



Public Service Alliance of Canada

## **HANDOUT 2 - TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PICKET SIGNS**

### **How to design appealing posters, signs and banners**

Posters and signs are an important part of most campaigns. They tell the public and the press why you are taking action and what it is you want.

Your message can be depicted either in words or by illustration. Either way, it is important that your message is brief, consistent and to the point.

Your message should be something anyone and everyone can understand. While “inside jokes” or innuendo can be an effective way of mobilizing activists, they can prove confusing to the public.

Your message must be effective but not offensive. Using humour, sarcasm and wit are fine — unless it alienates others. Keep in mind the diversity of your community and be sure your messages and images are culturally sensitive.

Short, to-the-point slogans are better than long statements. Slogans that rhyme or include a clever play on words, or those that would be suitable for chants make the best poster slogans.

Art is good, but it should not be complex. A symbol or stick figure can be more identifiable than trying to illustrate a person or a complex design.

If you have a logo or motto, it is important to make this clearly visible.

### **Putting it together**

- Make sure the print on your signs is large, with tall lettering that is easy to read at a distance.
- Use both sides of your sign, poster or banner. It is okay to create two different messages, one for each side.
- Use a dark colour for lettering against a light background or light lettering against a dark background.

- Choose script that is easy to read. Lower case letters are easier to read, especially from a distance.

## **Be prepared**

Plan in advance for inclement weather. Choose materials that are waterproof or find a way to make them so by using a plastic covering, laminating and/or by using rainproof fabric for banners.

Whether you use a pole or a string around the neck or you carry your sign with your hands, choose your method of display based on what will be the most effective under the circumstances. Signs attached to poles or sticks are difficult to carry on a windy day and can get heavy after a while. Still, they are more easily seen in a crowd than signs draped from a string around the neck.

*(Please be aware that to reduce the chance of accidental injury to other picketers or to people who may try to force their way through a picket line, be sure when building picket signs to use suitable cardboard for the message, and relatively thin pieces of wood (e.g. nailing boards) or light plastic for the handle. Suitable items can be found at most office supply and/or building supply/hardware stores, inexpensively. Our experience teaches us that picket signs should be sturdy enough to be re-useable and to withstand wind, rain and snow, but that they should not be constructed of materials so heavy, solid or stiff that they could cause injury if someone were accidentally bumped by a sign, or that a sign could be perceived by police as a potentially threatening “weapon.”)*

Banners are best carried by hand — one person at each end — in a long march but are best displayed using poles during a rally.

Banners are effective when used as a backdrop for speakers and/or chants, songs and theatre. Where possible, banners can be hung in central locations.

It is not essential for everyone in a large group to carry a sign or banner. This task can be shared by the participants while others are handing out leaflets, leading chants and so forth.

Remember, it's all about the message. Keep it simple, be creative, and have fun!