

Plan: Explain and assess the way in which local and/or national government has reacted to a campaign known to you.

### Introduction

- explain how you're going to write the essay
- Fathers4Justice intro
- Matt O'Connor

### What are pressure groups?

- described as organised groups seeking as much support from the general public
- influence the decisions made through government policy or proposed legislation
- aims of pressure groups are to influence key individuals with powerful roles in society
- ‘interest groups’, ‘lobby groups’ or simply ‘protest groups’

- Charter 88
- Liberty
- NUS
- NUT
- RSPCA

### Fathers 4 Justice

"So many people have lost contact with their children through the courts, it was inevitable something like Fathers 4 Justice was going to emerge,"

#### STUNTS:

- 17<sup>th</sup> December 2002 with O'Connor and a small group of supporters storming into the Lord Chancellor's Office dressed as Father Christmas
- 21<sup>st</sup> October 2003 campaigners (Gorecki and Stanesby) scaled the Royal Courts of Justice dressed as Batman and Robin
- 19<sup>th</sup> May 2004 where two members threw a condom bomb with purple flower at Tony Blair during 'Prime Minister's Questions' at the House of Commons
- January 2006, The Sun had published a story that claimed the probability of campaigners of Fathers 4 Justice to kidnap Tony Blair's son

#### SLOGANS:

- “A father is for life not just for conception”
- “Save SPERM” (Society for the Protection of Equal Rights for Men)

- Families Need Fathers set up in 1974

### Can pressure groups influence politics?

- G (A Child) [2003] v EWCA Civ 489 in Northampton County Court
- “The Real Fathers for Justice” = Campaigning Direct Action Parenting Group which raises public awareness as well as applying pressure for “long overdue” changes in UK family law.

### Insider Politics

- either local or national individuals who have strong links with the decision makers in government

### Outsider Politics

- none of the advantages of insider groups as they are not consulted during the policy-making process, nor can they expect to gain any access to ministers and civil servants
- work and campaign outside of governmental decision making process
- Fathers 4 Justice can be classified as an outsider pressure group

### Conclusion

- sum up

Explain and assess the way in which local and/or national government has reacted to a campaign known to you.

### Introduction

The group **Fathers 4 Justice** were founded in the United Kingdom by Matt O'Connor, aiming to battle against the inequality men have, and are receiving in regards to parenting. The main objective of this group is to persuade the government to reform its current legal structure concerning family-law, and the opportunity for fathers to experience equal contact to their children when they become divorced parents. This essay will be assessing the practices and methods campaigners have used in order to encourage the government to taking action, as well as realise the fact that fathers have responsibilities as well as rights when it comes to their children. I hope to look at whether the campaigners of **Fathers 4 Justice** have been active citizens in their ways of protesting, and whether or not the government has changed its policy in regards to family law.

### What are pressure groups?

Pressure groups can be described as organised groups seeking as much support from the general public as possible, in order to influence the decisions made through government policy or proposed legislation. These groups tend not to be candidates or parties with the main aim of getting elected in formal elections, as they are more focused in convincing politicians to do their jobs properly: i.e. represent the views of the people. The general aims of pressure groups are to influence key individuals with powerful roles in society to make effective decisions that represent their group's views.

Pressure groups may also be called 'interest groups', 'lobby groups' or simply 'protest groups' as people that take more of a literal approach to group titles may interpret them as putting actual pressure in achieving their aims, but this does not necessarily always happen. The number of political parties in Britain is quite small, with the 'big 3', or main parties being the Conservative party, Labour party and the Liberal Democrats party. Where political parties are small, pressure groups are incredibly large running into their thousands. The membership of political parties has fallen resulting in that of pressure groups increasing.

A few examples of popular pressure groups in the UK include Charter 88, Liberty, NUS, NUT and RSPCA. 'Charter 88' is a group campaigning for an established written constitution (similar to the Bill of Rights in America). 'Liberty' campaign to defend and extend human rights and civil liberties. 'NUS' (National Union of Students) and 'NUT' (National Union of Teachers) have been up and running for a long time, with the tasks of enhancing the learning and teaching opportunities people in the UK receive. 'RSPCA' campaign for the rights of animals, about issues regarding their fur or their mistreatment by humans.

### Fathers 4 Justice

**Fathers 4 Justice** is a pressure group in both the literal and theoretical definition of a 'pressure group', as it is known to have pressurised those in government through a vast array of stunts and possibly illegal incidents.

Matt O'Connor had created this group following the separation of his wife in 2000 after a court had barred him from seeing his young sons outside a contact centre. "So many

*people have lost contact with their children through the courts, it was inevitable something like Fathers 4 Justice was going to emerge," he has said.*

Activists have taken part in a number of unique stunts that have attracted the attention of the mass media (newspapers, television, radio stations, the internet etc) as well as some politicians who have publicly agreed with the cause of the campaign. The stunts began on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2002 when O'Connor and a small group of supporters stormed into the Lord Chancellor's Office dressed as Father Christmas. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2003 campaigners (Gorecki and Stanesby) scaled the Royal Courts of Justice dressed as Batman and Robin. The most publicised stunt occurred on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2004 where two members threw a condom bomb with purple flower at Tony Blair during 'Prime Minister's Questions' at the House of Commons. The Times had written that the group had "*succeeded in becoming the most prominent guerrilla pressure group in Britain... within eighteen months of its founding*". This comment could be regarded as a satirical remark in favour of the group, as activists have never used weapons to spread their message.

Six years later, in January 2006 the unreliable<sup>1</sup> British newspaper 'The Sun' had published a story that claimed that campaigners of **Fathers 4 Justice** planned to kidnap Tony Blair's son Leo Blair "*for a few hours as a symbolic gesture*". This led to O'Connor condemning the alleged act and had threatened to shut down the campaign because of it. Within a few days, his threat was followed up on and the group had split.

It has however revitalised since then, and the group's popular slogans of "A father is for life not just for conception" and the more comical "Save SPERM" (Society for the Protection of Equal Rights for Men) are being used by fathers (and mothers) across the country.

**Fathers 4 Justice** is not the first group to campaign against the mistreatment of fathers. "*The first men's family law reform group was **Families Need Fathers** which was set up in 1974 at the time when the post-1969 reforms had started to bite. Men were finding themselves, through no fault of their own, stripped of their children, homes and income and being left heartbroken and destitute.*"<sup>2</sup>

#### Can pressure groups influence politics?

The essay question asks whether national or local government has reacted to the ongoing campaigning of Fathers 4 Justice. As no drastic changes have occurred in the law yet, the only reactions that can be considered are the ones active and potentially active members are emitting, as well as the reactions of the courts.

In the case of G (A Child) [2003] v EWCA Civ 489 in Northampton County Court it was said that before the father had any contact with his child, the mother "went to pieces". The judge had ordered a five-year bar on any further contact that concerned this 2-year-old child, on the basis that "everyone needed some peace and a breathing space." This shows that from the members of F4J's points of view change is necessary, and the best way to acquire this change is through getting involved and campaigning with them.

Another pressure group called "**The Real Fathers for Justice**" are part of the Campaigning Direct Action Parenting Group which raises public awareness as well as applying pressure for "long overdue" changes in UK family law. They also seek to support families through parental separation and are developing ongoing co-parenting support

services. If this pressure is applied in the right way, and at government officials throughout the country, politics could subsequently try and change matters that the entire country are dissatisfied with.

### Insider Politics

Insider pressure groups (also known as insider politics) can be either local or national individuals who have strong links with the decision makers in government, and are regularly consulted with matters that may involve their cause. An example of this is where an insider group might be included in regular meetings with ministers or civil servants, or they might be included on lists for circulation of new government proposals. As insider groups are physically involved in the consultation process of government, they are able to use direct tactics to make use of the influence.

Insider pressure groups tend to respect the decisions of the government and don't make public attacks on ministers (verbally or physically). **Fathers 4 Justice** are not privileged enough to withhold such status within the government, and the condom bomb incident most defiantly goes against the rule of not attacking ministers so it's not much of a surprise that they haven't been invited into the elite force. Insider groups are usually big organisations (such as the Church of England or the force) and are usually involved in the consultation process of government proposals.

Gordon Brown, current Prime Minister of the UK is known to have said the following: *"I'm a father and that's what matters most. Nothing matters more than that. Nothing!"* This could highlight the possibility of changing or having a major influence of changing the current system regarding family law, as he has shown an interest in the cause campaigned for.

### Outsider Politics

Outsider pressure groups (or outsider politics) have none of the advantages of insider groups as they are not consulted during the policy-making process, nor can they expect to gain any access to ministers and civil servants. They have to work and campaign outside of governmental decision making process, with only the hope of influencing those either in the government or other inside pressure groups. This leads to the problem of outsider groups having less chance to determine the laws and policies put into place in the UK.

**Fathers 4 Justice** can be classified as an outsider pressure group which seeks to protect the justice and interests of fathers, as well as promote the cause of equal treatment of divorced parents in regards to their children.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, **Fathers 4 Justice** is a pressure group that is trying to change the law through endless campaigning in order to get through to the government, and endless publicity stunts to get into the media's attention to generate more support to continue campaigning until change is officially made. The government has not yet responded to this pressure group through the legislation it has enforced, but it will respond through the potential rebellion of an entire nation through active citizenship.

### Bibliography

<sup>1</sup> Due to over exaggerated articles, such as *Lie back and think of England:*  
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