



CCJP

CATHOLICS IN COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace
2014 Occasional Paper Series

‘What is the Sydney Alliance?’



<http://www.sydneyalliance.org.au/>

**Edited Transcript of Address given by
David Barrow on 20th July 2014**

**CCJP and CLRI NSW have both become Members of the
Sydney Alliance.**



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David is an experienced organiser working for social change and organisational renewal. David plays a leadership role within the Uniting Church, was the chair of the National Christian Youth Convention and is a delegate of the NSW Synod. Formerly David was a board member of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, Australian Youth Forum Steering Committee and a student representative of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. He was the President of the UTS Union Board, then the National Union of Students. As National President he campaigned in Australia and India to secure the 2009 reforms of International student rights and won increases to youth allowance for rural and poor students.

...So what is the Sydney Alliance?

The Sydney Alliance is a coalition of 52 organisations, including the Catholic Archdiocese, Broken Bay Diocese, Parramatta Diocese, Catholic Care, St Vincent de Paul, as well as the Uniting Church, the Baptist Church, The Muslim Women's Association, The Jewish Board of Deputies, community organisations, migrant resource centres, schools and nine trade unions. What we do is build a better city through a technique called **community organising**.

Community organising started back in the 1940s with a guy called Saul Alinsky who was a Jewish outsider. I really see a lot of similarities with Alinsky because his first job was getting the Irish Catholics, the Slovak Catholics and the Polish Catholics to talk to each other in a place called the Back of the Yards, the world's largest abattoir complex in Chicago where Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* was written. And that year the union that employed thousands and thousands of workers in this place cut pay three times and the churches, the Catholic churches and black Protestants, the union came together to fight a campaign and they used this technique called community organising. That was a long time ago. Saul Alinsky is a very divisive figure, but since then this type of community organising has evolved.

Amanda Tattersall, who founded the Sydney Alliance off the back of the Your Rights at Work campaign where unions and community and faith groups had

worked together, went to explore community organising in the United States. She wrote a PhD about it, she came back and she asked what would it look like to set up a broad based organisation like the ones that I've studied, here in Sydney. So they went out and got the first set of organisations - Unions NSW, Parramatta Diocese, the Jewish Board of Deputies - to come in and they started to build the relationship. We spent three or four years building a relationship because our organisations had never worked together before, or not in recent history.

So we did the relationship building and then we had a listening campaign and we had 6,000 conversations with people around Sydney. We asked them if you could improve one thing in our city what would it be?

The issues identified were social inclusion, community health and support and, of course in Sydney, public transport.

We then launched at the Town Hall. Was anyone there? Who was there? Yeah, a number of you were there.

Two thousand leaders in the Town Hall from all walks of life, all parts of Sydney. Before we did any public action we wanted to have our debut on Sydney's scene. Of course it was the same night that the casino were doing their big refurbishment, so that was the main story on the front page, not this amazing coming together of people from different walks of life.

Since then we've started our political action, working at non-partisan political action and we're coming up to an election in NSW where we will be taking part vigorously, and the invitation to you is to take part and bring your communities with you to take part in the assemblies happening around Sydney. Our agenda at the moment is around affordable housing, public transport and jobs for disadvantaged young people. So that's a bit of history.

Why is the Catholic Church involved? Well His Eminence George Pell committed to this because he saw a role for Catholics in public life. I've admired him; that's something that he's always been very passionate about. He was interested in seeing what this would look like because the only stories told about Catholics in the news are about...*Abuse*.

The humble work of the Spirit that is done every day is not reported on. That was number one. Two, was this community organising - and Saul Alinsky was best friends with a guy called Jacques Maritain, and all of his theories came out of Catholic social teaching, solidarity, subsidiarity, common good and human dignity. It's a secular understanding of Catholic social teaching.

The third is that in Sydney the Catholic Church is more multicultural and poorer than almost any other subsection of the population. Not all of it, there's a big diversity in the Catholic Church but the Sydney Alliance have helped families in Sydney get a better life and that brings practical changes in people's lives. So that's a bit of background.

In community organising we use something called the *organising cycling*...

We start off by *building relationships*... We then work out what we can work on together, because we don't agree on everything. We're not going to work on social issues, we're not going to work on gay marriage, we're not going to work on abortion, we're not going to work on even climate change, we have to work on things that builds the society and create a common platform. So we do some *discernment*. We do *research*. We want to find out what are the specific wins that we can extract from government, to get government to deliver, because most people have never participated in this kind of work before and their usual experience of politics is defeat. We do not want to give people an experience of defeat when they come into public life.

We do *planning and then we run actions*. Now actions are about getting the right reaction from power. We have a very strong power analysis and understanding of self-interest. This is not about altruism. It's about self-interest properly understood - interest, yours and mine together. So run actions, run huge meetings with hundreds of thousands of people and we ask the local politicians to deliver. And the reason I'm excited to meet with you all is that we usually have someone of outstanding moral fortitude do the role of *pinning*. *Now pinning is when we get them to pin down the politician to a commitment*.

Now Sister Louise is an experienced pinner. She may be small in stature and quiet in voice but watch out, when she's up there with a politician she has the cool, reflective nature that is needed in the crucible in front of hundreds of



people to actually get these people to deliver. We have needs all over Sydney for people like yourselves to help us in this regard 'cause really, who can say no to a nun?

Anyway, so we run these actions and then we evaluate because we've learnt from the mistakes of the past. We don't want to be repeating failures. So that's the organising cycle. And I thought what I'd do is I'd show an example of this work from our sister organisation in London.

Now they started about 15 years before us, they're very much more advanced than we are, and the work that they did around the Olympics is just really exciting, and we're thinking about in the future after our current campaigns, thinking about how we could do something similar with the Western Sydney Airport perhaps, I'm not sure. So I'll get you to have a look at this and think about it, and it will explain this organising cycle in itself and explain a little bit about community organising.

Watch Citizens UK Video – What is Community organising?:

http://www.citizensuk.org/youtube-2/?tubepress_page=2

Gregory was a student at a school in East London back in 2003 and about to embark on an epic journey. He heard that politicians wanted London to host the Olympic Games in 2012 and if they won it would be right in his backyard. Many of his friends didn't seem to care about this but he thought that it could be a real opportunity.

Through his head teacher, Gregory had been on a leadership training course with Citizens UK, an alliance of schools with churches, mosques, trade unions and other civil society institutions. He had been trained, along with other leaders to go out and listen to what was important to people in their local area. They found lots of people complaining about housing and jobs. He pulled together a team who decided to act on what they had heard. They wanted to ensure that the Olympics brought a fair deal for everyone in East London. They created a clear set of demands and presented them to the people in power.

At first the politicians leading the Olympics bid refused to meet with them. Gregory and the other people in the alliance realised that they needed to build



power if they wanted to be recognised. So they decided to produce a video letter outlining their demands for the common good. Living wage jobs on the Olympic Park, training and jobs for local people, affordable family housing to be provided after the Olympics.

By now Gregory was one of 500 citizen leaders from a diverse range of local institutions who through their organising tactics and persistence had persuaded Londoners, the mayor, and the bid committee to consider these people's ethical guarantees into the London bid. These very same teachers, cleaners, students, shopkeepers, imams and priests empowered with the relationships they had built now stood on the same platform as those from traditional positions of power. Gregory led the citizens delegation to a signing ceremony at City Hall and delivered a powerful story about the impact the Olympics could have on his life. The main politicians involved, Mayor Livingstone, and Lord Coe were moved by his story, and not only recognised the alliance but also agreed to include the citizens' demands in the bid.

On the 6th of July 2005 Prime Minister Tony Blair and Lord Coe would share the London bid with the rest of the world. London had won, and the simple act of knocking on doors and listening to people had extraordinary outcomes.

This ability to rebuild and strengthen communities is based on a process called community organising. It works to build a diverse membership alliance that is trained to listen to local people, build teams around issues that matter to them, develop the art of public action, demand recognition from people in power, sit down to negotiate for what they want, focusing on the world as it is and striving to create the world as it should be.

But this was not the end for Gregory and his fellow leaders. They met regularly for the next eight years from those in charge of delivering the Olympics' legacy. They wanted to ensure that the Olympics were the best ever, not just in terms of sport but also to ensure its lasting legacy for people living in London, and it was worth it. For example, by turning citizens' institutions into job centres they managed to get nearly 2,000 local people into living wage jobs, many to people who had never had a job before. Citizens UK starts by bringing people together so that they are powerful enough to create the change they want to see. It is



based on the principle that stronger relationships between people and their institutions give communities more power to make change.

As well as successful campaigns, including the Living Wage, creating job opportunities and providing permanently affordable housing for local people, Citizens UK members have also made our streets safer, stopped families being locked up in immigration detention centres and taken action on hundreds of other local issues. We exist so that people like Gregory can reclaim politics and pass on the baton to future generations.

A few reactions to that? Do you want to share your thoughts, Mary?

Mary: I just thought it was quite powerful how they could use the resources after the games, which often doesn't get looked at.

David Barrow: That's right. Other reflections?

Female: I liked the connections between people finding the common ground, to tell you what they need despite their differences.

David Barrow: That's right.

Female: And finding the needs of people instead of telling them what they need.

David Barrow: And I tell you what, that's a very agitating idea for many of our organisations.

Female: obviously they're in it for the long haul.

David Barrow: That's right. That's why we don't have individual members, we only have organisational members because individuals will come and go but our organisations have to stand the test of time.

Female [15:01]: I think it shows what we can do when we get out of our comfort zone.

David Barrow: Indeed. Creating a safe place for people to be given the excuse to meet their neighbours who might be different from them, outside of their comfort zone.

Female: Well that brings us back, doesn't it, to listening to each other, finding common ground, and that struck me as being probably the most important thing.

David Barrow: And that's what makes this very different to social movements that come and go around an issue, because our power isn't based on just the issue, it's based on a network of relationships that bring people together and through many issues. The Arab Council and Jewish Board of Deputies are both members of the Sydney Alliance, and that's a very complex relationship.

