



Photo: Dorothy Todd Hénaut

The following is a report from the Challenge for Change Newsletter published by the National Film Board of Canada (P.O. 6100, Montreal). It is typical of the many media related community activities which the Film Board involves itself in. People interested in using video in community action should get in touch with Dorothy Hénaut, editor, for past issues since their experiences will prove invaluable for anyone wishing to do a similar thing.

Challenge for Change attempts to implicate the communications media in the process of social change . . . The videotape recording project in Saint-Jacques is an attempt to extend to its logical conclusion the conviction that people should participate in shaping their own lives, which means among other things, directing and manipulating the tools of modern communication necessary to gain and exercise that participation.

The Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques, a dynamic citizens organization in one of downtown Montreal's many poor areas, was founded in March 1968 at a public meeting called by a handful of concerned citizens with the help of a community organizer from the Urban Social Redevelopment Project. At the meeting, the citizens agreed that bad health was their most immediate problem. On receiving no help from provincial and civic authorities, the citizens decided that would take the affair into their own hands. They rented an apartment in the area, renovated it themselves, and recruited medical and dental workers who were interested in the idea of a citizen-run community clinic. By October, they opened their clinic five nights a week.

There seemed to be a convergence between the needs and ideas of the Citizen's Committee and those of Challenge for Change and we approached the Committee with the idea of a project exploring the use of videotape recording equipment in community organization. The Committee recognized its potential effectiveness as an

organizing tool, and formed a VTR-film group . . . The broad objectives of the Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques are to work as citizens to gain as much control as possible over their own lives. The main job of the information team to which the VTR group is attached, is to sensitize the inhabitants of the area to their common problems and to communicate the Committee's hope that together they can act to change their situation . . .

We were still floundering around, testing possibilities and uses of the equipment, when the information team proposed a week-long information and organizing campaign for the end of January. The aims of the campaign would be to inform the residents of the community of the existence of the Committee, to stimulate debate on their collective problems, to gain new and active members, and subsequently to decide on new projects . . . This was exactly what the VTR group needed to give it some direction. We proposed to prepare a half-hour program on the problems of the people in the area, which would be shown at the opening of each meeting. Building on the existence of the clinic, the theme of the campaign was, "Why are we sick?". This led to exploring the causes of ill health, bad housing, unemployment, inadequate welfare, sparse recreation facilities, low-grade education, and bad medical care . . .

The VTR group did some interviewing in the streets on the day of the meetings, inviting people to come and see themselves on TV. These tapes were run, unedited, a half-hour before the start of the meetings as people were coming in . . . When the 30-minute video presentation was over, each group moved its chairs into a circle and plunged into a discussion. Having seen people like themselves on the familiar TV screen, discussing their problems with utter frankness, removed much of the reticence and timidity people have in a group of strangers. They simply said, "I guess this is the place where I can talk freely," and talked at length of problems shared and possible collective solutions.

CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE