Community/trade union organising: building and sustaining reciprocal relationships

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Current research

‘Broad-based community alliances: a comparative study of London and Sydney’

• 18th-month Economic and Social Research Council Funded project - study of London Citizens (UK) and the Sydney Alliance (Australia)

• Aim: to develop a greater understanding of how and why unions choose to get involved in community coalitions (and why not) and what they perceived the benefits or threats from this type of organising.
Defining community unionism…

‘Community unionism describes a whole series of ways that unions work with communities and community organisations over issues of interest to either or both'.

Carla Lipsig-Mumme (2003) 'Forms Of Solidarity: Trade Unions And Community Unionism.'
Defining community unionism…

‘Community unions identify with the broader concerns of their ethnic, racial and geographical communities. The organisations view housing or civil rights or immigration issues as connected to their core mission around worker organising and issues of class and race, class and place, class and gender and class and ethnicity are joined in this model.’

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Defining community unionism…

‘In community unionism, ethnic, racial, gender, geographic, and even religious ties of low-wage workers stand in for craft and industrial identities…although the workplace continues to be central, neighbourhood, church, and social networks are also very important’.

Necessary elements for coalitions

Common concern
Organisational commitment, member commitment, public commitment

Relationships and structure
Organisational capacity, coalition structure, decision making, organisational culture and bridge builders.

Scale
Political opportunities, scale(s) of the decision makers, local broker organisations
The importance of power

‘At its core, a coalition is truly successful only if it has created organisational strength. Coalitions are strategically limited if they win political reforms in ways that sacrifice the power of their organisations. Coalitions play a role in rebuilding civil society by sustaining relationships between the organisations as this creates a ready network of future allies.’

JUSTICE!!!
JUSTICE!!!
Justice for Migrant Workers!
Regularisation of undocumented workers!
Filipino Migrant Workers, Unite!
Clean up LOW PAY
Recognising where power lies

‘The moral authority that London Citizens has given to the London living wage has been extraordinary’ and that ‘this should not be underestimated…we would not have been able to do what we have done without this leadership…the moral authority of London Citizens has been devastating in its impact.’

Jack Dromey, former Unite Deputy General Secretary.
Summary community organising

Community organising takes time!
- It means building reciprocal relationships and alliances
- It is about listening and being clear about the issues – what is the ‘ask’ – is it achievable?
- It is about understanding power and leverage
- It is about innovation and tactics
- It is about being able to mobilise communities and people
- It is about doing actions and creating reactions
Useful readings on community/trade union organising


