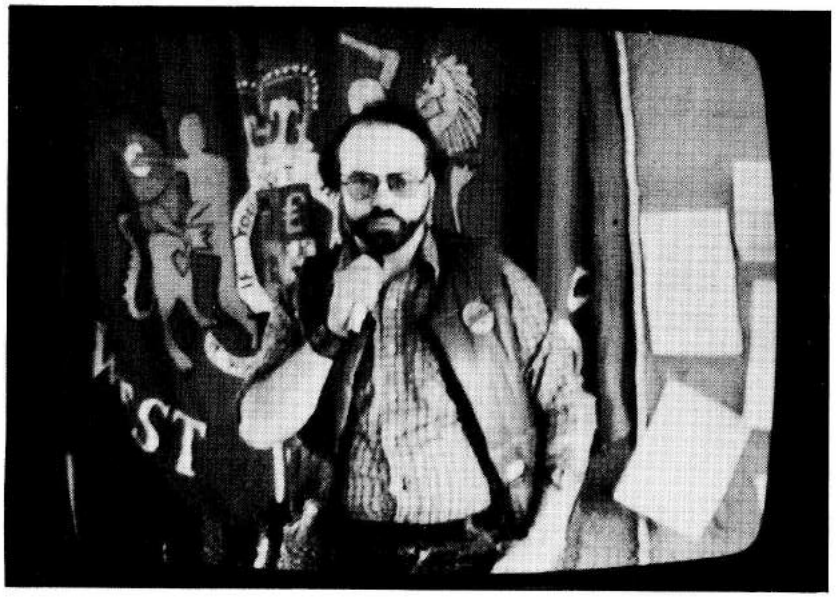
A growing number of parents in Castlemilk, and teenagers, will not accept this situation. Our children are too precious. We feel that for the kids' sake, we can help each other, and help ourselves.

Many of these parents are involved in the Jeely Piece Clubs. The Clubs aim at happy summer holidays. For this year, they have the use of 3 primary schools for 5 weeks (4th July - 5th August). They have booked buses to take kids away very cheaply, and are getting together basic equipment for games, making things, dressing up, etc. There will also be film shows, disco and kids' con-

Glasgow: Castlemilk's community newspaper



Glasgow : Eddie Graham of Castlemilk Claimants' Union

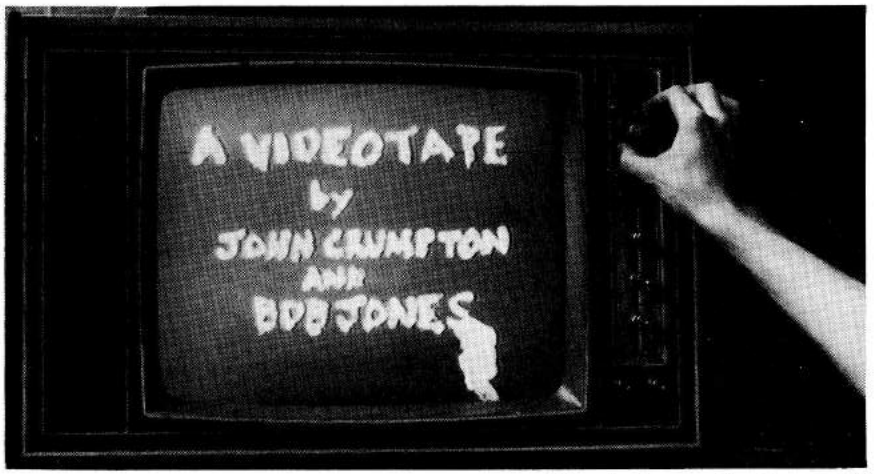


Glasgow: a speaker at a national Claimants' Union conference

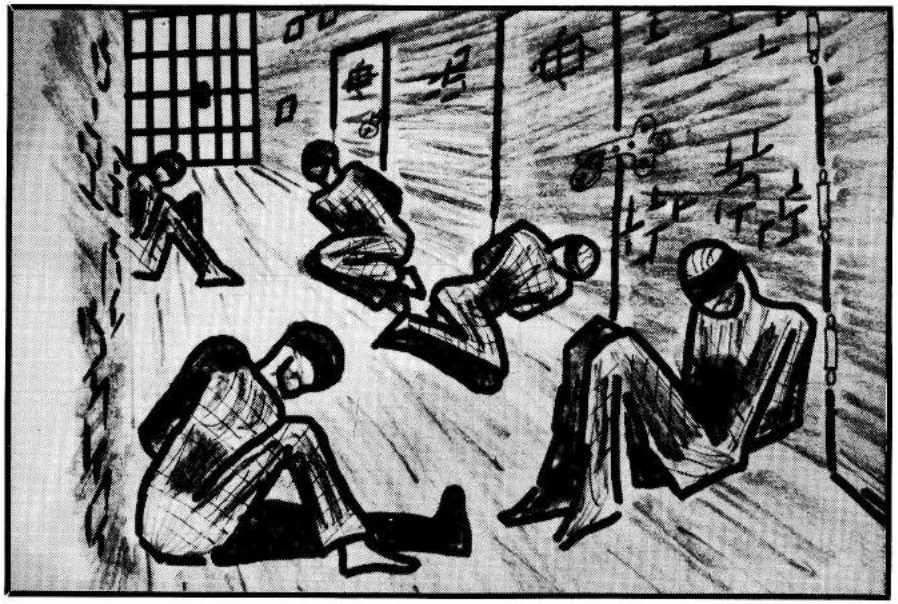

Glasgow: Castlemilk's local social security office



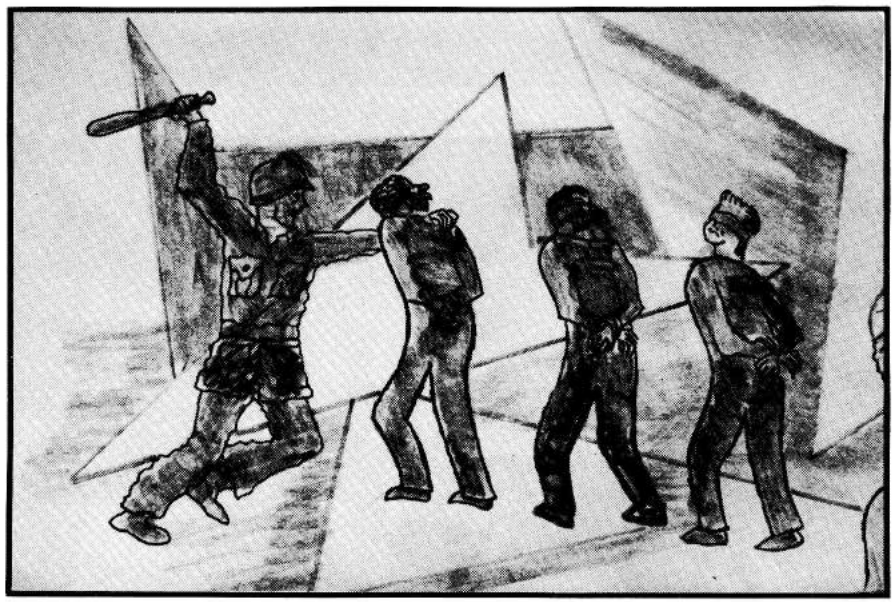
Manchester: John Crumpton with children on Hulme council estate




Manchester: a video tape credit



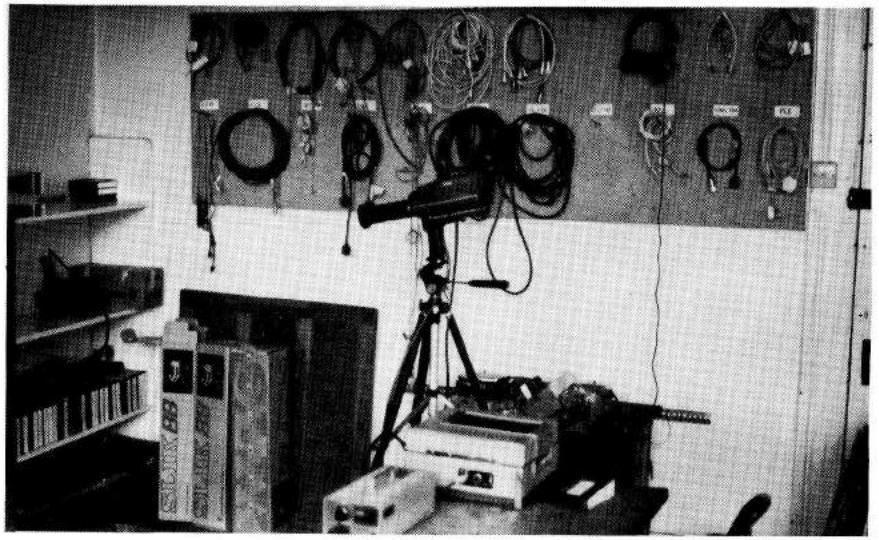
Manchester: a Chilean exile's drawing used in the Chile tapes






Manchester: Bob Jones tapes a demonstration at the Immigration Office


Belfast: the workshop's front door



Belfast: the workshop's portapack and store room





*The British Media and Ireland*: cover and cartoons


## Chapter 6

# Manchester Film and Video Workshop

This workshop is unlike the rest in that it has developed from a predominantly film base. However, a good deal of its present work is with video. This change of emphasis has come about through financial and technical pressures combining to make it cheaper and easier to use video than film.

John Crumpton, who has remained workshop organiser since its formation in 1977, traces its origins back to the Independent Film Makers Association set up in the mid-1970s. A number of individuals in the Manchester area, including members of the IFA, were frustrated by the lack of opportunities and facilities for those wanting to make non-commercial films.

At about the same time, the film panel of North West Arts, the regional arts association, were formulating a long term policy which, it was hoped, would eventually give Manchester its own regional film centre. It seemed the two needs related to one another and so it was decided to set up a workshop as a first step to realising the film centre idea, which still required considerable amounts of cash from the British Film Institute to make it possible in its entirety.

Because there was not a vast amount of money available for creating the workshop it was initially decided to concentrate on super-8 film and video equipment. A limited amount of 16mm film gear was also available. In 1977, soon after it was established by North West Arts' film panel, the workshop moved into far from ideal premises near Manchester city centre.

The building is an old mill, built last century, and reached down a narrow cobbled road which comes to an abrupt dead-end. At first the space was shared with a printing group, but they moved out leaving the workshop with two floors to work in. At present the ground floor has the general office, where all four workers have their desks, a small hall, used for meetings, film projection, video screenings and



shooting, and a small room for 8mm and 16mm film editing. The basement contains an area for video editing and darkroom space for still photography.

In practice the workshop functions in a similar manner to most others in the field. It aims to provide access to media facilities for individuals and groups who otherwise would find it difficult or impossible to lay their hands on any. However, in the theoretical framework devised by the funding film panel this point appears: "That priority be given to film makers/groups who wish to seriously engage with the problems and practices of film and video as media in their own right, as opposed to using those media in an uncritical way as simply transparent vehicles for the transmission of some predetermined information."

Here the accent is clearly placed on creative uses as distinct from community ones — an attitude which one might expect from a film panel of an arts association. The brief history of the workshop has shown that there are minor conflicts between the film panel's views and those of the workshop staff — differences which will be considered later.

## Dissatisfaction

John Crumpton landed the job of workshop organiser largely out of dissatisfaction with what he had been doing before. He'd been a local government clerk, worked in theatre and as an assistant film editor — all after completing art college. Specifically he wanted to be able to make his own films and help others in the same position.

As the workshop grew — there was no shortage of people ringing up to borrow film projectors, portapacks and wanting to learn how to use them — it became clear that more workers were needed. First to be taken on, after a long period doing the job voluntarily, was Greg Dropkin, an American from Chicago who came to this country to study mathematics. He has been on the payroll since mid-1978.

He states his own position unambiguously: "If I had the money I would make films. But I don't, so I make video tapes instead." He sees the workshop as officially having two purposes: to provide equipment for independent film and video producers and to provide technical support and training for community groups — "with not much emphasis on what the final product looks like." The first purpose

derives from the initial and continuing film panel money. The second from subsequent money from the community arts panel.

He describes his own motivation for working there as being mainly political. "I want to make films like the Other Cinema in London distributes — political documentaries about what is going on around me. If I couldn't do that on video tape then I'd try to do it by writing. I'm not trying to make 'my' films. In work I've done there have been a lot of people involved at different levels. I'm not concerned to override what other people may want — although I'll put my point of view."

He draws a broad distinction between long and short term projects. His own clear preference is for the longer term ones "which are done slowly and carefully with a good deal of background reading and discussion." The briefer type of work — "where people call in and want a result in three days" — doesn't particularly appeal to Greg Dropkin, with a few exceptions.

One of these exceptions in an occasional session with a group of mentally handicapped young people in their late teens and 20s. "They usually come to the workshop at a day's notice and want to make something immediately. It's very exciting for them. Once they've shot their video tape nothing else is done except replay it. I enjoy that, but I don't particularly like constantly showing someone how to plug a portapack in."

Roughly half Greg Dropkin's work is on long term projects, the rest is divided between one-off activities and printing photographs in the workshop's darkroom. A considerable amount of time is spent on a variety of groups wishing to screen both their own and other people's material. For the year 1978/79 the workshop drew up a list of all the groups which had used their facilities. It totalled 107 organisations. Under the heading community groups appeared 23 names, including the Daisy Bank Day Centre and North Manchester Women's Aid. Under cultural/leisure organisations were 44 entries, including Cheetham Adventure Playground, Rochdale Film Society and Rabid Records.

There were 17 entries under educational agencies, including Manchester Free School, several university and polytechnic groups and further education departments. Ethnic minority groups clocked up nine entries, including George Jackson House and the Shanti Third World Centre. Five statutory organisations are listed, including Moss Side Child Guidance Clinic and Eccles Probation Service.



Finally, under others, appeared nine groups, including the Anti-Nazi League and the Radical Media Conference.

## The other workers

In addition to John Crumpton and Greg Dropkin there are two other full-time workers. Bob Jones, like John, comes from an art college background. He became interested in video when portapacks first appeared in the UK around 1969. After leaving college he took a string of jobs including one working in Granada TV's film library. In the mid-1970s he met others in Manchester — Greg Dropkin among them — who wanted to pursue their own style of committed independent film making, and was subsequently involved in the setting up of the workshop. He became a part-time paid worker in early 1979 and went full-time in June that year.

He has worked on a range of video projects, but still feels he has yet to find a method of working which completely satisfies him. He is critical of the workshop's role which he feels is sometimes little more than being "an audio-visual warehouse". Like Greg Dropkin he would prefer to spend his time working for a long period with a group of adults — but he hasn't achieved this. He dislikes the town centre position which the workshop occupies and believes a small base in an outlying neighbourhood might be more productive for the kind of activity he wishes to develop.

The fourth full-time worker, Peter Bainbridge, worked as a bank clerk after leaving school. After more white collar jobs he took some A-levels at a college and then a degree in politics at Hull University. This was followed by a period working in a factory and a brief course on community arts at Manchester polytechnic. He sees himself working within the general context of community arts which he summarises as "finding a way to help people organise themselves."

He works over a very broad front which takes in training and production in video, still photography and super-8 film making as well as a number of routine jobs like answering the phone and ordering supplies. Most of his activity is with young people. Some of these film and video projects involve related arts activities such as drama, set building, making masks and so on. Others take a local event such as a carnival as the springboard for a production and some are concerned with immediate issues such as unemployment.

The main emphasis of his work leans towards helping groups

organise themselves and providing basic equipment training as part of an overall project. He places less emphasis on finished products particularly for groups who are new to film and video tape making. However, he does believe in groups developing their practical skills so they can achieve more polished products which in turn will win wider appeal.

There is also a part-time helper, Wayne, who clears up around the workshop. He recently left school and is unemployed. His presence has enabled him to learn about film animation. He also uses the premises as a free practice hall for his rock band.

## The gear

Manchester Film and Video Workshop has the largest array of equipment of any group examined in this study. On the video side there are two black and white portapacks, associated mains edit decks, a pair of old black and white studio cameras (which can be linked with the portapack cameras to provide multi-camera coverage of an event), TV sets and two home video cassette recorders.

For 16mm film activities there are a pair of projectors, a Bolex camera and quite sophisticated editing machines. For super-8 film there is a projector, two cameras (including sound recording) and editing facilities. For still photography there is a 35mm camera and darkroom facilities for processing and printing. There is shared equipment between media such as lighting, screens, microphones, audio recorders and so on.

Like other groups the workshop has three scales of hire charges for these facilities. The first for people without grants, the second for people with them and the third for "commercial and higher educational bodies." The highest charge is £15 a day for hiring a portapack at the commercial rate. At the lower community rate this drops to £3 a day.

Yet it would be wrong to leave the impression that the workshop is well-equipped or that the workers think it is. Although it may have more facilities than most other resource centres of its type, there is still a lot of room for improvement. Much of the equipment is old — none of the video gear can make original tapes in colour for instance. On top of this the physical state of the premises is such that efficient work becomes even more difficult. A few days spent in the workshop with people popping in and out, the phone continually ringing,



equipment having to be transported from one place to another, training sessions having to be arranged and so on, would convince anyone that the workshop manages to carry out a more than satisfactory job against quite impossible odds.

Even more miraculous is that so much considered production — requiring the active participation of workshop members through many or all of its stages — actually takes place. One of the most time-consuming video tapes yet made using the workshop's facilities and expertise took as its subject the position of Chilean refugees in Britain.

## The Chile tape

Both Greg Dropkin and Bob Jones independently of each other had the idea, in 1978, of producing something about Chilean exiles who were forced to leave their country after the military coup had destroyed the democratically elected government of Popular Unity there led by Allende. Greg Dropkin already knew one of the refugees in Manchester — Jaime Cortez — and through him arranged a meeting to consider the idea with several Chileans.

The group which he assembled were all associated with one Chilean political party, the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left). It was generally agreed that a video tape should be made, but that the tape's perspective should be a broad one so that it could appeal to a wide audience. In other words the tape was not to confine itself exclusively to the MIR political tendency.

But the MIR predominance in the steering group offended other Chilean political groups and they decided they didn't want to take part. A letter asking for help was written in Spanish and sent to all known Chileans in Manchester and not a single response was forthcoming — except from MIR members. So the project got off to an unfortunately sectarian start, yet as it progressed its broad character became apparent and many non-MIR Chileans became involved. In the end, of all refugees interviewed on video tape, not one was a MIR member.

Basically the MIR is a marxist-leninist party which, before 1970, carried on a great deal of its work outside the traditional areas of trade union industrial activity. Instead it directed much of its energy to the slums and minority groups such as the Mapuche indians. It was in conflict with the Allende government because it had to take direct

action to win help for those sections of society it worked in. There were also other, more profound political differences.

While the MIR broadly supported the Allende government, it regarded the period of Popular Unity as a breathing space during which left-wing activity should develop and expand. They did not regard the Allende government as a solution to Chile's problems in itself, but as a stepping stone in that direction. The Chilean Communist Party felt that the Allende government fell because it was trying to introduce change too fast. The MIR Party and other left groups believed the opposite — that US intervention could be foreseen and should have been prepared for.

During the initial discussions on what should be included in the video tape several basic ideas surfaced. One was to counter the myth that a group of poor refugees from the third world had been generously welcomed by a civilised and liberal British society. As Greg Dropkin explains: "The real situation was that a number of refugees were admitted and they then had to face all the problems of the dole, housing, health service and so on. Most of them couldn't speak English and had a very bad time setttling down."

Another proposed aim was to give information about what had happened in Chile since the military coup as well as some account of life during Popular Unity. It was felt that interest in the Chile issue had become rather dampened after Allende's overthrow and that more recent information might help to rekindle interest.

Jaime Cortez describes a further area that they wanted to tackle: "Britain is supposed to be a developed country and Chile an underdeveloped one. But at certain levels it is vice versa. Because we in Chile are a poor country the level of mobilisation, the consciousness of the people is higher in the third world than it is in Britain.

"We had a special view of Europe from books and films — but that only showed the world of the upper classes. It came as a shock to a lot of us that Europe also has its poverty and exploitation. For instance, there is relatively little racism in Latin America, so to come to a country where you are made to feel inferior because of your skin colour is very strange and shocking.

"For women in Chile children's nurseries were common — to find they are rare in a civilised society also comes as a shock. So we wanted to make a video tape about why these refugees were here, what forced them to leave Chile, and how they see their lives here. As I see it we are aiming at an audience generally in the solidarity



movement, those who are fairly knowledgeable about politics with an humanitarian concern. It would also be useful to Chileans just arriving here."

Greg Dropkin admits his preferred audience for the tape was trade union groups. There was some debate on whether the tape should appeal primarily to a British or Chilean audience and it was agreed to go for a the British one — so the tape is in English. As the discussions lengthened and interest grew, so the scope of the project expanded. Eventually it was agreed that the final tape should run for 90 minutes in three sections.

## Production problems

An undertaking of such vast proportions did not pass without its share of problems. Early on a Chilean using the camera at a demonstration accidentally pointed it at the sun irreversibly scarring the tube — which meant a small dark squiggle appeared in the middle of all the pictures shot on that camera afterwards. After six months of gathering material (the project began in the spring of 1978) there was a distinct lack of dramatic tape sequences. Luckily, this was overcome by a weekend's recording at a reception centre in London where most Latin American refugees are sent on arrival in this country.

There were also severe hold-ups on translation work. But eventually this difficulty was overcome. At the time of writing, the first 30-minute section has been completed, and the editing and dubbing of the other two are well advanced. So far the project has received just one grant of £100 from North West Arts to cover the expenses of the London taping. All the rest of the costs have come out of the workshop's general fund. A further grant may be sought to pay for a 16mm film copy of the completed tape to widen its chances of exhibition.

The opening section of the Chile tape proves that all of the time and energy which has gone into the project has been worthwhile. There are technical imperfections, but these are relatively minor irritations. The tape manages to build up a solid picture of what it is like to be a refugee arriving in Britain — and the first hurdle comes immediately with immigration control at Heathrow. As one person comments: "Some immigration officers are obviously unsympthetic to immigrants of any sort, but particularly to refugees." The medical checks and questions are all humiliating.

The interviews conducted at the London reception centre — an hotel in Notting Hill — are riveting. Accounts of close relatives being taken from their homes by the Chilean secret police to be tortured to death are appalling. Two former copper processing workers, now living in Manchester, recall the days before the success of Popular Unity: "There was exploitation by the multi-nationals — they took the raw materials, but left disease and poverty."

There are several minutes of film taken from a movie made by Popular Unity supporters in Chile itself. A sequence of a bus ride in Chile is intercut with one video taped from the top of a Manchester double-decker — the two worlds collide on the screen. The Chile Solidarity Campaign helped at various stages of the production. The basic team was made up of Greg Dropkin and half-a-dozen Chileans living in Manchester, which has a Chilean community of about 250. It is hoped the tape will be shown outside the north west region.

## Immigration

Another long-term project, which began more recently in autumn 1979, concerns immigration. Greg Dropkin believes this subject "is more hopeful because the left has started to take up immigration and deportation, whereas Chile is no longer a big issue." The idea of making a video tape on this theme developed from two people who came to the workshop to see another tape — a Granada TV film recorded off-air — which dealt with the attempted deportation of Abdul Azad of Oldham.

Although the Granada film was good by broadcast television standards it limited itself to the one case and did not deal with deportations in general or the position immigrant workers find themselves in. So the two people who came to see the Azad programme — one was a community advice worker, the other a Bengali law centre worker — decided with Greg Dropkin, Bob Jones and Peter Bainbridge to try to make a more detailed tape. Several other people turned up to the first three meetings to discuss how the tape should be made.

So far these discussions have mainly revolved around the two key questions of content and audience. There have been differences over how much time should be given to an historical account of racism and how much to relating the problems of immigrant workers in this country to similar guest-workers in other west European states.



Parallel to these ideological arguments, research tasks — on the various immigration laws, particular deportation cases and interviewing individuals — are defined and given to people to carry out as quickly as possible. In the meantime there are a number of current campaigns underway to fight deportation proceedings against black immigrants in the region and arrangements are made for portapacks to cover as many demonstrations as possible.

A picket of the immigration appeals office in Manchester to support Pakistani Nasira Begum was covered by Greg Dropkin and Bob Jones from the workshop with a portapack to build up this kind of material. The 50 or so people on the demonstration mostly know of the film and video workshop already and are more than willing to cooperate and be interviewed.

Contacts with other groups who have experience of immigration issues — like the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants — are put in hand. Someone else tries to follow up the Thames TV series *Our People*, so that extracts may be used in the new video tape. In a similar way to the Chile tape an intensive programme of discussion and research is launched to produce what is hoped will become a comprehensive, informed and watchable video tape which will make a significant and unique contribution to campaigns fighting existing and proposed repressive immigration laws.

## Commitment

In the final analysis the Chile tapes, the immigration tapes, and the dozens of other video tapes made by Manchester film and video workshop in conjunction with all sorts of groups, organisations and individuals, depend on the degree of commitment given them by the workshop's workers. The massive undertaking of the Chile project only struggled through its complicated and lengthy stages because Greg Dropkin wasn't prepared to see it fail.

At the beginning of the project he wasn't able to speak a word of Spanish. Almost at its end he can conduct a basic interview in Spanish. This is not to undervalue the contribution of those Chilean refugees who participated in the production, but it does underline the deep commitment of the video worker who saw it through.

This process of struggle and perseverance — repeated in other community media projects all over the country — goes on in a context of limited resources, technical breakdowns and extreme pressures on

time and energy from the competing demands of other campaigns and pressure groups.

Yet despite this and other displays of sheer hard work, bodies like the Manchester workshop are consistently underfinanced. It is a matter worth thinking about — and one which will be considered at the end of this study — but, for the moment, let us examine where the workshop derives its income.

## Funding

As mentioned earlier, the workshop grew out of plans for a film centre conceived by the film panel of the North West Arts Association — the regional organisation of the Arts Council of Great Britain. The major share of the workshop's finances have come always from the film panel — they have paid the co-ordinator's salary (John Crumpton), bought most of the equipment and footed the bill for the general running costs. However, since early 1979, when the workshop's staff began to expand — first by one part-timer and eventually by three more (Greg Dropkin, Bob Jones and Peter Bainbridge) — the community arts panel of North West Arts Association has also contributed money to pay these workers.

This new source of income has brought to the fore some of the tensions surrounding funding for groups such as the film and video workshop. In an application for money to the community arts panel submitted by Greg Dropkin and Bob Jones in late 1978, these observations appear from Bob Jones: "Whilst I welcome the interest shown in our application . . . I was worried by certain attitudes made clear in the questions asked by the community arts officer and a panel member.

"I feel the emphasis placed on pure training work betrays a lack of understanding of how much work is involved in working with a group and helping them produce a film, tape or newspaper that best expresses what they want to say . . . We do not see our future as *just* teachers of basic operational skills to hundreds of community workers. It is not due to our personal whims that groups like the Chileans or the literacy group become involved in the workshop. It is because there are people around who understand from a practical point of view the value of access to 'alternative' media."

This passage underlines the kind of pressure, however slight, which can be exerted by a funding source. The implication is that the community arts panel wanted to see an emphasis on training a large number of people in the technical operation of media, rather than pursuing long term projects. It is also made clear in this application that some of the workshop staff (at that point in time they were in fact voluntary workers) felt that the community arts panel didn't want them to carry out political work.



A specific criticism was levelled by the community arts panel at a video tape made by the workshop in conjunction with some council tenants living in Moss Side. In the same application Greg Dropkin notes: "I am a little disappointed that some panel members did not feel that the Moss Side tape was community arts . . . People may disagree with its political position . . . but it was certainly a tape made as far as possible with a group of people whose experience of the established media has been entirely negative. Some panel members expressed the opinion that we manipulated the interviews. This suggests a lack of awareness of the real depth of feeling among the tenants of Moss Side. No one could put words into the mouths of these people, who are simply speaking from their own experience. Certainly the tenants do not speak in terms of sociology or economics, but it would be completely blind to pretend that politics and political awareness are not part of the tenants' everyday life."

## Is it art?

The workshop is also subject to pressure — pulling in a different direction — from the film panel. In another document, written by the film officer, this appears: "There seems to me a possible tension between the declared aims of the film panel in the sphere of film/video production and the direction the workshop has been taking over the last year (1978/9). This tension has been heightened to some extent by community arts panel (funding). The distinction between the respective areas has been recently outlined in the film panel's revised production guidelines:

> 'The panel is unwilling to support projects which are primarily extensions of social and community work, in which the final film or video tape is of secondary importance to the process and experience of group work. The community arts panel of North West Arts will consider such applications . . .' "

In other words the film panel is more concerned that the workshop should undertake projects which produce more considered

end results — results which, to quote another film panel document, "engage with the problems and practices of film and video as media in their own right, as opposed to using those media in an uncritical way as simply transparent vehicles for the transmission of some predetermined information." As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this view of the film panel underlines a creative and theoretical approach.

But these two attitudes — of the film and community arts panels — both fail to appreciate the feelings of the workshop staff as a whole. Significantly both views implicitly shy away from any overt political involvement on the part of the workshop or the groups it works with. So in a real sense the workshop finds itself going against the wishes — often expressed in a round about way — of both its paymasters.

Because the funding of the workshop is split between two panels of North West Arts, and has not been given systematically, the workshop's development, particularly on the equipment level, has been haphazard. However, as Bob Jones points out, this has had its advantages. Because few members of either panel have bothered to find out in any detail what the workshop is actually doing on a day to day basis, a degree of freedom has resulted.

Greg Dropkin takes a more cynical view. Asked whether he felt there was a built-in conflict between relying on arts association money for his own preferred projects — such as the Chile and immigration tapes — he says: "I don't make any claims to be either creative or artistic. I'm sure they don't enjoy funding me and at some point will cut me off."

The workshop co-ordinator, John Crumpton, is more philosophical. "It's the classic case — you always angle a particular funding application to the body you're applying to. It's difficult to generalise on the overall nature of the work we're doing when each project has its own identity. Basically we're trying to encourage people to make films and video tapes and we're trying to find audiences for those products — audiences which will give something back after a presentation."

John Crumpton sums up his own motivation, which serves to speak for the workshop as a whole, by saying: "I like working with people on an equal basis. Even if a video tape which has taken hours to make only gets shown to 50 people — then that's better than attracting a huge audience with a product that's compromised. It's only worthwhile if the tape is made on the terms of those people directly involved. If you haven't got your heart and your head in the right place then you're lost. All you can do is what you feel is right and just hope you make steady progress. I know that the barricades are not going to go up in the streets tomorrow.

"We work on a different basis to television, which regards interviewees as camera fodder, ripe for distortion and exploitation. There is normally no discussion or consultation with people used by the established media. We work jointly with groups towards a mutually agreed production, at the same time trying to break down the myth and élitism of media technology."

## Chapter 7

# Media Workshop Belfast

The battle-scarred streets of Belfast and all that goes with them — the heavily armed police and army patrols, the searches and the medieval-looking military fortresses — might seem an unlikely context for a band of community media workers to be active in. However, the Belfast Workshop manages to exist.

A small group interested in the potential of low-gauge video has existed in Belfast since about 1972. But it wasn't until the beginning of 1978 that it moved into its first proper home — two floors of old offices over shop premises in Lombard Street right in the centre of Belfast. Here the media workshop shares the space with a closely related group known as Art and Research Exchange (ARE).

Both the workshop and ARE had founding members in common. ARE aims "to foster and promote the development and participation of the arts among the inhabitants of Northern Ireland." Among its current activities are the provision of rehearsal space for local punk bands, a silkscreen printroom and the staging of art and photographic exhibitions. The two organisations, although administratively separate, also share a connection with the Free International University, set up by two German intellectuals, the writer Heinrich Böll and the artist Joseph Beuys. Both groups participated in the Documenta 6 exhibition of modern European art held at Kassel in West Germany in 1977 and organised by the Free International University.

Quite a number of those involved in the media workshop come from an art college background. The first full-time coordinator, Rainer Pagel, studied art both in his home country, Germany, and in Belfast. He took the job on when the workshop moved into its Lombard Street premises. His wages are paid by the education department under a special community worker research project,



which basically aims to stimulate self-help community activity in the depressed city. Pagel had already been involved with both the workshop and ARE for some time on a voluntary basis before he was offered the job.

The equipment and running costs are mostly paid for out of an Arts Council grant which amounted to £5,000 in 1979. There are another two full-time workers, both young women employed on a Manpower Services Commission scheme — called Young Help — which gives school leavers temporary jobs lasting a year. The workshop has four portapacks, a video editing system — which uses a half-inch deck to a one-inch deck, associated sound and lighting gear, a still photography darkroom and equipment related to that. All of the workshop's activities are housed in four office areas: a general office, a portapack room where tapes can be viewed and cables and repair equipment are stored, a video editing room and a darkroom.

## Neutrality

Working as it does in a city and region permeated by sectarianism the workshop attempts to project itself as a neutral resource centre. "We try to keep it that way," explains Rainer Pagel, "And to the outside we always have to keep it that way. If we were based on just one side of the community — with the Republicans for instance — we wouldn't last very long in the centre of town. No one would give you a grant here for sectarian work."

Even though the workshop does operate a strictly non-sectarian policy on who it works with, the fact remains that its facilities and services have been more heavily in demand in Catholic areas than in Protestant ones. The point is illustrated in the response the workshop received when it wished to recruit three workers on the Young Help scheme.

Two Catholics were recruited quite quickly, but when it came to finding a third person — who it had been decided should be Protestant — difficulties set in. One leading member of the Protestant community, when told by the workshop that they were looking for a non-sectarian Protestant to fill a vacancy, replied: "There's no such thing as a non-sectarian Protestant." Although several people have been interviewed for the post at the time of writing it has not been filled.

Rainer Pagel typifies the workshop's range of activity as

"supporting, and in some cases inciting, community art. Something like housing action. Quite a few women's groups have used video to highlight the situation of women in ghetto areas — battered women, lack of nursery facilities and so on. There's also your traditional bits of music and ploughing matches which have been documented for the local museum. In an art context we monitored on video tape an Arts Council programme on performance."

When he started as workshop coordinator he saw his initial task as creating a sound technical base. All the equipment was gathered together from its holding points all over Belfast and put into good working order. The video editing room was constructed. One of the most successful aspects of the workshop has been Rainer Pagel's efforts to develop in-house technical skills.

After two years of operation the vast majority of equipment breakdowns are now dealt with internally. Before, even the simplest repair — like the replacement of a portapack fuse — required machines being sent away for a minumm of three weeks. So not only has efficiency improved, but a lot of money has been saved, which is to be spent on more complex repair equipment such as oscilloscopes. Over a recent six-month period the longest any portapack had been out of service was just one day — a remarkable achievement for a community video enterprise. A good stock of spares has also been built up.

## Community centres

A good deal of the workshop staff's time is spent visiting community centres offering training sessions with the video equipment. These have generally proved successful often leading to further projects. Visits to a nursery group run voluntarily in West Belfast resulted in the organiser suggesting that he paid for another portapack which the workshop could keep on the understanding that the nursery could borrow one whenever it wanted. Such a system is far more enlightened than a small group keeping its video equipment locked away in a cupboard when not using it.

In a nine-month period during 1978–9 the workshop trained over 400 individuals in the use of video gear. For a couple of days' loan there is no charge and longer loans are discouraged unless the group or individual can show they have a clear idea of why they want the equipment. The overwhelming bulk of loans are therefore for very short-term exercises — usually the recording of a single event.



A large proportion of video tapes made in conjunction with the workshop are concerned with the social ills of poor housing and unemployment — both worse in Northern Ireland than any other part of Britain. This focus of interest reflects Rainer Pagel's view of the workshop's position: "I think I would prefer to say we are involved in community work rather than community arts as such. Although I used the term community arts earlier, I don't really like it. Essentially the work here is social and political with the reservation that video is just one more tool in the toolbox of social action."

Both of the Young Help workers — Pat Short and Patricia McComish — see what the workshop does as mainly community work. They express a strictly non-sectarian attitude about their activity, stressing the bridge-building possibilities of video. Pat Short says: "Video can show both sides of the community that they share the same problems. They can see each other's tapes." To a limited extent this is true — tapes have been exchanged between the Catholic and Protestant communities — but it has hardly taken place on a large scale.

The chance of working full-time on the project has particularly widened Pat Short's horizons. When her year's contract with Young Help expires she intends to stay on — if her wages can be found from a another source. After leaving school she went on a secretarial course. "At college I was put in an office one day a week sitting by a typewriter and I couldn't stand it. I like to do things where you go out to talk to people. Before I came here I felt that community and social work were only for people with A-levels and degrees. Without coming here I would have done voluntary work, but now I intend to get a full-time paid job."

She continues: "It's changed the way I think. I tend to look at things in a more adult way. I've seen a lot more and taken on a lot more responsibility. I'm very lucky to be here — most of my old school friends are either in offices, stitching or are unemployed. I know a girl with five O-levels pushing a tea trolley."

The experience for Patricia McComish has been less positive. She really wants a place in art college and dislikes Belfast. Photography has drawn her interest more than video because she feels it is a medium you have greater control over. Although she

believes the workshop is worthwhile she intends leaving it and the city when her contract is up.

## Unemployment

When asked to give an example of a video tape in which they had been involved and which had also been successful, both young women independently cited one called *Craigavon Unemployment*. This was made in 1979. It developed out of another video tape made by a local community centre worker with the workshop about unemployment in Ballymurphy. This tape had been shown in several places, including Craigavon, where another community worker suggested a local version should be produced.

A community worker did the interviewing and the workshop looked after the video taping. Five 20-minute reels of material were shot and eventually edited down to a 45-minute programme. The tape consists of a group of young unemployed men talking about their lives on the dole. The depressing reality of their position with nowhere to go and nothing to spend is solidly described in their own words.

One of them, Eddie, suffers from diabetes and he relates the story of how he was thrown off a government training scheme with only three weeks to go when it was discovered he had a disability. "We're going to have to terminate you, they said," Eddie recalls. "It's as if you haven't grown up — you're still a child if you've got a disability. Once they know I've got a handicap they don't want to know."

Samson earns a little pocket money by babysitting for his older brothers. He explains: "One of the problems I find when you go for a job is that they say, 'Let's see what your school record's like.' When I was a kid I was in the hospital a lot and I went to primary school very late. I was in an orphan home until I was eleven. I was then faced with a big place in Lurgan, St. Paul's school. I did have a rough time — that's how I got my name Samson."

Later he refers to filling in forms at job interviews — "Those old tricks. I say I'll take it home to do as my spelling's no good. But just because someone can't write well, that's no reason for turning a person down for the job — he might be better at the job than at writing." Eddie adds bitterly: "The pen isn't going to go into your tools."

The video tape is an effective and personal portrayal of what it is like to be young and unemployed. Its premiere was staged at the Craigavon community centre where an invited audience of 50 people saw it. The mayor was there with some councillors, some employers and a cross section of local people including those who appeared in the video tape. After the screening the idea was to have a discussion on the theme of youth unemployment.



The tape was shown on three television monitors simultaneously and, according to Rainer Pagel, grasped the audience's attention well. He recalls: "What really struck me was that the chaotic nature of most discussions which happen here was removed by the tape. It seemed to bring a degree of structure in. And for the three workshop staff it was very beneficial for us to see that a tape could have quite a powerful effect."

## Tokenism

A direct result of the tape was an offer of two jobs by the director of Goodyear tyres to Eddie and Samson. In one way this reflects the success of the project, but the workshop staff have no illusions about it being little more than a token gesture — and certainly one which will have a negligible impact on chronic youth unemployment in the whole region. However, it brought a spark of hope to the drab lives of two young men.

The bulk of the video work carried out using the workshop staff and facilities is not dissimilar to *Craigavon Unemployment*, although it is mostly on a smaller scale. A good deal of time is spent training people in the use of video gear so they can make tapes about housing conditions, lack of social amenities and local events. However, there is another strand of video activity which focuses more precisely and deliberately on the political realities of Northern Ireland. This is usually produced by people who have developed more than a passing or slight interest in the medium, people who wish to construct video tapes which reveal aspects of a society torn by deep internal divisions and under what to many people is nothing less than occupation by a foreign army.

Among all kinds of left-wing and civil rights groups — not to mention large sections of the Catholic and Protestant working class population — there has built up a tremendous distrust of the established news media. Because so many newsworthy events have occurred in Northern Irish streets, literally on the doorsteps of

thousands of people, the reality of those events and the coverage they receive in newspapers, on radio and on television has been scrutinised from first-hand knowledge on a massive scale. And that coverage has been found to be sadly lacking in accuracy and truth. At best it has been slapdash and gleaned from fourth-hand sources, at worst it has been consciously manipulated to produce a desired effect. There have been few exceptions to this general rule — very few indeed.

In a pamphlet called *The British Media and Ireland* — with the subtitle *Truth: the first casualty* — the considerable extent to which news and comment about the Northern Irish troubles has been controlled is outlined. The contributions included in it come from a range of prominent writers, producers, critics and academics.

Consistently the media have been instructed not to report the policies and arguments of the "terrorists". Meanwhile the army has assembled its own sophisticated propaganda machine which, in the words of Brigadier Frank Kitson, must "promote its own (the government's) cause and undermine that of the enemy by disseminating its view of the situation, and this involves a carefully planned and coordinated campaign of what for want of a better word must regrettably be called psychological operations."

Such "psychological operations" include the issuing of press statements saying that "terrorist gunmen" killed innocent civilians while attempting to shoot British soldiers, when, after enquiries, it turns out that the civilians were shot with army bullets and no proof of "terrorist gunmen" can be found. Such black propaganda has saturated the Northern Ireland conflict. (See *Sunday Times* 26 September 1976 and examples on page 43 of *The British Media and Ireland*.)

## A Provo funeral

The potential of using the workshop's video equipment for putting across — or at least recording — a view of what is happening in Northern Ireland which is very different from that of the established media has at least been partially exploited. An example of such use is *Funeral*, a video tape recorded in the summer of 1977. It follows, without the aid of any commentary, the progress of the funeral of a young Provisional IRA volunteer.

The relatively unadorned presentation of the event through the video tape stands in stark contrast to the sort of treatment it would



typically receive in a television news bulletin or documentary: a few brief shots of the uniformed paramilitaries interpreted for the audience by a partisan commentary. The tape runs for almost 30 minutes and starts by showing the children gathering outside the block of Ballymurphy council flats from which the procession will later set off.

At several points through the day the tape captures the straight news media — particularly the newspaper photographers — as they hover to snap the most dramatic aspects of the ritual. As the uniformed paramilitaries first assemble round the hearse (with the sign *Healy Belfast* advertising the undertaker in a side window), it is the moaning sound of automatic film winders in a few dozen press cameras that impresses itself on the viewer's attention.

As the cortege slowly moves past block after block of bricked up flats an old woman cries and the half-dozen or so male Provos guarding the coffin march along stiffly, but all out of step. It is a ragged urban army and the soldiers on display that day were very young indeed — some only in their early teens.

When the column halts in a terrace street for the firing party to produce its revolvers and fire three volleys of shots in honour of the dead young man, the assembled press cameras whirr even more loudly into frenzied activity. The procession moves onto a four-lane road and takes its width over entirely — no army or police personnel are to be seen. As the cemetery is reached a woman in the crowd is shown filming on a home movie camera — possibly one of the family or a friend.

An army observation helicopter is heard, but not seen, circling overhead. Someone asks: "Could you move back and leave the priest through, please?" The service is read: "Lord you are our life and resurrection," and the Lord's Prayer is chanted. A little boy of about six cries bitterly in the front row around the graveside and a woman strokes his head. Dirt is shovelled on top of the lowered coffin.

A heap of wreaths are laid on top of the mound to the orders of a man with a megaphone — first those of the family and then those of the different battalions of the Provisionals' Belfast brigade. The oration is read by a woman: "A lad strong of will, sixteen years old — only a child in age, yet a man of heart and mind. When it came to his country he showed no fear nor backed down to any person. This is the reason the British army have cut him down in childhood." The helicopter hovers lower and she has to raise her voice to be heard

above its engines. A minute's silence is observed by the assembly after which they disperse. The camera tilts upwards to show the helicopter and then pans across the cemetery as people find their way home.

It would be wrong to see *Funeral* as a pro-Provisional IRA video tape, or for that matter one that is anti. Its strength lies in its powers of quiet observation. It contains a wealth of detail which illuminates part of a complex struggle and for that reason it should be welcomed and more widely seen.

## Overview

Another tape of the same type is *Belfast October 1978*. This was made by a small group of anarchists as part of a contribution they were to make to a libertarian conference held in Manchester. Several 20-minute reels of tape were shot over a very short period and then edited down to about 45 minutes. Although there is a commentary, there is little attempt to editorialise or question people who appear in it critically. This was deliberate.

The introductory sequence gives a brief view of the streets — the Protestant Shankill, the small Catholic enclave of Unity flats, the lower Shankhill — "known as the Weetabix complex", and the Catholic Falls Road. The slogans proliferate: No Pope Here, Remember the Loyalist Prisoners, RUC Thugs Out, Provos Rule the Falls, Sectarianism Kills Workers, Will Lizzy Visit H-Block? and Stonemason Will Not Break Us.

The main body of the tape is devoted to a series of interviews. The first is with a woman from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). "In my opinion," she says, "the violence has demoralised people to a great extent and has led to them not being involved to the extent they could be in political change." She refers to the Protestant workers who are increasingly suffering unemployment, which used to be largely confined to Catholics. "This is teaching the Loyalist section of the population just exactly how important they are to Britain."

Next comes an interview with a woman from Sinn Fein — the Workers' Party, more popularly known as the Official IRA or the stickies. She outlines a shift in IRA policy during the mid-1960s when Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, became more socialist. She continues: "In 1970 the Provisional, nationalist elements left. The Provisionals increasingly showed themselves to be an armed right-wing reactionary movement."



The spokesperson for Provisional Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Provisional IRA, tells the story rather differently. He says that when it became clear at the end of the 1960s that the demands of the civil rights movement could not be met, there was a difference of opinion within Sinn Fein — those who believed in countering British capitalist violence with Irish armed struggle and those who adopted a non-violent position. The pro-violence segment became the Provos. He says they are fighting for both the military and economic withdrawal of the British to be replaced "with a genuine democratic socialist system."

The tape makers had intended interviewing a member of the Ulster Defence Association, a Loyalist paramilitary group, but their tight schedule coincided with a UDA conference which meant no one was available at that particular time.

## Torture

There follows a section where "a detainee talks to us on the day he was released." A somewhat nervous young man, face away from the camera, relates his story of being picked up under section 11 of the anti-terrorism law. He describes the bullying tactics of his questioners at the Castlereagh interrogation centre. Threats against his wife and children were made to produce a confession. He describes physical torture inflicted on him.

Then comes a sequence of a street riot, an account of feminist politics in Northern Ireland and the tape concludes with a statement from the NICRA woman. She ends by saying: "People in Britain should be aware of the consequences of ignoring Northern Ireland. It's fine to salve your conscience by being active on such issues as Chile or South Africa, but we always say you should clean up your own backyard first. . . . To ignore Northern Ireland is to nail the coffin of your own democracy."

Because of a technical problem with the copy of *Belfast October 1978* which was taken to the Manchester conference for which it was intended, on that occasion extracts from the original raw material had to be screened instead of the edited version. Nevertheless, they still made an impact. One of the tape's producers, Ernest McNab, says: "It got people a bit angrier about Northern Ireland than if the information had been related in speech." Subsequently the video

tapes remained in England for several months and were seen by different groups including the Troops Out Movement.

The original group of Belfast anarchists is now planning to update the original tape and wishes to considerably extend its video activity. At the time of my visit they were busily raising funds to make a video tape at a large syndicalist CNT conference in Spain. They believe video is the most dynamic and effective form of communication for getting across their message.

## Community television

Looking to the future, the media workshop is in the process of establishing a video news project based on an independent community resource centre in Upper Springfield, West Belfast. Rainer Pagel describes it as an attempt "to have some local counterpart to the regional broadcast television stations." The idea is to get people in the local Catholic estates of Ballymurphy, Springhill and Whiterock to record their own news items to be regularly presented in the form of a news video tape.

The resource centre has welcomed the proposal in principle. The resource centre's community worker Des Wilson has used the workshop's video facilities in the past — for recording a people's public enquiry into the education system — and he is confident a news service, carefully developed, would benefit the community.

He has already encouraged the setting up of a small theatre space in the resource centre and this would be used as a base for the news project. "I feel we still have to discover the usefulness of video. It's largely a question of rescuing these media — of putting them into the hands of people who ought to own them. Theatre is about people saying what's on their minds and exchanging views. I see our basic purpose as education. If people have enough knowledge of what is going on, then they will find solutions to their own problems," explains Des Wilson.

During my visit to the Upper Springfield Resource Centre a photographic exhibition covered the walls. Its subject was the photographic and written work undertaken by Walker Evans and James Agee in the depressed America of the 1930s — it was published in a book called *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. This study of poor farmers — itself now famous — is remembered for its documentary approach.



The photo exhibition — incidentally loaned to the resource centre by ARE — considered the work of Evans and Agee from the standpoint of a poor family with whom they had stayed and whom they had researched for their articles and book. Charles Burroughs, who was a child during that period, is recorded as having said:

> "It's true what they wrote, it weren't exaggerated or anything, it was . . . . . it was true. But the thing I didn't like about it is they didn't tell us the truth about it. If they had told us the truth about it when they were here, what they were doing and had asked to do it . . . mother probably would have done it anyway. We'd have let them done anything they wanted, because they was paying a small amount."

Charles Burroughs said that in 1978, looking back almost 50 years — but it was something he remembered and felt strongly about. He felt betrayed that his family had been so closely observed and recorded by two men who had never revealed what they were doing. The point illustrates an important lesson for community media workers — for, in many senses, they are the heirs to the documentary tradition pioneered by people like Evans and Agee. The lesson is simple: always fully involve the people who are your subjects, always carefully explain why you are filming/photographing/video taping and tell them how the material is to be used.

The fact that Agee and Evans felt able *not* to explain to the Burroughs family what they were doing shows how far attitudes have changed since then. But it is all too easy to slip back into bad old habits. The exhibition proves a timely reminder of the pitfalls to which even community media workers sometimes succumb.

Rainer Pagel says he would like to see the workshop working more directly with specific communities: "We are not interested in gaining credibility for people who sit on community arts panels and we don't want to be directd by them. We want people to use the facilities we have to voice their own problems — and not have outsiders do it for them."

## Chapter 8

# Some conclusions

The most important conclusion of this brief study must be that radical video activity of the sort which has been glimpsed in Sheffield, Glasgow, Cardiff, Manchester and Belfast is worthwhile and deserves support. The sheer range of work is impressive — covering education, health, social security, employment, right-wing politics, housing, race, women's groups, anti-poverty campaigns, Chile, Northern Irish politics and lots more besides.

As far as the quality of that work is concerned I can only offer my own opinion. Clearly very few of you reading this will have seen any of the video tapes which have been mentioned, so what I say has to be received "blind" as it were. It would be foolish to pretend that the standards of technical presentation in any of the tapes even approach those associated with broadcast television. There is no way that technology worth millions is going to be almost equalled by technology worth thousands.

At the most obvious level all of the work considered in these pages is in monochrome, yet around 75% of the population now watches colour television sets. Locally produced video, particularly after it has been edited from one tape to another and then perhaps played back on a different machine, looks that much greyer. Occasionally the picture may jump and the sound may not be bell clear — but all of the tapes described here are perfectly comprehensible to someone devoting all their attention to the screen.

None of the video workers in any of the groups would claim anything else. I would argue that what they lose in poorer quality they more than make up for in their content. But that does not mean they would appeal to everyone equally. In fact most of the material mentioned here would appeal to relatively few people. Most of it only sets out to appeal to a specialist, concerned audience. A video tape



made about the lack of laundry facilities on a particular housing estate is an obvious example. It might prove compelling viewing to a woman with two babies living in a ninth floor flat there — and her neighbours — but to few outsiders.

Largely radical video is attempting to convey specific information to a target group who might then use it to their own — and society at large's — benefit. Except in relatively few cases — such as the recording of a theatre or rock group — the subject matter is not intended to be entertaining. Rather it coincides with that sphere of production termed *documentary* — with which it has several historical ties. Not only the documentary still photographers working in America during the 1930s, but also with the British movie film documentary movement and its figurehead John Grierson.

It was Grierson who said in the 1930s that one of his central aims was to educate the emerging masses "in the complex and intimate drama of their citizenship." Today, a similar purpose, radicalised by the passing of time, can be seen within the community media movement. The accent has passed away from the old educational division of teacher and taught to the more progressive ideas of people like Paulo Freire who believe that everyone should be a teacher and everyone a student. The practice among the video workshops I visited has been heavily influenced by this approach.

At its base is a strong anti-authoritarianism — that people should no longer be led by superior leaders, but should collectively learn and discover with each other. Another element in this philosophy is a militant aversion to conventional party politics, including authoritarian marxism. The hypocrisy of politicians, including local councillors, is abhorred and instead reliance is placed upon self-help strategies where the whole community is involved in determining its future instead of just a few "elected representatives" who probably don't even live in it.

This is the basic context within which most of the video groups operate. It must be understood in order to assess the quality of their work. Some critics have stupidly dismissed the products of community video activity because they don't look very good. On their own and out of context that is often a fair description, but placed properly in their context they can take on power and meaning. To the Chilean refugee, the unemployed 16-year old, the black charged with sus, the battered woman, or the social security claimant, a video tape about them and their situation, a tape which they might have been

involved in making themselves, stands a very good chance of having a direct and immediate appeal. It is very difficult to measure or put a value on the transition which takes place when a person ceases to be just another anonymous social casualty and becomes an active individual in a project to fight the conditions and causes behind their disadvantaged position.

It is a transition that happens through the kind of video work described here. It can also happen through many other types of activity, but video, like community newspapers, posters, film or theatre, can aid that process. It can communicate facts and feelings quite effectively. It is particularly good at presenting cases for local campaigns — the *St. David's Hospital* video tape produced at the community video workshop in Cardiff is a good example.

It is also important that video as a community medium should not be seen in isolation from those other media. None of the video workers interviewed saw video as the single answer to all the problems they faced and often they employed one or more of the other media available — mostly print and photography.

But it would be naïve to assume that all is well with the use of video in the community. The truth is that the projects covered in this study — and dozens of others — lead an extremely precarious existence. Yet, ironically, the two most essential ingredients for a healthy growth of the use of video are in good supply, namely people wishing to learn about it and then use it and people willing and able to staff workshops. There is no shortage in either area.

## Money

The necessary third ingredient is money which is and always has been in very short supply. The funding of video projects has been consistently haphazard and ill-considered. Most of the activity described in this study owes its existence to the persistence and ingenuity of the video workers themselves rather than to any thought-out policies by funding agencies.

Radical video work over the last decade in the UK has probably received more backing from social security payments and unemployment benefit than it has from any other single source. Video on the dole has often been the only way for video workers to practice what they believe in.

The majority of funding has come from the Arts Council and in



particular the regional arts associations, but the relationships between the arts funders and video projects have not, on the whole, been happy ones. This has been as true for arts association film and video panels as it has been for community arts panels. As seen in the case of Manchester Film and Video Workshop, which receives money from both types of panel, the pressures from each source of funding can pull in different directions. The film and video panels want to see work which "seriously engages with the problems and practices of film and video in their own right," while the community arts panels are more concerned to see large numbers of people from a variety of community organisations and groups being trained in the use of video equipment — especially so that they can record local festivals and similar events.

Even within the Arts Council itself there are doubts about the field of community arts. In an article in the *Guardian* (September 30 1978), Roy Shaw, director-general of the Arts Council, stated: "Carried to an extreme, a passion for democracy in the arts does lead to the rejection of quality." Citing some of the arguments advanced in *Artists and People*, a book by Su Braden, he went on: "I cannot believe that all community artists share this really vulgar Marxist approach (democratisation of the arts), but if many of them do, then in sponsoring community arts the Arts Council have brought a Trojan horse into the citadel of the arts — one which seeks to subvert the whole of society and with it all traditional values in the arts."

Such attitudes, which permeate the Arts Council staff at both national and regional levels, are responsible for the miserable funding record for community media, and especially video projects. The arts establishment view is that politics — particularly that brand of radical left-wing politics which actually confronts real issues such as housing, employment and education and then does something about them — should not be mixed up with art. If that view is accepted, then clearly the Arts Council should have nothing to do with community media whatsoever.

## Greater London Arts Association

Another contributory factor to the tension between video workers and arts funders is that the funders often display a woeful ignorance of what video work is all about. A good example of this can be found in issue number 11 of the Greater London Arts Association's *Film and*

*Video Extra*. An open letter appeared in its pages from the London Community Video Workers Collective, which is a forum for several video groups working in the greater London region.

The letter was sent as a response to an article in the previous issue written by GLAA's film and video officer and headlined *Community Video in Great Britain*. In it, the officer, Maureen McCue, set down "an analysis of the last nine years" of UK community video.

The community video workers' letter began: "We were very angry to read *Community Video in Great Britain* in your last issue. From what (Maureen McCue) has written she appears to have found out virtually nothing about what we do, and to understand none of the theoretical assumptions behind our work." Unfortunately it is all too common for arts administrators on large salaries to have little idea of what is going on in those fields they have direct responsibility for. Now GLAA's community arts panel is overseeing community video funding.

Whereas one can criticise what the Arts Council has done, at least it has supplied some money to video workers. The British Film Institute, with a responsibility for television as well as film, has done next to nothing. Its deliberate policy of ignoring the existence of community video is one which should be reversed.

Some groups, like Sheffield Video Workshop, have adopted a search for finances almost completely outside the normal channels — of applications to Arts Council bodies and private charitable foundations such as Rowntree and Gulbenkian. They have concentrated on getting paid for at least some of their work — for theatre groups, rock bands, the local education authority, libraries, left groups and trade unions. It is a strategy which holds a good deal of sense.

One of its major advantages is that it renders unnecessary a certain schizophrenic attitude often displayed by video groups dependent on Arts Council — and even local authority — funding. The schizophrenia is caused by having to wear several different hats in rapid succession and sometimes simultaneously. The group will tell the community arts panel it wants money for community arts, whereas it really wants it to make political video documentaries. Much time is wasted in trying to maintain these deceptions. Some grant applications are written with a novelist's imagination.

But virtually all sources of state funding contain within them a safety device: the threat of no more money unless you behave. An article entitled *Camerawork 8 and the Political Photographer* in *Camerawork 16* described this quite accurately:

> "One of the built-in failsafe devices for this (capitalist) system is state patronage. *Camerawork*, like many Arts Council backed 'political' groups works within the knowledge that it can only go so far. Decisions are constantly made by these groups, knowing that if they do such and such, their finances would be under threat; and their decision not to is always rationalised by the explanation that they are more effective by their continuing existence than by blowing it all in a one-off job."

There are no simple solutions to the funding problem. The medium-term economic future in the UK looks pretty bleak. When the National Health Service and the public education system are being dismantled for lack of adequate resources it might seem unwise to ask for increased funding for community media. But on a deeper level it isn't. Because it is only through such channels of intensely localised communication that many ordinary people can ever become involved in fighting a system which deprives their children of free school milk and cheap school dinners. There are large sections of the population divorced from party politics and trade union activity. They have virtually no way of making their voices heard or even of communicating their feelings to others in a similar position.

## Audience

All of the groups mentioned in this study were very aware of the problems of gaining audiences for the media products they make. Yet it would be wrong to assume that all community video tapes only attract audiences which can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Many of the tapes described here have reached audiences of a few hundred, or even more.

Most tapes are made for relatively small, specific groups anyway. With more money for better replay facilities a number of simple problems could be overcome which would increase the numbers of viewers. The *Directory of Video Tapes*, published by the London Community Video Workers Collective in 1979, was a first step towards making tapes more widely available. More comprehensive catalogues are desperately needed.

Another area of urgent need is communication between

community media groups. It is ironic that people involved in the business of communication should be bad at keeping in touch with others in the same field. But again there are good reasons why it has happened: meetings and seminars are expensive both in terms of money and time — two commodities which community media workers are very short of.

Information on so many aspects of media work — relating to equipment, production methods, campaigns and so on — could help save groups a lot of time in the long run because they would be able to avoid duplicating mistakes which had alreay been made somewhere else. It is a great shame that this type of information exchange has not taken place — which has enabled ill-informed critics of community video to snipe from the sidelines with virtual impunity. Often community video workers have failed to counter charges made against them because they have remained relatively isolated from each other.

## Awareness

Apart from the question of money, video workers face a major problem of publicising what they do. In a sense — although they have very different ends in view — they face the same problem as the commercial giants who are trying to persuade millions of consumers to buy home video tape recorders. Both have to explain what video is and what it can do.

This book has tried to present a reasonably accurate portrait of what is happening in community video at street level in the UK. It would be inappropriate to list a set of recommendations putting forward what amounted to a Five Year Plan for the development of community video — as so many reports attempt to do in a very unreal, cut and dried manner.

However, there are certain broad conclusions which may be drawn. The problem of finance is crucial and there are no simple solutions to it, but it would appear that a spread of income sources — including money earned from undertaking work for an education authority, for instance — is better than relying on a single source of grant-aid.

Any project which envisages a finished video tape being made must from the very start consider the nature of the audience which is going to see it. Most of the tapes quoted in this book have had very



specific target audiences in mind. To reach a small audience successfully is much better than failing with a big one.

The cooperative and anti-authoritarian structures which most video groups adopt appear to work very well — and many would say are necessary for the sort of community activity they are involved in. Process video work — which relies on the *process* of using video gear and is not primarily concerned with producing a finished tape — usually depends heavily on this type of egalitarian structure.

It cannot be stressed too much that video is only one of a range of community media. It is impossible to advertise a video show without using posters and leaflets. All of the groups examined use other media to a greater or lesser extent. It is always wise to maintain a flexibility of approach and consider carefully which medium is best suited to which purpose.

Not least for the money-saving it achieves, any group is recommended to develop an interest in the technical aspect of video. If someone can undertake first-line maintenance on the spot, a great deal of time and embarrassment can be saved. Perhaps the local technical college runs courses.

Finally, it's important to remember that video is about communication, something which video groups should be good at. Good lines of communication between video groups, the people they're serving, financial backers and other community media groups both locally and nationally, are all worth spending time on.

## Big Brother

The examples of radical video activity outlined in these pages are living proof that the medium and its community applications are worthwhile and deserve developing. But they are only one part of a much wider argument about the sort of society we want to live in.

In 1961, a project called Centre Fortytwo based at the Roundhouse in London was launched to promote arts for the people. It failed. But in one of its promotional documents it gave a warning, which is still relevant today. It ran: "If we do not succeed, then a vast army of highly powered commercial enterprises are going to sweep into the leisure hours of future generations and create a cultural mediocrity the result of which can only be a nation emotionally and intellectually immature, capable of enjoying nothing, creating

nothing, and effecting nothing."

Radical video is part of the movement which has lined itself up against that commercial army. It deserves support.


# Chapter 9

# Information

## Some sources and further reading

## Books

*Videology and Utopia* by Alfred Willener, Guy Milliard and Alex Ganty, Routledge Direct Editions, London, 1976.*

*Community Media* by Heinz Nigg and Graham Wade, Regenbogen-Verlag, Zürich, 1980. Individual copies available from: Blackthorn Books, 74 Highcross Street, Leicester, UK. Price: £4.65 (incl. p&p).

*Raids and Reconstructions* by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Pluto Press, London, 1976.

*Video in Community Development*, by John Hopkins, Cliff Evans, Steve Herman and John Kirk, Ovum Ltd., London, 1972.*

*The Accessible Portapack Manual* by Michael Goldberg, The Satellite Video Exchange Society (261 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada), Vancouver, 1976.*

*VTR Workshop: Small Format Video* by Loretta Atienza, Unesco, Paris, 1977.*

*Access: Some Western Models of Community Media* edited by Frances Berrigan, Unesco, Paris, 1977.

*Local Television — Piped Dreams?* by Andrew Bibby, Cathy Denford with Jerry Cross, Redwing Press, Milton Keynes, UK, 1979.*

*Community Television and Cable in Britain* by Peter Lewis, British Film Insitute, London, 1978.

*Using the Media* by Denis MacShane, Pluto Press, London, 1979.

*Broadcasting and Youth* a joint study, Gulbenkian Foundation, London, 1979.

*Artists & People* by Su Braden, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

*Leaving the 20th Century — the Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* edited by Christopher Gray, Free Fall Publications, UK, 1974.
*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin) and *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (Writers and Readers) by Paulo Freire.
*Starting School* by Brian Jackson, Croom Helm, London, 1979.

## Pamphlets and reports

*Directory of Video Tapes* compiled and published by The London Video Workers Collective (c/o West London Media Workshop, The Base, St. Thomas' Church Hall, East Row, London W10), London, 1979. Price: £1.25 (incl. p&p).
*Basic Video In Community Work* (also sold in a pack *Tools of Change* with booklets on community books, print and newspapers), Inter-Action, London, 1975.
*Video Distribution Handbook* by Sue Hall and John Hopkins, Centre for Advanced TV Studies, London, 1978.*
*The British Media and Ireland* edited by The Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland, London, 1979. (1 North End Road, London W14.)
*Vale Television* by Oliver Bennett, Scottish Film Council, 1977.
*Social Action in TV* by Francis Coleman, IBA, 1975. (There are several titles in this free series of IBA Fellowship Scheme reports which are worth looking at.)
*Animation Projects in the UK* by Frances Berrigan, National Youth Bureau, Leicester UK, 1976.
*Community Arts*, a report by the Community Arts Evaluation Working Group, Arts Council of GB, London, about 1978.
*Video in Scotland*, Scottish Film Council, Glasgow, 1976.

## Articles

*The Local Community in Focus* in *Forum*, 2/1979, Council of Europe.
*Undercurrents* number 7, a special issue dedicated to the liberation of communications, 1974. (27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.)
*Film Video Extra*, all issues, Greater London Arts Association (25 Tavistock Place, London WC1).
*Local Cable Television* in *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1977, BFI.
*Polemic* in *Guardian*, 30 September 1978 — Roy Shaw of the Arts Council on Community Arts.
*The Story of Community Video* in *Video and Film International*, August 1978.
*The Resistible Rise of Video* in *Educational Broadcasting International*, September 1978.
*Community Benefits* in *Financial Times*, 23 November 1978.
*Video Casebook: Fantasy Factory* in *Video & AV Review*, January 1978.

* Books and pamphlets with an asterix are available from CATS, Fantasy Factory, 42 Theobalds Road, London WC1 — a full publications list is available from them on request. Fantasy Factory also houses one of the best print libraries on low-gauge video and associated fields in the UK. Access is free, but an appointment must be made. Phone: 01-405 6862.



## Some useful contacts

**Sheffield Video Workshop**, 8 Kearsley Road, Sheffield 2. Phone: Sheffield 583524 — Nick Smart.
**Community Video Workshop — Cardiff**, 36 Tudor Street, Cardiff. Phone: Cardiff 31194 — Terry Dimmick, Eileen Crane, George Auchterlonie.
**Manchester Film & Video Workshop**, 5 James Leigh Street, Manchester. Phone: Manchester 236 6953 — John Crumpton, Greg Dropkin, Peter Bainbridge, Bob Jones and Wayne.
**Media Workshop — Belfast**, 22 Lombard Street, Belfast 1. Phone: Belfast 40123 — Rainer Pagel.
**Merseyside Visual Communications Unit**, 90–92 Whitechapel, Liverpool 1. Phone Liverpool 709 9460 — Colin Wilkinson.
**Medium Fair**, Marlborough Hall, Kimberley Road, Exeter. Phone: Exeter 32617.

## London

**Albany Video Project**, Creek Road, Deptford, London SE8. Phone: 01-692 0231 — John White.
**The Basement**, St. George's Town Hall, Cable Street, London E1. Phone: 01-790 4020 — Maggie Pinhorn.
**Tony Dowmunt**, video worker, 56 Josephine Avenue, London SW2. Phone: 01-671 0682.

**Fantasy Factory Video**, 42 Theobald's Road, London WC1. Phone: 01-405 6862 — Sue Hall, John Hopkins. Manages (for the Greater London Arts Association) a U-Matic editing suite for community users, distributes publications and runs a comprehensive print library.
**Inter-Action**, 15 Wilkin Street, London NW5. Phone: 01-485 0881.
**Islington Bus Company**, Palmer Place, London N7. Phone: 01-609 0226.
**Liberation Films**, 2 Chichele Road, London NW2. Phone: 01-450 7855.
**Two Borough Video Project**, Oval House, 52 Kennington Oval, London SE11. Phone: 01-735 2786.
**Walworth and Aylesbury Community Arts Trust**, Shop 8, Taplow, East Street, London SE17. Phone: 01-701 9010.
**West London Media Workshop**, The Base, St. Thomas' Church Hall, East Row, London W10. Phone: 01-969 1020.

There are many other groups and institutions using video equipment — you just have to ask around and find out whether they allow outsiders to borrow or hire their gear. Regional Arts Associations should have an officer — for film, film and video or community arts — who knows of video projects in that particular area. You can find out the address and phone number of your Regional Arts Association by contacting: The Arts Council, 105 Piccadilly, London W1. Phone: 01-629 9495.
There is also: The Scottish Film Council, 16 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow G3. Phone: Glasgow 332 9988.
The Welsh Arts Council, 9 Museum Place, Cardiff. Phone: Cardiff 394711.

## Video tapes

Many of the groups listed have extensive libraries of video tapes which they are willing to hire out. Most of the tapes mentioned in this book are listed in the *Directory of Videotapes*, which is the best single source currently available (see pamphlets list).