

— Almost 50 percent of the population is **not involved** in any community decision-making activity, not even voting. They will become active only under unusual circumstances.

This discussion will focus on the people who choose to get involved — those who are active in a variety of community decision-making activities — and will emphasize the actual process by which some become community influentials. It will only briefly touch upon the issue of whether the system of community decision making, dominated by so few individuals, can or should be changed.

In the following sections, we will briefly discuss:

- What is **social power** — what are its sources and how is it exercised?
- What are **power actors** — who are they?
- What are **power structures** — are there different kinds?
- How can **power actors** and **power structures** be identified?
- How do **power actors** and **power structures** fit in with community decision-making principles of representation and participation?

## SOCIAL POWER

We will begin with two definitions describing social power:

*"The capacity to control the actions of others."*

Charles P. Loomis, *Social Systems*, p. 20.\*

*"A party's capacity for acting in such a manner as to significantly affect or condition another's response."*

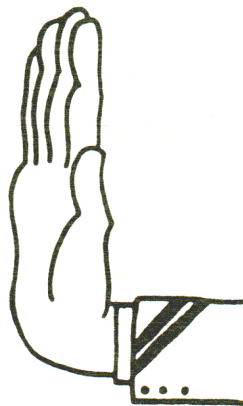
James B. Cook, *Citizen Participation: A Concepts Battery*, p. 2.\*

In brief, a person with social power can influence those with less social power to do something they would not otherwise do.

### Sources of Social Power

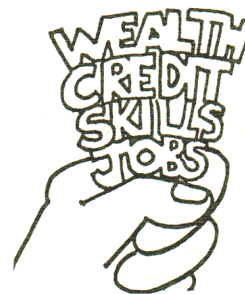
The two major sources of social power are **authority** and the **control of resources**. Many who have and exercise social power will use a combination of both.

**AUTHORITY** is the **right** to control others, usually resulting from a **position** or **occupation** which gives authority to the person who occupies it. Examples of such positions or occupations are: city mayor, police chief or county sheriff, chairperson of a legislative committee, president of an organization, fire inspector, and so forth.



\* See selected readings list on p. 15 for more complete information on these quotations and for detailed bibliographical information on all research studies mentioned in this bulletin.

**CONTROL OF RESOURCES** gives an individual the **potential** to influence or control others. Any person



controlling key resources necessary for making or implementing decisions has social power.

Resources in community decision making have usually been thought of in terms of wealth or material goods. However, there are many other resources

which can be crucial in today's highly complex, urbanized, and interdependent society. Different resources that can be used to influence others would include:

- **SPECIAL SKILLS** that an individual might possess, such as the ability to work with a computer; mastery of certain accounting or budgeting procedures; or human relations skills for negotiating with unions or management.
- **KNOWLEDGE**, especially highly specialized or technical knowledge that is so often necessary in current decision making and action. It is this specialized knowledge that gives certain "bureaucrats" social power today. Examples of people who possess specialized knowledge are planning consultants, civil engineers, economic analysts, and "grantsmen" — those who know where grant money is available and how to get it.