

Campaign Strategy Newsletter No 52, June 2009 The Gurkhas Campaign: Lessons From Lumley

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New Database of Campaign Strategy Documents

There is a new searchable document store at my website www.campaignstrategy.org which we hope will make it easier for readers of this newsletter and other users to access content of the 50-plus newsletters and numerous articles and other reports now posted at the site. You can search by document type and over twenty campaign topics, at <http://documents.campaignstrategy.org>

Campaigning is OK!

Titus Alexander of the community empowerment Novas Scarman Group www.novasscarman.org is inviting all campaigners along to the launch of 'Campaigning is OK!' at 5 - 6.30 pm on Monday 13 July in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons in London, in association with Parliamentary Outreach.

Campaigning is OK! is a guide to building capacity for advocacy and campaigning, with reports from eight regional events involving over 600 people earlier this year. It gives "information about why campaigning matters, where to get support and resources available, including training, materials, books and websites" and is "aimed at a wide range of audiences, including learning and training providers, third sector support providers and anyone involved in empowerment, advocacy, campaigning and learning active citizenship".

Anyone planning to attend should contact Kellie.white@novasscarman.org

Jobs For Campaigners

Action Aid is looking for a Head of Campaigns based in London - http://www.actionaid.org.uk/101893/head_of_campaigns.html

The Gurkhas Campaign: Lessons From Lumley

Last month UK readers might have noticed the successful conclusion of a campaign started in 2003 to give UK rights of residence to retired "Gurkhas", a famous regiment of the British Army recruited exclusively from Nepal. Led by a local Councillor from the regiment's base town in England, and with the support of a rich businessman and former military colleagues, the Gurkha Justice Campaign [1] scored the highest profile campaign success in Britain for some years.

This was however, presented to a one woman campaign and was largely down to media interest in their telegenic champion, actress Joanna Lumley. The turning point so far as the public saw it, came in an extraordinary series of twists and turns in negotiations between the campaign team led by Lumley, and Government Ministers, even the Prime Minister, in early May. At one point Lumley intercepted an unfortunate immigration Minister, Phil Woolas, in the BBC Westminster studios and forced him into an impromptu televised press conference [2].

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A couple of weeks later after a defeat on the issue in the House of Commons, the government conceded. The Home Office Minister, whose Department along with the Ministry of Defence, had appeared to argue that the country could not afford to give all the former soldiers the right to live in Britain, announced that she was "proud to offer this country's welcome to all who have served in the brigade of Gurkhas". The Prime Minister declared "I believe it is possible for us to honour our commitments to the Gurkhas and to do so in a way that protects the public finances." [3]

In many ways it was an old-fashioned campaign run and supported by generations whose idea of twitter is probably more ornithological than technological – it was trial by tv and Parliamentary, and involved living icons of the past: Lumley herself as a glamour queen of considerable vintage, and the Gurkhas is a regiment with long battle honours.

Campaigners running more 'modern' campaigns and those outside the UK can still though, learn some important lessons from the Lumley triumph.

Commentators pointed out that unusually for a campaign, it enabled the often xenophobic right to unite with liberals in defence of the interests of honorary Brits – some of the self-same media and supporters who would naturally rally against immigration, were in favour of these plucky warriors. A campaign which would, if anyone had checked, have probably won support across all the main values groups: Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers [4].

It had something for everyone: symbols of defence and national security, and a story of continuity and honouring commitments forged by blood shed in battle (Settlers), fame and celebrity and entertaining simple personal clashes (Prospectors), and arguments about rights and ethics (Pioneers). This was reflected in its cross Party as well as wide social and media support.

The fortunate alignment of values aside, the campaign also benefitted from the prevailing context [5] of government unpopularity, particularly on matters ethical: the ongoing MPs expenses scandal had undermined any claim the government might have to being a moral or ethical judge of what was right.

Above all however, it illustrated the benefit of having the most empathetic figures in the story on your side [6]. Rather than presented by a professional or unknown 'campaigner', it was led by someone the public already liked – a lot – in the shape of Ms Lumley. Not only is she glamorous, she's very funny, creating a character called Patsy in the TV Series *Absolutely Fabulous*. See the write up of her campaign in the celebrity obsessed *Hello Magazine* [7]. Lumley also had credibility in depth (important to the Pioneers), with authentic family links to the Gurkhas, although she did not play this up in the campaign. Then people liked the Gurkhas – genuinely brave little men who for the purposes of the media, could be presented in a one dimensional way as deserving and blameless victims.

This simplicity was in turn, preserved by tv news with its limited scope for complexity. There were a few letters to the press from dissenters, pointing out for example that the pensions of Gurkhas who went home to Nepal had long been cited as one of the best examples of 'trickle down' as a form of effective although unintentional 'foreign aid', and questioning whether it was actually good for Nepal to have them stay in Britain but this did not fit the media framing and made no impact. It might have been different if the campaign had been primarily networked in the blogosphere.

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Any campaign designer could look for opportunities to bring together such a combination of factors. Even climate change for example, endlessly diverse and complicated, could easily yield some empathetic victims and a likeable champion focused on a specific decision, if campaigners could bring themselves to be selective and not try to explain the issue, or demand complex sweeping outcomes, or front it themselves, or rely on their favourite rational arguments. Ellis Island in New York, gateway to freedom for refugees long before climate change, the setting of the Statue of Liberty, donated by France in the cause of enlightening the world, and a walkable distance from the UN, is where the key meeting preceding the Copenhagen climate summit will take place: surely this offers a time and place?

The fact that Lumley's success was down to factors other than her own undoubted capabilities was illustrated by her less publicised support for the Green Party. Shortly after her victory with the Gurkhas she came out in favour of the Greens at the UK European elections [8]. The right wing *Daily Mail* wrote: "Miss Lumley's support has been highly prized after she dictated the political agenda over the Gurkhas in a highly-effective campaign". While the Greens did poorly, UKIP, the anti-immigration United Kingdom Independence Party, trumped major parties, as well as the Greens, by coming second. In previous elections Sir Jack Hayward, the prominent business supporter of the Gurkhas campaign, gave large donations to UKIP [9] – a fact that the media appeared to be unaware of, or perhaps, did not want to know about.

[1] http://www.gurkhajustice.org.uk/about_us.html

[2] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/may/07/gurkhas-joanna-lumley-phil-woolas>

[3] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8060607.stm

[4] search 'values' in the document database at documents.campaignstrategy.org

[5] for the role of Context, search CAMPCAT in the document database at www.campaignstrategy.org

[6] see How To Win Campaigns extract at http://www.campaignstrategy.org/book_extracts/stay_on_the_side_of_the_victims.html

[7] <http://blogs.hellomagazine.com/aviewfromtheburbs/2009/05/joanna-lumley-an-absolutely-fabulous-goddess-of-our-time.html>

[8] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1188893/Campaigner-Ab-Fab-star-Joanna-Lumley-comes-Green-Party.html>

[9] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3804339.stm and

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-campaign-funding-twice-that-of-labours-751467.html>

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HOW TO WIN CAMPAIGNS pub April 7 2005 Earthscan by Chris Rose see

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