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## **Broad-based organizing in the UK: reasserting the centrality of political activity in community development**

Paul Bunyan

### **Abstract**

This article examines the emergence of broad-based organizing in the UK and the importance given to political activity within community development. Popularly associated with Saul Alinsky and the work of the Industrial Areas Foundation, the translation from the USA has been problematic. With the emergence and sustained growth of 'London Citizens', now one of the largest citizen-based organizations in the country, a firmer foothold has been established. The article examines the central concepts underpinning the political and philosophical basis of broad-based organizing and explores some of the challenges involved in developing and sustaining an approach that is overtly political and utilizes conflict and direct action to engage and negotiate with established power. At a time when the neo-liberal agenda has had a depoliticizing effect upon community development, this provides a model that challenges current orthodoxy associated with 'partnership' and 'empowerment' and reasserts the centrality of power and politics in promoting change and social reform.

### **Introduction**

The growth and success of 'London Citizens', a broad-based organization that has become a significant player in public life and grass roots politics of the capital represents an important development in UK community development. Broad-based organizing derives from the work of Saul Alinsky in the USA. Aimed at renewing interest in public life by training people within local organizations and institutions to build power and take responsibility for solving the problems in their own communities, it provides a model of community engagement which is distinctly different from consensus-based models that have dominated the theory and practice of UK community development in recent years.

Saul Alinsky is best known for his two books *Rules for Radicals* (Alinsky, 1971) and *Reveille for Radicals* (Alinsky, 1969) in which he combined philosophical and tactical insight about the nature of political engagement in an urban context with a large measure of irreverence, acerbic wit and humour. Alinsky died in 1972, but the work of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the organization he set up in 1940 to promote the development of broad-based citizens' organizations, continued under the leadership of Edward Chambers, who had worked with Alinsky as his chief organizer for almost two decades. Chambers, now over 75, continues to head up the IAF which has a network of over sixty organizations across the USA and works closely with the Citizen Organizing Foundation, the national body promoting broad-based organizing in the UK, to which 'London Citizens' is affiliated.

In 2003, Chambers published *Roots for Radicals*, setting out the fundamental tenets and philosophy of broad-based organizing. Central to this is an understanding of power and politics, and the first part of the article compares key aspects to current discourse about 'partnership' and 'empowerment'. The second

part examines the development of London Citizens in terms of structure and agency, and the challenges and issues involved in establishing and sustaining broad-based organizing as a model of community action in the UK.

### **Politics and power versus partnership and empowerment**

In his classic text *In Defence of Politics*, Bernard Crick describes politics as an activity at the heart of the human condition. He says:

Politics is an activity which must be carried on; one does not create it or decide to join in – one simply becomes more and more aware that one is involved in it as part of the human condition (Crick, 1992, p. 26). Political activity is central to shaping and promoting human development

or what Amartya Sen has defined as the ‘expansion of human freedoms’ (Sen, 2001, p. 3). In broad-based organizing, the starting point in addressing human freedoms lies in the relationship between the personal and the political, and finds expression in what Chambers has referred to as the most radical thing taught by the IAF – the relational meeting. In *Roots for Radicals* he defines this as:

an encounter that is face-to-face – one-to-one – for the purpose of exploring the development of a public relationship . . . . A solid relational meeting brings up stories that reveal people’s deepest commitments and the experiences that give rise to them . . . stories that open a window into the passions that animate people to act (Chambers, 2003, p. 44).

Chambers realized that if organizations were to be sustained and rooted, then the political could not be at the expense of the personal but rather had to flow from, and be inextricably linked to it. To this end, the relational meeting became the building-block of broad-based organizing and the central element in the training of organizers. Relational meetings remain the core activity of professional organizers, and most organizers spend a significant period of their week-to-week schedule carrying out individual relational meetings. Such relational activity makes sense within the context of a power-based organization. To have conversations and engage in dialogue with people about the issues that most affect them and the aspirations they have for themselves, their families and their communities make more sense when this happens within a framework that can engage them with others as agents for change.

In broad-based organizing, power represents the central reference point. For Alinsky, it constituted the fundamental issue, around which his political and tactical insight was based. Alinsky maintained that without power, ordinary folk were left to the vagaries of the power elite and the liberal establishment. In *Reveille for Radicals*, he says:

Liberals fear power or its application. They labour in confusion over the significance of power and fail to recognise that only through the achievement and constructive use of power can people better themselves . . . . Every issue involving power and its use has always carried with it the liberal backwash of agreeing with the objective but disagreeing with the tactics (Alinsky, 1969, p. 22).

In part, Alinsky was reacting against a limited one-dimensional view of power, that of ‘power over’ or power understood as the exertion of influence over others in accordance with, or against, their will, which remains the dominant view of power held by many. Contrasting with this view is the understanding of power as ‘power with’, which is the capacity to do or achieve something collectively, irrespective of the intentions of others. This view of power has its most influential proponent in the philosopher Hannah

Arendt who has remained an important influence in broad-based organizing, particularly in the thinking and writing of Chambers. Arendt understood power as 'speaking and acting in concert'. She says:

Power springs up between men when they act together . . . . Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence (Arendt, 1958, p. 200).

This is a useful conceptualization of power in relation to broad-based organizing and the building of a people's organization. It is an understanding of power as being built through the activity of speech and action otherwise known as politics. Alinsky's great insight in terms of building such power was that he understood the importance of local institutions in the everyday lives of people – their allegiances with churches, workplace unions, schools and community organizations – and the potential for such institutions to become the basis of a power organization that could act on the issues and concerns that mattered most to them.

Power has always been an important concept in community work, but, recently the vague and hollow language associated with 'empowerment' and 'partnership' has increasingly displaced it. While partnership is nothing new in that organizations have always worked together to a greater or lesser extent, partnership as a political construct and formal policy mechanism shaped within the context of neo-liberal ideology represents a significant change in terms of the social, economic and political landscape within which community development now takes place. In contrast to the early sense of optimism about the role and potential for community development within the context of partnership, the profession in the UK has struggled within this changed landscape. In the most recent survey of the current state of community development in the UK, carried out by Henderson and Glen and reported in the *Community Development Journal* in July 2006, the authors identify a number of significant developments:

The most significant change that has taken place in community development practice has been the importance of partnership working (p. 278). . . . Most (65%) of the paid community development posts identified were located within the context of wider strategic policy programmes . . . primarily, government-funded programmes such as regeneration, community cohesion, and healthy living strategies implemented through a partnership arrangement (p. 283).

In concluding the article, the authors identify two main reasons why community work has struggled within the current context. The first, they claim, is the weak 'infrastructure' of the profession and the need for it to 'get its own house in order'. The second is the lack of resources and support by central and local government departments despite the rhetoric around social policy identifying the need for community involvement and engagement. While accurate this analysis only tells part of the story and misses some other salient points. First, in framing community development primarily within the context of the state and of 'partnership working', the profession has risked becoming domesticated and disconnected from its radical roots, radical in this context being associated with the notion of getting to the root of people's experiences and holding the state and private sector to account for the ways in which they fail to connect with, and respond to, people's needs and aspirations.

Secondly, in not developing a robust enough analysis of partnership and power, particularly within the context of the neo-liberal agenda, the profession has too easily been strung along believing that the language and rhetoric around 'partnership' and 'empowerment' would translate into increased recognition and resources. These have not materialized, however, and with the gradual realization that beneath the rhetoric, the emphasis has been more about centralized managerially led targets rather than commitment to people-centred processes the profession now finds itself at a critical juncture, at risk of losing its identity and soul. Thirdly, in an increasingly managerialist and bureaucratized context, the value of relational work has been diminished. In their survey, Henderson and Glen comment:

There appear to be some significant trends. Chief among them is evidence that a high proportion of the paid workers spend a relatively small amount of time in direct contact with communities (Henderson and Glen, 2006, p. 282).

Within the context of partnership working and the so-called ‘empowerment’ of communities, we appear to be witnessing a trend whereby professional workers, not just community workers but also youth workers, social workers and other professionals who traditionally worked with people face-to-face, are spending less time engaging with people in communities and more time relating with each other. This trend accords with a move towards a managerialist, top-down social planning approach and away from a community development approach. Finally, partnership makes sense only when understood within the context of power – otherwise it has the intentional or unintentional effect of masking relations of power and consolidating existing power relations. Authentic partnership exists when there is a closer power approximation between the partners. To this end, one of the central tasks of community development is to change the nature of established power relations and equip communities to engage with those who dominate and control the structures and allocations of resources of post-industrial societies (Head, 1979).

### **London Citizens – structure and agency (membership, funding and campaigns)**

The impact of the social, political and economic context upon the relationship between agency and structure has been central to the community task at any given time (Poppo, 1995; Shaw, 2007). In recent decades within the structural context of neo-liberalism and associated government policy mechanisms promoting ‘empowerment’ and ‘partnership’, agency in community development has been increasingly channelled into more benign, consensus-based and apolitical visions of change (DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge, 2006).

Broad-based organizing as a political strategy aims to enhance agency by bringing institutions together across an urban area to work for change and social justice. The power and agency of a broad-based organization is therefore largely derived through the number and the size of the institutions involved. Currently, ‘London Citizens’ is made up of three broad-based organizations, namely ‘The East London Communities Organization’ (TELCO), ‘South London Citizens’ and ‘West London Citizens’ (plans are currently ongoing to start an organization in North London) that together comprise a total of almost ninety dues-paying member institutions. The structure of the organization, with local institutions becoming members of an organization covering a particular part of London, which in turn link with its counterparts in other parts of London, means that, while ownership remains local in addressing concerns and developing new leadership, there is the scope to address wider issues across the city through the development of more ambitious strategic campaigns.

The table 1 below shows the current breakdown of London Citizens’ member institutions. Some institutions are more engaged in broad-based organizing than others illustrating that within civil society, there are many competing and contested views about the means and strategies best employed in working for change. To this end, there are many reasons why organizations decide not to join London Citizens, including factors such as the political nature of the work and tactics employed, existing relations of power, the requirement to pay dues and the expectation of a commitment to working with a diverse range of organizations on a multi-issue agenda. Conversely, there are many reasons why organizations decide to join including factors such as a desire to build power, to develop leadership and involvement in public life, to relate with other organizations, to promote social justice and to act on particular issues of interest or concern.

**Table 1. London Citizens' institutional membership (as at September 2008)**

Type of institution	Number of member organizations
Buddhist Organizations	1
Church of England Parishes	9
Medical/Health Organizations	1
Methodist Churches	4
Mosques/Islamic Organizations	5
Pentecostal Churches	2
Roman Catholic Parishes/Organizations	31
Schools	11
Sikh Gurdwaras	1
Student Associations/University Departments	3
Union Branches	11
United Reformed Churches	1
Voluntary Organizations/Community Associations	7
Youth Organizations	1
Total	88

The table 1 shows clearly that faith institutions constitute the foundation of the organization. There are two main reasons for this. First, in philosophical terms, faith institutions have a strong perspective on values associated with community, solidarity and the 'world as it should be' (even though they may struggle at times to animate such values) and one of the central strategies of broad-based organizing is to link themes of solidarity and social justice to narratives of faith. Secondly, in political terms, in urban areas, particularly diverse poorer urban areas, faith institutions remain important for large numbers of people, holding out the potential for mobilization around common interests and concerns. In London, faith institutions have remained relatively vibrant due in large part to the Black immigrant population for whom faith, in relative terms, has remained a central aspect of identity, culture and public expression. This contrasts with other parts of the country where faith institutions, particularly traditional Christian denominations have suffered a significant decline in numbers in recent decades (Knight and Stokes, 1996) and may point to one of the contributory factors as to why broad-based organizing has so far struggled to become established outside of the capital.

It is beyond the scope of the article to look at each of the different types of institutions shown in the table 1 and the reasons why they are involved. However, I shall briefly examine those institutions that provide the bulk of the institutional membership. It should be noted, however, that the number of organizations associated with the different types of institutions shown does not give an indication of the numbers of people associated with them or indeed the importance and influence of an organization within a locality. For example, although the table 1 indicates only five Mosques/Islamic Organizations in current membership, one of them, the East London Mosque, in Whitechapel, East London, represents the largest of all of the member institutions and one of the most influential organizations in that part of London.

Within the broad category of faith, Roman Catholic parishes and organizations play a significant role accounting for over a third of London Citizens' member organizations. There are a number of reasons for this, including factors such as a large proportion of the membership being working class, an emphasis in Catholic social teaching on notions of the 'common good', solidarity and social justice, a distinct and separate history and identity from the state, and at a pragmatic level, the general endorsement by the Catholic hierarchy in London, of broad-based organizing and the involvement of parishes within the organization.

The involvement of the Church of England by contrast has been limited. In an article in the *Community Development Journal* in 1997 entitled, 'Breaking with tradition? The Church of England and community organizing', examining the association at the time between the Church of England, through its Church Urban Fund, and broad-based organizing, the authors highlighted a number of contrasting and potential areas of tension between broad-based organizing and the Anglican 'social tradition'. These included, among other things, an emphasis in broad-based organizing on building and confronting power and identifying grassroots 'selfinterests' and shared concerns, as opposed to an emphasis in the Anglican 'social tradition' on meeting needs and changing minds, and commissioning research in identifying social problems. The established nature of the Church of England, in particular, was identified as a potential area of tension. On this point the authors commented:

Anglicanism has certainly been more socially engaged than many more pietist denominations. However, this engagement has rarely shared the radical commitment of community organising (broad-based organising) to enabling the poor themselves to confront established power. Indeed, the Church of England has itself been part of the establishment, strongly middle class, white and male in its government and with a very limited working-class membership (Furbey et al., 1997).

Union involvement in London Citizens grew as a direct consequence of the 'living wage' campaign launched by 'TELCO' in 2001. The bringing together of faith and community-based organizations with work-based Union Branches, in a campaign to tackle poverty by pressing for improvements in the pay and conditions of low-paid workers, represented an important development and was responsible for significantly raising the profile of London Citizens and broad-based organizing. Large public sector organizations, such as hospitals, and private sector corporations, such as banks, were targeted and pressured to pay their low-paid workers a 'living wage' as opposed to the minimum wage, which kept many workers trapped in poverty. The campaign which is ongoing has secured major improvements in the terms and conditions of contracted workers at a number of hospitals across London and in an increasing number of corporations, most notably the world headquarters of HSBC at Canary Wharf. In 2006, an independent research report by Queen Mary College, University of London, entitled 'The impact of improved pay and conditions on low-paid urban workers; the case of the Royal London Hospital' (Sokol et al., 2006) identified a number of significant improvements as a result of the campaign, including an increase in hourly pay from £5.20 to £7.50, which, in turn led to a higher commitment from workers to their workplace and to a significantly reduced staff turnover.

The involvement of schools has grown steadily in response to the agenda around the teaching of citizenship in schools, with those joining the organization seeing it as a way of turning what could be an arid classroom-based activity into a more 'hands-on' experience of political activity which enables students to engage with the realities and complexities of urban life. It also recognizes that the fates of urban schools and communities are inextricably linked and that it makes little sense to reform urban schools in situations in which the communities around them stagnate or collapse (Warren, 2005).

Member institutions pay yearly dues of between £500.00 and £1800.00, depending upon their size to support the organization. The money that comes from membership dues, referred to as 'hard money', in contrast to 'soft money' which comes from other sources such as Trusts, Foundations and the National Lottery, is seen as crucial in terms of developing members' ownership, accountability of paid staff and independence and autonomy from the state, from which money has so far been resisted. Membership dues contribute towards the running costs of the organization, which include the employment of paid organizers, the training of leaders and the costs associated with actions and campaigns. Between April 2006 and March 2007 almost £64,000 was raised through membership dues, representing just under 20 percent of total income, the aim being to increase the percentage of 'hard money' raised in relation to 'soft money'. This represents a major challenge, particularly as the organization has grown and attracted

increasing attention and interest from Foundations and Trusts which in turn has led to the employment of more paid organizers, currently numbering ten in total.

The growth of the organization is in large part due to the increasing scope and ambition of the actions and campaigns that have been undertaken in recent years. Examples of two such campaigns currently being waged focus on issues related to affordable housing and the rights of migrants and demonstrate the importance of the institutional basis of the organization and the use of conflict tactics and tension in engaging and negotiating with power. In July 2007, one hundred 'London Citizen' families camped in tents erected on the green outside City Hall, the Mayoral and London Assembly headquarters, to launch the 'Our Homes, Our London' campaign, aimed at increasing the provision of affordable housing in London. In 2004, Mayor Livingstone had pledged to work with 'TELCO' to develop community land trust homes on a site in Bow, East London, but, after three years, there was little progress. Prompted by the Mayor's inactivity, 'London Citizens' raised the level of tension around the issue through the 'tent-city' action and generated a great deal of media attention. As a result, Livingstone announced that he would work with London Citizens and build one hundred new community land trust homes in a pilot project starting in 2009 with thousands more community land trust homes being developed in future years across London. In the run up to the London mayoral election in May 2008, at a London Citizens Assembly attended by over 2500 people from member organizations, Livingstone's main rival, Boris Johnson, pledged, if elected, to work with 'London Citizens' on the issue of affordable housing. The challenge for the organization over the coming years is to hold him to his pledge now that he has become mayor of London.

Both the affordable housing campaign and the 'living wage' campaign mentioned earlier provide examples of issues about which there was ready agreement amongst the membership about the need for action. That was not initially the case with the second example, the 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign, which focused on the rights of migrants and it is worth looking briefly at this to examine the process by which decisions about action and campaigns are made within the organization.

The practice of democratic assembly has long been established as part of the culture and ethos of broad-based organizing. Large yearly assemblies have been augmented with smaller internal delegate assemblies and monthly strategy meetings where teams of leaders from member groups come together to discuss, argue, hear testimony, debate and eventually vote (as an institution) on a position or a new campaign. In May 2005, West London Citizens voted to extend the living wage campaign into the hotel sector and this brought the organization into contact with large numbers of exploited workers, many of whom were undocumented or 'overstayers'. Contact with Roman Catholic ethnic chaplaincies at the time also brought the organization into contact with many 'undocumented' workers and worshippers. Over the summer of 2006, local meetings were held in member groups and with other groups with experience of the issue of 'irregular' workers, and stories and testimonies from members were gathered. In October 2006, delegates from TELCO and South London Citizens met in two delegate assemblies and considered the various proposals for action that were before them. The proposal for a 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign was voted upon and agreed at both assemblies and a month later in November 2006 ratified by much fuller assemblies, totalling 1500 people.

At a strategy meeting of West London Citizens also in November 2006, though sympathetic to the issue, delegates were less convinced that they knew enough about the issues involved and that enough people had been involved. They asked for more time and agreed to meet to decide on the issue in March 2007. After three months of workshops and research, West London Citizen members voted almost unanimously to support the campaign. The process identified, which covered a period of almost two years, culminated in a major action which took place on 7 May 2007 (May Day), when 10,000 London Citizen members marched from Westminster to Trafalgar Square in support of the 'Strangers into



Citizens' campaign, aimed at promoting the rights of migrants by securing a two-year pathway to full legal rights for undocumented migrants who have been in the UK for four or more years. Supporting the campaign on the platform at Trafalgar Square was an impressive and unlikely mix of religious and political leaders and activists, including the Catholic Archbishop, Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Dr Abdul Bari, head of the Muslim Council of Britain, Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON, John Cruddas, Labour MP, Baroness Shirley Williams, Liberal Democrat Peer and Billy Bragg, musician and political activist. The numbers involved and the platform line-up highlighted both the importance of the process and internal politics involved and the institutional basis of broad-based organizing in ensuring turnout and the involvement of a diverse line-up of prominent public figures.

### **Establishing and sustaining community action as a model for change – issues and challenges**

Over thirty-five years ago, Marris and Rein (1972) explored the complexities of promoting social reform through community action, drawing parallels to the ideals and assumptions implicit in the social experiments taking place in the USA at the time, to similar programmes that were taking shape in Britain as a result of recommendations arising from the Seeborn, Plowden and Skeffington reports and the setting up of the Community Development Projects under the UK Home Office. In both contexts, an ambitious programme of urban projects was initiated, at the heart of which was a commitment to the idea of co-ordination, community participation and the need for systematic evaluation, not dissimilar to present day assumptions underpinning 'partnership' and 'empowerment' as mechanisms of social policy. Marris and Rein illustrated the inherent difficulties in the application of these principles within a complex political environment. In relation to the agencies they studied and their competing roles and priorities in accommodating the expectations and interests of a multiplicity of stakeholders including funders, politicians, government bureaucrats, community leaders and the public at large, they concluded:

Only as an agency became partisan, and chose between its possible roles, could it recover its coherence. This is perhaps the most general conclusion of our study: that no movement of reform in American society can hope to supplant the conflicts of interest from which policy evolves. It can only act as advocate, not as judge. If it is to be persuasive, it must be single-minded about the interests it represents, and so willing to surrender any claim to universal authority. Once this is recognised, community action can be seen as the starting point of a variety of innovations, each of which, if it is to influence the progress of reform, must be disentangled from the constraint of its rivals (Marris and Rein, 1972, p. 287).

This provides an important insight in examining the role of community action and the constraints and difficulties involved in establishing and sustaining it as a model of social reform. The strength of community action lies in its independence and autonomy from those influences, including the state that might deflect it from the partisanship and single-mindedness in promoting the interests of the poor and those lacking power, referred to by Marris and Rein. This inevitably leads to the need to develop a conflictual perspective and approach. However, developing and sustaining such an approach, particularly in relation to establishing a power base, mobilizing resources and securing funding present a major challenge, accentuated by the sense, within the present neo-liberal context, that conflict is a thing of the past and that in these more enlightened times of partnership and empowerment there is little need to adopt such a stance. In building a power base, founded upon existing local institutions who recognize that their capacity to promote the interests of their members are best realized alongside others in developing a sufficient degree of power, London Citizens has managed to address some of the challenges identified.

The way that community work has been conceptualized within the context of the UK provides a further reason why community action-based models have struggled to take root and become established. Since the 1970s, the development of community work practice theory in the UK has been framed by what Shaw (2007) has referred to as a spurious dichotomy, between what has been variously referred to on the one hand as professional, objective, technical and technicist approaches and on the other hand political, ideological, radical and transformationist approaches to community work. In contrast to the implied mutual exclusivity between the two camps, Shaw sees community development as being 'both a professional practice and a political practice', the distinction serving analytical purposes, 'rather than a dichotomy in which one has to choose sides' (Shaw, 2007, p. 26). One of the implications of such a dichotomy has been that community work theory has tended to divide into two broad camps based upon the micro-level and macro-level, respectively, at the expense of what has been termed the meso-level:

The so-called meso-level represents a structured intermediate level of social, economic and or political organisation lying somewhere between the macro- (large-scale levels) and the micro (small-scale) levels, partly separate and autonomous but also linking the two (Goehler, 2000, p. 32).

Shaw stresses the importance of this intermediate level in developing new forms of collective identity and political praxis:

One way forward is to think of community as an intermediate level of social reality in which people collectively experience both the possibilities of human agency and the constraints of structure – between, in Mills' (1970) terms, the micro-politics of 'personal troubles' and the macro-politics of 'public issues' (Martin, 2003). It is in the dialectics of community, understood in this way, that citizens may conceivably be able to analyse and articulate their own contradictory experience of policy, to express new forms of collective identity and interest or to revive old ones (Shaw, 2007, p. 32).

This is an important observation because activity at this intermediate or meso-level is critical in terms of connecting people beyond the local and opening up the arena of public and political activity. However, it represents a very significant challenge both in organizational terms, in the development of structures not prescribed by the state, and in establishing a power base that transcends the local or micro-level and is sustained over the longer term. London Citizens would appear to have achieved the transition from the micro- to the meso-level in its structure and in many of its strategic campaigns but it presents an ongoing struggle and challenge to sustain such a model.

Having examined some of the issues and challenges in terms of the broad context and the constraints with which more radical approaches to community development have had to contend, I shall turn briefly to look at the specific difficulties encountered in establishing broad-based organizing as a model for change in the UK. To this end, the relatively recent success of London Citizens needs to be set against a background stretching back over almost two decades in which there has been a number of failed efforts to establish broad-based organizations in other parts of the country. In 1988, the Citizen Organizing Foundation was established to promote broad-based organizing in the UK. Grants were secured from a number of Trusts and Foundations, most notably the Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Church Urban Fund. In 1990, the first broad-based organization was launched in Bristol, followed by Merseyside in 1992. Over the next four years, four other organizations were launched in North Wales, Sheffield, the West Midlands and East London. The first few years went well with each organization achieving recognition as a new political entity and player within their localities and regions, and there was a strong sense in which a national network was being developed upon which the possibilities of national campaigns could be forged. However, despite an over-riding sense of optimism, concerns and difficulties began to emerge as the intensity of the work and the relatively limited scale of resources, meant that organizations were over-stretched with some operating with only one full-time worker. As a result issues about sustainability, funding and the allocation of resources across the network increasingly began to

dominate. As finances became tight and uncertainty about sustainability increased, divisions and differences about how centrally held resources should be used to develop broad-based organizing across the UK led to a split across the network, with the East London and West Midlands organizations remaining affiliated to the Citizen Organizing Foundation and the others choosing not to remain affiliated. The rapid expansion of the network can be seen to have ultimately contributed to the difficulties which emerged and in hindsight, the strategy of launching too many organizations in a short period of time without having established a successful prototype was over ambitious and can be seen to have been flawed. The way that London Citizens has subsequently developed, building upon the success of The East London Communities Organization, first launched in 1996, with South London Citizens being launched in 2003, West London Citizens in 2006 and North London Citizens in the process of being formed, shows that lessons have been learned from this more troubled period.

The fall-out across the network has resulted in the present situation in which broad-based organizing, as promoted by the Citizen Organizing Foundation, is now currently operating in the two cities of London and Birmingham. The operation in Birmingham is at present, relatively smallscale and currently there are issues in relation to funding, sustainability and governance in terms of the management, supervision and employment of paid organizers, at the centre of which are problems related to the nature of the relationship between the Citizen Organizing Foundation as the central body and the local Birmingham organizing committee. Governance has remained a thorny issue over the lifetime of broad-based organizing in the UK and it is perhaps surprising and ironic that in an organization in which the concept of power is so central, developing a workable equation in terms of internal relations of power across a national network has been somewhat problematic. It perhaps also highlights and is symptomatic of the messiness of politics and the attempt to build power in general, but the failed attempts in other cities and the issues around governance do raise questions about the extent to which the successful model developed in London can be replicated in other cities in the UK in the near future. Having said this, the internal network issues need to be seen alongside the wider difficulties, complexities and constraints identified earlier, in developing an overtly political, community action-based model in what could be considered a largely conservative and challenging political context and environment. To this end, the current national picture of broadbased organizing should not detract from the achievements and success of London Citizens in establishing and sustaining what is currently one of the largest and most powerful broad-based citizen organizations in the UK.

## **Conclusion**

While partnership and consensus amongst professionals about how the needs of people are best served, may constitute a legitimate goal or aim, in the contested arena of public action, the interests of the poor and those who lack power are best served when power is developed to the extent that the potential and possibility for conflict exists. Without the potential for conflict and the necessary tension this involves, existing power relations remain unchallenged and the possibilities of developing a more radical and transformative agenda remain dormant. As Martin Luther King once said in response to eight prominent 'liberal' Alabama clergymen who had criticized him claiming that his actions would have the effect of inciting civil disturbances:

Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out into the open where it can be seen and dealt with (King, 1963).

The theory and practice of community development in the UK would appear to be at a critical juncture. The colonizing by other professions of its language and practices, the hollowing out of concepts such as 'partnership' and 'empowerment', and the shift to forms of managerialism that despite the rhetoric, consolidate rather than challenge existing relations of power, has eroded much of the radical edge and vitality which once defined community development as an activity. In a neo-liberal age in which consensus-based models of community development have prevailed, broad-based organizing as practiced by London Citizens provides an alternative model which offers 'the possibility of talking back to power rather than simply delivering depoliticized and demeaning versions of empowerment' (Shaw, 2007, p. 34).