

SAUL ALINSKY: MAN WITH A VISION

by

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B. S., McPherson College, 1967

5248

A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Science

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1971

Approved by:


Major Professor

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An important part of my creed as a social scientist is that on the grounds of absolute objectivity or on a posture of scientific detachment and indifference, a truly relevant and serious social science cannot ask to be taken seriously by a society desperately in need of moral and empirical guidance in human affairs. Nor can it support its claims to scientific purity or relevance by a preoccupation with methodology as an end and by innumerable articles in scientific journals devoted to escapist, even though quantifiable, trivia. I believe that to be taken seriously, to be viable, and to be relevant social science must dare to study the real problems of men and society, must use the real community, the market place, the arena of politics and power as its laboratories, and must confront and seek to understand the dynamics of social action and social change. The appropriate technology of serious and relevant social science would have as its prime goal helping society move toward humanity and justice with minimum irrationality, instability, and cruelty. If social science and social technology cannot help achieve these goals then they will be ignored or relegated to the level of irrelevance, while more serious men seek these goals through trial and error or through the crass exercise of power.

Kenneth B. Clark

Introduction

We hold these truths to be self evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed;...

Declaration of Independence

The ultimate question which mankind may face is whether world society in which population growth has been mastered, in which world order has been assured, and which affluence has brought an end to inequality and injustice, can also be a world in which the individual can enjoy those "inalienable rights" which the authors of the Declaration of Independence held to be the proper ends of government. Any theory of developmental change which neglects to consider the problem of progress in such terms as these remains but a fragmentary approach.

Fred W. Riggs

In the decade which began about 1958 and in the period following continuing up to the present we in the United States have been witnessing and participating in a great social movement. The direction of these social stirrings seems to be toward finding alternative ways for men to gain equality and individual liberty. The scope of the movement has been wide indeed. From both sides of the generation gap we have seen sit-ins, eat-ins, love-ins, marches, demonstrations, strikes, protests and communes. The action has been not only in Black and White, but also in Red Power and Brown Power. The actors have embraced a broad segment of United States population, including students and professors on college campuses, clergymen, women, Chicanos, Viet Nam veterans, Blacks, environmentalists and "Nader's Raiders." There has been movement on the Left and movement on the Right with every group proclaiming to have some solution to our present problems. (This is not to deny President Nixon and the "Silent Majority.") Still, the search for alternatives continues

and everyone from the most complacent American to the most alienated "drop-out" seems to be listening for the true prophet of the new age.

It is extremely difficult to make definitive statements about where all this activity is leading, and yet certain themes and counter themes are discernable. On the "Protest" side one such theme has been a fight against a "depersonalized, unresponsive bureaucracy." Another is the fight against "computerization and automation." A third is a contempt for "corporate liberalism." The common thread is clearly a revolt against stereotyped structures of contemporary American society. And, despite the charge that the activists are all negative, some positive themes are also discernable. One of the most prevalent cliches of the movement has been "freedom and equality." A crusading humanism has been on the move preaching the value of individuals and urging concern for the quality of life. Illustrative of these themes and counter themes is the following excerpt from a Student for a Democratic Society statement:

We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom and love. In affirming these principles we are aware of countering perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in the twentieth century: that he is inherently incapable of directing his own affairs. We oppose the depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things - if anything, the brutalities of the twentieth century teach that means and ends are intimately related, that vague appeals to "posterity" cannot justify the mutilations of the present...Men have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity. It is this potential that we regard as crucial and to which we appeal, not to the human potentiality for violence, unreason, and submission to authority. The goal of man and society should be human independence.¹

It is significant, I think, to note the idealism, the vision of man and society which comes through such statements. The future will tell us whether these voices are pure rhetoric or whether they have led to sustained action, action based on a renewed faith in mankind. But whatever the result, it seems

clear that the social stirrings mentioned turn away from the emphasis on technology and consumption and toward the continuing struggle for human dignity and meaning. It appears to be a changing of priorities, a reordering of values. This is important because the essential meaning of human life does not depend on the events of our existence, but rather is tied to our interpretation of those events and thus to our vision of ultimate reality. For example, it is a reported "fact" that on July 4, 1776, the Philadelphia Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. This event, coming as it did after fourteen months of armed hostilities between the American colonies and Great Britain, was not particularly significant. It was merely a formal explanation for the actions of the rebellious colonists. However, subsequent interpretations have given that event very powerful meaning not only for Americans, but for others as well. It has acquired meaning because men have been moved to action.

I submit that men do in fact try to build society so that it is congruent with their idea of ultimate reality. They are limited, of course, by physical and biological factors as well as by competing visions. Still, the roots of society, and thus of social change, lie in the ideas that men carry in their heads. If one assumes this generalization and then looks more closely at the social stirrings which have been mentioned, perhaps it is possible to see some beginnings of a new structure of society, a structure fashioned in part by the activist radicals. The word "radical" is used here because it has a double meaning both of which are part of the current situation. The common usage of "radical" is extreme change, and those who are termed radicals are certainly calling for sweeping changes. The second meaning of "radical" is that of getting at the root, of going back to basic assumptions. If the activists are

successful in changing the course of American society, it will be in part because they are radical in that second sense. The vision which they carry is also part of the American tradition and the changes for which they call have been sounded before.

In order for a vision or an idea to have power in society it must be shared by a large proportion of the people. And in order for it to be shared it must be articulated in a way that will catch people up and motivate them into activity toward the fulfillment of the dream. In the case of present day radicals in the United States, the content of the vision is not completely new, but contains ideas of individual freedom and human dignity which have long been a part of our heritage. Unfortunately, many of those who have been active in trying to articulate the vision have been ineffective in communicating with the American middle class. In their desperation they have resorted to tactics such as flag-burning, which have succeeded only in alienating the people they are attempting to influence. Or there are those who have "dropped-out" so completely that their absence is at best a feeble protest. To the person who is genuinely committed to changing society in the direction of the radical vision must come the realization that such efforts need a solid footing in the American heritage as well as a mature knowledge of how an effective opposition can be mounted. It is to this end that Saul D. Alinsky has established a training institute in Chicago and has continued to speak to interested groups throughout the nation as well as abroad.

Saul Alinsky has been known as an American radical, a community organizer, an activist, and a reformer for almost forty years. He is no longer in the headlines frequently, and, because of his age, many consider him to be "over the hill." However, I think he deserves serious study for several reasons.

He is a most articulate spokesman for the vision of human dignity, for equality and freedom. He is solidly grounded in the American tradition and has had a life time of practical experience at organizing people to reach the dream. His message is simple enough to be clearly defined. His vision is backed by insights from sociology and psychology as well as from political science. He is a catalyst and a voice of hope in present day America where so many feel so powerless.

In the following discussion I intend to look at Saul Alinsky as a spokesman for participatory democracy and as a builder of ideology. I will attempt to show that he is solidly in the American tradition and that his vision and tactics, which have been structured through years of experience, are also backed by insights from various academic disciplines. He has been known primarily as this country's foremost organizer of the poor, but I submit that his real significance may be in the vision he has for American society and in the way in which he is able to move people toward that vision.

Chapter I

Democratic Views in the American Tradition

Society and Ideas

It is quite plausible that the most significant aspect of the social movements of the past few years has been the statements of ideals which describe the kind of society the activists are looking toward. Such statements are important because, as Louis Wirth has pointed out, societies are possible in the last analysis "because the individuals in it carry around in their heads some sort of picture of that society."² That is to say that, for better or for worse, men are social beings and as such they construct a world of meaning. Social order is not a physical or natural phenomenon apart from the activity of man. Rather, social order exists because man produces it in the process of externalizing himself. The point at which man proclaims that all reality is humanly meaningful is what Peter Berger calls the "symbolic universe."

The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place within this universe...The symbolic universe is, of course, constructed by means of social objectivations. Yet its meaning-bestowing capacity far exceeds the domain of social life, so that the individual may "locate" himself within it even in his most solitary experiences.³

Another sociologist, Talcott Parsons, has also concerned himself with the importance of meaning and values to society. He, too, locates the guiding force of human activity in the level of the symbolic universe or as he calls it, the level of "ultimate reality." In the following diagram, which has been

modified, Parsons illustrates how societies function through the interrelation of the different levels of which society is composed.

The Structure of Society ⁴		
Ultimate Reality	(6)	(High Information)
Pattern Maintenance - Cultural System	(5)	
Integration - Social System	(4)	
Goal Attainment - Personality System	(3)	
Adaption - Behavioral Organism	(2)	
Physical Environment	(1)	(High Energy)

This diagram is a model showing the different levels which are the components of man's world. Levels two, three, four and five constitute what Parsons calls the "human action" system whereas level one falls below activity and level six reaches beyond activity:

Action consists of the structures and processes by which human beings form meaningful intentions and, more or less successfully, implement them in concrete situations. The word "meaningful" implies the symbolic or cultural level of representation and reference. Intentions and implementation taken together imply a disposition of the action system - individual or collective - to modify its relation to its situation or environment in an intended direction...Human action is cultural in that meanings and intentions concerning acts are formed in terms of symbolic systems...⁵

In this paper the concern will be specifically with the interaction of the social system and the cultural system because it is in this crucial interaction that the protests, demonstrations, manifestoes, etc., can be understood. A further quote from Parsons will make this more clear:

The central functional exigency of the interrelations between a society and a cultural system is the legitimation of the societies' normative order. Legitimation systems define the reasons for members' rights and for the prohibitions incumbent upon them.

Above all, but not exclusively, the use of power requires legitimation. The present concept of legitimation need not imply the adjective "moral" in a modern sense. But it does imply that it is in some sense "right" that things be done in accord with the institutionalized order...A legitimation system is always related to, and meaningfully dependent on, a grounding in ordered relations to ultimate reality.⁶

Social order is thus possible because people have in their heads a picture of society. Included in this picture are the various structures through which people act and interact according to shared expectations. And Parsons seems to be saying that society, in one sense, is a "moral community," that people in a society have certain shared definitions of the way things should be. Chalmers Johnson helps to clarify the situation even more when he states that: "One irreducible characteristic of a social system is that its members hold in common a structure of values. A value structure symbolically legitimates - that is, makes morally acceptable - the particular pattern of interaction and stratification of the members of a social system." If this analysis is then applied to the United States it can be said that our society is held together in part by shared values.

To look at what holds a society together is at the same time to look at the seeds of social change. That is, if shared values have held the United States together, then it is logical to assume that if the nation is to change radically, then the values must also change. This is not to say that there is always a one-to-one relationship between the actual and the ideal but that there must be a high degree of congruence in a stable society. Conversely, when the picture of reality which the individuals hold becomes blurred or fragmented, then the social structure tends toward anomie and the individuals feel a loss of purpose and meaning. Then there is widespread disorder and crime.⁷

Perhaps a valid interpretation of the current social unrest is that our society has become increasingly fragmented. The common experiences of Americans have become disintegrated enough to threaten the picture of reality which has held us together. The result is that contemporary Americans simply are not in agreement concerning the fundamental assumptions about the way society should be structured. This is not to say that all Americans have ever agreed completely or that there is not agreement on many issues even now. However, in the protest and the disorder of our times a common theme which keeps recurring is the call for a recognition of human dignity and individual freedom and worth. Those who sound the call - the Blacks, the student activists, and the feminists, do not all speak the same language, and at times they themselves seem confused as to their objectives. Still, in general they appear to be asking for a radical change in the priorities of the nation, a change to a more just and democratic society. The picture of such a society is within the American tradition, and thus the call not only is important, but also has some chance of being heeded if it can be articulated in an effective manner. Because of Alinsky's ability to pinpoint salient issues so graphically, he offers a vivid example of effective communication.

It has already been stated that to speak of all members in a society as sharing a common value structure is not to imply that they all think exactly the same on all issues. Such is certainly never the case. Rather, the situation is that some core values are constantly being debated. It is this debate which can be said to be the dynamic of social change as members of a society argue over the ideal and work together on moving toward it. The remainder of this paper will be concerned with these debatable values and the ways in which American society has evolved.

Chalmers Johnson has provided a useful definition of the debatable values by referring to them as an alternative value structure or as an "ideology." An ideology in this sense may become a full value structure for a people if it is successful in restructuring society, but as an "ideology" it is always a challenger, an alternative set of values. Because an ideology in this sense is always "out" trying to get "in," it plays the role of the critic. "Ideology" performs the function of the loyal opposition by pointing out shortcomings of the present order and by demanding improvements. Its diagnoses of the social situation tend to be selective or even partially distorted because it is attempting to be a replacement for the old value structure. But from the very nature of society we can assume that an ideology in this sense cannot be totally different from the value structure it is seeking to displace, but probably derives from an idealized version of an even earlier value system.⁸

It would be overstating the case to say that there is an ideology or a well defined set of values welded into a coherent philosophy to which all the activists and supporters of the "Movement" subscribe. However, I think it is possible to see trends and themes which have been so prevalent as to suggest they may be the beginnings of such an ideology. The most common themes have been a reverence for the human individual and a call for his freedom, a call for him to have the opportunity to develop in his own way. We have seen this theme time and again in the civil rights movement, in the anti-war movement, in the women's liberation movement, in the student movement and in all the social stirrings I mentioned before. The fact that many of these movements have led their participants only into new forms of tyranny should not minimize the reality that the impetus which started them and which carries them forward even today is a search for dignity, a fight against the depersonalizing forces

of our society and a longing to participate in the important decisions that affect their lives. Such ideas, I contend, can be interpreted as the core of a challenging ideology which is gaining strength in present day America.

Historical Roots of Current Protest

All existing things have a past. Nothing which happens escapes completely from the grip of the past; some events scarcely escape at all from its grip. Much of what exists is a persistence or reproduction of what existed earlier. Entities, events or systems, physiological, psychological, social and cultural, have careers in which at each point the state of the system stands in some determinant relationship to the state of the system at earlier points... All novelty is a modification of what has existed previously...The mechanisms of persistence are not utterly distinct from the mechanisms of change.⁹

With the foregoing thought from Edward Shils in mind, let us proceed to look for some of the roots of the new "ideology," which undergirds the whole of Alinsky's activity, in the historical circumstances that have preceded it. For the sake of brevity and convenience the discussion will be limited to the people, events and ideas in America since 1776 which have the most relevance to our present discussion of current social change. This discussion will include, above all, the familiar details of American history known through Fourth of July speeches, the innumerable United States history and government texts which have been a part of our education from second grade up, the required civics courses and the various socialization processes which have made us "Americans." The interpretations may vary, but the "facts" are part of the common body of knowledge.

Let us begin this review with the Declaration of Independence and the War of Independence. Why did we declare and why did we fight? The stock answer would be "to be free from England and to establish a democratic government." We tend to ignore the fact that about one-third of the colonists remained loyal

to the King of England and approximately another one-third were apathetic or neutral.¹⁰ We also ignore the fact that democracy was a little-used word during the war. It did not appear in the Declaration of Independence nor in any of the state constitutions nor in the United States Constitution.¹¹ This leads me to suggest that even then as now the people who called for freedom for the individual, equality, and participation by all in making political decisions were building an ideology in the sense that they were competing with the dominant social values and structure of their day. In 1776 the majority of Americans were Englishmen to whom the idea of government by the consent of the governed was not yet as powerful as the older notion that the king and the nobility properly wielded authority.

To say that American history can be explained as a contest between aristocrats and democrats would obviously be simplistic and yet this interpretation has been a part of our tradition. We are a pluralistic society which means, in terms of ideology, that we have had a "shared core universe, taken for granted as such, and different partial universes coexisting in a state of mutual accommodation."¹² There have been varying degrees of tolerance and cooperation along with bitter conflicts as Americans have lived together and worked out their common destiny. The conflict of "government by the people" as opposed to "government for the people" has indeed been an important part of our heritage however much we have tried to keep the two together. For example, a general statement of the American "democratic" creed which tries to gloss over the conflict is as follows:

We begin with the belief that man is endowed with certain "unalienable rights," along which are life, liberty, property and equality before the law. Tyranny is absolutely evil. Government is essential, but its policy decisions must be based upon the consent of the governed, and its actions must conform with the law. To guarantee these rights, we adopt a constitution which both delegates

and limits the power to govern. Both the Constitution and all government officials are ultimately responsible to the electorate at the ballot box. Our society is pluralistic - not monolithic; this implies freedom to differ, diverse cultural standards and patterns, unregimented homes, churches, schools, and trade unions, a mixture of private, public, and cooperative enterprise, volunteer service organizations for those who want them, and democratic institutions.¹³

Statements such as the foregoing quote from an American government textbook are maddening in a way because they add to the myth that in America everyone is free and equal and, further, that our government is democratic insofar as everyone is equally represented. Relatively speaking, compared to other governments in other countries, there is some truth to the myth. However, even more truth can be found by realizing that the American tradition includes a theme of conflict, a conflict in which the unrepresented have constantly appealed to those in power for their freedom and liberty. The diverse groups who combined to make the Revolution have continued to quarrel over the direction of that Revolution. There has been a dialectic between the "ideals" of America and the existing social institutions. It sometimes happens that theories are concocted to legitimate the situation that exists. The Declaration of Independence could be an example of that. But it also happens that institutions are changed in order to make them more legitimate, to make them conform to existing theories.¹⁴ For example, Negro slaves were freed and women were granted the right to vote partially to make American practice conform to the theory that "all men are created equal."

The American political tradition has often been called "liberal." That is because we have had an optimistic and idealistic way of thinking about man and government. We have traditionally believed in progress, liberty, equality, democracy and individualism. Why, then make a point of finding conflicts in our history in which people have been fighting for precisely those things?

It is because as a nation we have talked better than we have acted. We are an example of the universal lack of close correspondence between the "ideal" and the "actual." We are human and therefore we are also ambiguous, inconsistent and contradictory. In present day America there are many examples of groups (Blacks, student activists, etc.) who are challenging the status quo. They have weighed the present structure of the society against their vision of what society ought to be and they have found it wanting. It is as an "ideology" that their ideas have significance because the inconsistency between the ideal and the actual is tension producing and "hospitable to change."¹⁵ The current protestors are not the first to call for reforms; rather, they are the inheritors of a tradition from those who have repeatedly called for another American revolution to free all men.

It can be said that the first American revolution which formally ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1783 was a victory for democracy and for the common people as opposed to the aristocracy. At that time the Articles of Confederation had been in effect for two years, and reportedly there was a great feeling of jubilation at the experiment in self-government which the newly liberated states were undertaking. This experiment, however, soon took a turn in direction and in 1787 the convention met in Philadelphia to draw up the Constitution. Notably absent from the delegates were the radicals of the revolution such as Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine. Instead "the fifty-five delegates were a conservative, well-to-do body: lawyers, merchants, shippers, land speculators, and moneylenders. Not a single spokesman was present from the poorer, debtor groups."¹⁶ The constitution that they drew up can be interpreted as the counter-revolution because it had built into it deliberate safeguards against the excesses of "mobs." These safeguards included indirect

election of the President and Senators as well as the appointment for life of Supreme Court justices. It was a victory for the Federalists and even Jefferson is reported as being so aristocratic as to have had a distrust of "the mobs of the great cities."¹⁷

It is to the fight for the ratification of the Constitution that I point as the first major example of a call for more liberty in American history. This call which has reverberated again and again is part of the tradition which Alinsky has inherited. The case of the Constitution ratification is not clear-cut because those who opposed it did so for various reasons, as did those who favored it. It has been charged, probably with considerable justification, that the debtors opposed it because they feared they would be forced to pay off and that the rich favored it because they felt that it would profit them.¹⁸ Aside from that argument, it can be said that the aristocrats won that particular fight and that the poorer classes conceded only after seven of the states agreed to attach to the Constitution the Bill of Rights for the guarantee of civil liberties. The majority had not spoken because at that point only property-owning white males could vote and this probably did not include more than one-fourth of the population.¹⁹ It can be argued that, while the Constitution talked of equality, it actually meant equity before the law and nothing more. However, the amendments which have been added through the years, for the most part, have illustrated the drive for an extension of equality to more and more people, a concept to which Alinsky has devoted his efforts. Thus, we have had "Jacksonian democracy," agrarian reforms, freedom of the slaves, women's suffrage, labor legislation, the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier, the Great Society and beyond.

After the Constitution came into effect, the next event I would point to as an illustration of a movement for liberty and equality was the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800. Jefferson has been thought of as the great spirit of American democracy because he appealed to the man behind the plow. But it should be remembered that he was more of a libertarian than an equalitarian. He was not ready to throw out the distinctions between the well-born and the more humble. The primary reason he has been remembered as a friend of the common man was his opposition to a more powerful central government. He feared the tyranny of the states above all else and his vision for the United States was a nation of small farmers who all owned their own land.²⁰ It is a tribute to the strength of the democratic myth that Jefferson, the aristocrat who was finally selected in the House of Representatives and not by a popular majority of voters, is remembered generally as the great American democrat.

Again in 1828 with the election of Andrew Jackson we can see what was considered a victory for the masses. This particular election occurred after suffrage had been widened extensively; the western vote especially was the largest ever and Jackson, who was a hero of the "dirt farmer," won with a large majority. Actually, Jackson himself was a frontier aristocrat standing for a powerful central government, but by allowing muddy boots in the White House, he helped to strengthen the growing myth that the United States government was both by and for the people. His reelection in 1832 was another event to indicate that the quest for greater political and social equality has been a powerful driving force in American life.²¹ It was during the eight year presidency of Andrew Jackson that Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat, came to the United States and, after much travel and study, he wrote Democracy in America. He was much impressed by the spirit of equality that he could feel

wherever he went. Although he had misgivings about the longevity and the overall effectiveness of the American experiment, he was moved by its spirit:

Democracy does not confer the most skillful kind of government upon the people, but it produces that which the most skillful governments are frequently unable to awaken, namely an all-pervading and restless activity, a superabundant force, and an energy which is inseparable from it, and which may, under favorable circumstances, beget the most amazing benefits. These are the true advantages of democracy.²²

In the discussion of the events and people of American history involved in the movement toward liberty for ever more people, it is well not to lose sight of the reason why the movement has been necessary. The reason is that our tradition has also included more than a little of aristocratic and conservative thought. Russell Kirk is an example of an articulate spokesman for those who believe that men are not equal and that, in a manner which is reminiscent of Aristotle, government ought to be by the "best men." It is men such as Kirk who would say that the curse of this age is "the revolt of the masses." In so doing, he would only be echoing his intellectual predecessor, Edmund Burke, who spent a life-time in opposition to the democratic theories of individualism and equality. It is because of ideas like Burke's that the newly freed colonies held on to so many of the traditions they had inherited.

Woe to the country which would madly and impiously reject the service of the talents and virtues, civil, military, or religious, that are given to grace and to serve it; and would condemn to obscurity everything formed to diffuse lustre and glory around a state! Woe to that country, too, that passing into the opposite extreme, considers a low education, a mean contracted view of things, a sordid, mercenary occupation, as a preferable title to command! Everything ought to be open; but not indifferently to every man...I do not hesitate to say, that the road to eminence and power, from obscure condition, ought not to be made too easy, nor a thing too much of course.²³

Nowhere else in the American tradition has aristocratic and conservative thought had so much power or has been so continuously illustrated as in our economic theory and practice. It was Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, and his friend James Madison who worked so hard to get the Constitution ratified so that the United States would be safe against the will and whim of "men without property and principle."²⁴ From that point on we have seen an economic conservatism which has been doggedly persistent in the American tradition. The commercial and business interests of the East have generally been aligned against the agricultural and working class of the West. Such a broad generalization doubtless has many exceptions, but it can be illustrated by the disputes over the public lands, the national bank, and the "free silver" controversy which brought William Jennings Bryan to campaign for President several times. The various fights over the tariff, the Greenback Labor Party, the Populists, the tax question and Coxey's army of 1894 all are events which show that economic questions were of overriding importance and that the conservatives generally carried the day although they often made some concessions. Throughout much of our history, it seems that the word "liberty" has meant first and foremost, economic liberty. There has been a tendency to equate laissez-faire capitalism with democracy.²⁵ Strangely enough, though the conservatives had misgivings about giving freedom to the common man, they had no qualms about organizing government to help businessmen make money.²⁶

In the period from Jackson until after Reconstruction (roughly 1835 to 1877) the politics of the United States was tinted on almost every question by the slavery issue so that it is difficult to choose particular events to illustrate the movement toward more liberty and equality. The abolitionists themselves crusading for the freedom of the slaves were an example, as were

the various slave revolts. So too were the utopian experiments such as the Fourierites, which were precursors of the Marxism that later gained currency in the labor movement. This was the period of the great westward expansion which helped to create the feeling that there was opportunity for all in the land of "Manifest Destiny."²⁷ During this period also America was changing from an agrarian to an industrial nation. There were millions of immigrants to do the most menial tasks and in the process to help the burgeoning business barons such as Gould, Vanderbilt, Harriman, Cooke, and Morgan to set up financial empires. In general the euphoria that accompanied the expansion of the nation overshadowed the growing inequalities between the new corporate elite and the remaining poor.

However, even then some groups continued to point out injustices in American society which were intensified by increasing centralization, and to champion the rights of man. Self-interest seemed to be the most powerful motivation, but the ideals were there too. Examples of such movements would be the Labor Reform Party and the Greenback Labor Party, both of which drew support mainly from agrarian interests who opposed the privileges given to the railroads and the tariff-protected manufacturers. Working men, too, were demanding more rights, and their voices were heard through the Knights of Labor and, later, through the American Federation of Labor. The crusade also continued for female suffrage and women's rights. Unfortunately, not many spoke in defense of the vanishing American Indian or of the immigrants who helped fill the first urban slums.²⁸

In the early 1890's a third party emerged to challenge the Republicans and the Democrats. This was the People's Party, known generally as the "Populists." They tried to gather strength from both the agrarian unrest and the labor movement and in 1892 they named a candidate for President.²⁹ They did not succeed

in getting many votes, but their ideas were so popular that in 1896 they were influential in getting William Jennings Bryan nominated as the Democratic candidate for President. In the campaign which ensued, there was clearly a lineup of the debtors and the "poor folk" against the more prosperous businessmen, and again economic conservatism won the day. Bryan was defeated by those who wanted law and order, by those who wanted more of the same policies which had already been profitable for them.³⁰ The reformers, however, had been heard; they had succeeded in getting some of their planks into the Democratic Party platform.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were in America many humanitarians and others whom I shall call "progressives" who were trying to realize social ideals and who were calling for a curtailment of "big business" and personal greed. Among the "progressives" were the Muckrakers, the labor agitators, consumer leagues, housing associations, and those who called for the improvement of colored people. Even Theodore Roosevelt, who was a firm believer in free enterprise found it expedient to promise the public a Square Deal and to gain a reputation as a Trust Buster. Thus, in the early 1900's there was a very definite movement to enlarge the concept of social justice and to overcome the misery of the poor.³¹ Robert M. LaFollette, elected governor of Wisconsin in 1901, exemplified the strength of the "progressives" at the state and local levels. The common people were definitely trying to gain more control of the government, an objective which today is promoted by Alinsky. From the vantage point of history, it now seems ironic that the movement led them to urge the Hamiltonian doctrine of more centralization for social betterment. Although the Progressives did not get a man in the White House, they succeeded, as the Populists had done before them, at getting the Democratic Party to implement some of their reforms during Wilson's first term.³²

World War I, as we have all been taught, was fought "to make the world safe for democracy," but it was not until after the war that the Nineteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution to allow women's suffrage. Then there was a Red scare, and the reformers, many of whom were connected with the Socialists, lost popularity. Big business boomed again until the great depression of the 1930's when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected on the promise that he would help "the forgotten man" and give the country a New Deal. The election of Roosevelt has been called another American revolution because even big business was sufficiently afraid to let the government intervene in financial affairs on an unprecedented scale. Whether good or bad, the New Deal was, philosophically at least, a turning away from a laissez faire society toward a more managed economy which presumably would include the interests of the poor and the working class.³³

It is impossible to tell what the results of the New Deal would have been if the United States had not gotten involved in World War II, but it seems clear that the war accentuated tremendously the size of government machinery. The businessmen and others who were already part of the "have" groups were able to use the New Deal reforms for their own benefit so that the disparities between the rich and the poor continued to increase. The "have nots" lost rather than gained effective representation in the government. Then after the World Wars the Cold War ensued and the fight against Communism and a preoccupation with economic problems has continued up to the present day. However, the ideal that the interests of the poor would be included has not been reached.³⁴ The nation seems to have forgotten the ideals for which it stands and is now preoccupied with survival. These words in an American history textbook published fifteen years ago need to be heard again:

But we must capture much of the driving faith that we had in democracy during the early years of the Republic, when to the monarchical world,

the most feared "isms" were American constitutionalism, republicanism and liberalism. The United States, once a revolutionary force in a world of conservatism is now becoming a conservative force in a world of revolutionism. We should remember that we cannot combat dangerous foreign ideologies with inquisitions and guns, but only with better ideologies, properly communicated. We need not so much A-bombs or H-bombs or C-bombs as I-bombs - Idea bombs.³⁵

New Voices and Old Themes

To the American people of 1789, their nation promised a new way of life: each individual a free man; each having the right to seek his own happiness; a republican form of government in which the people would be sovereign; and no arbitrary power over people's lives. Less than two hundred years later, almost every aspect of the dream has been lost.³⁶

It is my contention that in many of the various social movements of the past few years, including the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement and others, we are seeing a resurgence of the ideals which have sparked the reformers throughout American history. The themes are the old ones of liberty, equality and human dignity. The rhetoric still bears considerable similarity to its historical antecedents, but the activity is largely new because the situation is new. And the most frightening thing about the new situation is that we are unable as a nation to define it and then to act accordingly. Several years ago C. Wright Mills described our situation as follows:

When people cherish some set of values and do not feel any threat to them, they experience well-being. When they cherish ideals but do feel them to be threatened, they experience a crisis - either as a personal trouble or as a public issue. And if all of their values seem involved, they feel the total threat of panic. But suppose people are neither aware of any cherished values nor experience any threat? That is the experience of indifference, which if it seems to involve all their values, becomes apathy. Suppose, finally, they are unaware of any cherished values, but still are very much aware of a threat? That is the experience of uneasiness, of anxiety, which, if it total enough, becomes a deadly unspecified malaise. Ours is a time of uneasiness and indifference - not yet formulated in such ways as to permit the work of reason and the play of sensibility. Instead

of troubles - defined in terms of values and threats - there is often merely the beat feeling that all is somehow not right. Neither the values threatened nor whatever threatens them has been stated; in short, they have not been carried to the point of decision.³⁷

In the time that has passed since Mills wrote these words we have heard some new statements of values by activists in the movement, and we have heard their analysis of the threats to those values. The values, as I have indicated, are old ones which are being restated in different terms, but the threats are new or at least they are only recently recognized and articulated. The principle threat facing the values of a democratic society is one which has been gaining force for over one hundred years. It began with the Industrial Revolution and is now characterized by our reliance upon the computer. The threat is the subversion of human values to scientific technological progress.³⁸ It has become a habit for our society to turn to the scientist, to the expert for the answers to problems that face us. In the name of scientific progress, we have forsaken the values of representative government and participatory democracy.³⁹ This is the threat that is causing the activists to search for alternatives to the present pattern of life in the United States. In their revolt against the corporate state and the consumer society they have, unwittingly perhaps, pointed to one of the most serious dangers to the future of democracy everywhere.

Jacques Ellul in The Technological Society goes to great lengths in discussing the future of man in a world that is dominated by the machine and by techniques rather than human values. His is a pessimistic view because he sees only the growth of the "impersonal" along with the emphasis on "efficiency."⁴⁰ This will lead, he argues, to a world in which all "ends" are forgotten and all the efforts are put toward the perfection of "means" and that will be

totalitarianism. Technique is a mass instrument, says Ellul; it leaves no place for the individual. Thus, democracy, rule by the people, is an impossibility in a technological world because the rights of man will inevitably be subverted by the necessity of technique.⁴¹ The picture will be complete when there are no more politicians who spend their energies furthering justice, but instead there are only technicians who are trying to be more effective.

Ellul paints a bleak picture indeed, and perhaps he overstates the problem; he has touched, however, a reality that is only too much with us in the present day United States. Those who challenge the status quo in our society are admonished to "be practical" to leave it to the "experts" to figure out the answer. There seems to be an insidious notion abroad that scientists and technicians, if given the power, can somehow solve all the problems of the human race. Take for example the following excerpts from a speech of a President of the United States:

What is at stake in our economic decisions today is not some grand warfare of rival ideologies which will sweep the country with passion, but the practical management of a modern economy. What we need are not labels and cliches but more basic discussion of the sophisticated and technical questions involved in keeping a great economic machinery moving ahead...I am suggesting that the problems of fiscal and monetary policy in the sixties as opposed to the kinds of problems we faced in the Thirties demand subtle challenges for which technical answers - not political answers - must be provided.⁴²

It is this sort of mentality which has a pervasive hold on American society, and it is a denial of such thinking which is becoming increasingly apparent in the literature and in the activities of the movement.⁴³ Charles Reich pointed to the new mind-set in The Greening of America. His analysis is that the American crisis is related to an inability of people to act because they are now dominated by our machine civilization. In contrast to Ellul, however, Reich

is optimistic. He sees a revolution coming, a revolution against the corporate state with its tyranny of technology. And after the revolution he envisions a more human American society filled with liberated individuals.⁴⁴ The similarities are readily apparent between the objectives of those in American history who have battled against the privileges of the "rich and the well-born" and the objectives of those such as Alinsky in present day America who are fighting against the depersonalizing and dehumanizing forces of a technocratic society in favor of bringing men together in community to actively participate in making political decisions. The anti-war activists, the feminists, the radical students and others as well are shouting that it is as wrong to reduce men to the status of robot-like consumers as it was to hold the Black man in the bonds of slavery.

It is important, I think, to emphasize "consciousness," the mentality of the activists. The twentieth century has boasted of its consideration for the welfare of people and yet this boast seems to have been forgotten in the United States through our preoccupation with being the "biggest and the best," with "saving the world from Communism" and with "getting to the moon first." The activists are building an ideology in the sense that they are calling for a shift in our national priorities. Their call is more "radical" than revolutionary because they are reminding us of a tradition which has long been with us. They challenge the nation to pay more than lip service to the classical democratic doctrines which we espouse. They are in agreement with Hans Kohn who wrote:

Ultimately democracy will be determined by its strength as a moral and spiritual factor dominating the public mind...For democracy does not exhaust itself in political techniques or in economic reforms. It is, above all, a fundamental attitude, a scale of values, a definite conception of man and his place in society...Democracy presupposes the existence of opposition as a legitimate partner in

the democratic process; it accepts a pluralistic view of values and associations, and it rejects any totalitarian or monolithic identification of the state with one party or with one dogma. But discussion and tolerance must always be held within the framework of the democratic faith, and that means the recognition of the fundamental values of individual liberty and of the freedom of the inquiring mind.⁴⁵

The "ideology" which is beginning to be built by those in the movement has a chance to succeed in changing our national priorities because it has legitimacy, it rings true. Democratic ideals are a part of the symbolic universe of Americans although, as we have seen, they do not comprise the total. However, democratic ideas have a special power now because they fulfill men's needs for security, for status, and for participation in a cultural experience, needs which are felt so strongly in today's mass society. We need to remember that "men possess thoughts but ideas possess men."⁴⁶ However, if these ideas are to be potent weapons in the struggle for the direction of our society they will need to be articulated in words and ways which will be understood and accepted by a large proportion of the American people.

I am convinced that one of the most glaring faults of the "counter culture" is that it has alienated itself from the main stream of American life. The most extreme example of this, of course, is the "drop-out," but those in this category are relatively few. There are many more, however, who have become so disenchanted with our consumer society and its militaristic tendency that they have tried to "do their own thing" while despairing of communicating with those they were reacting against. Prophets and poets are essential parts of social change, yes, but what is needed still is to get to the "silent majority" in a meaningful way so that they, too, can be moved by the vision which has motivated the activists. I submit that many of those in the movement are not aware of how many core values they share with their fellow Americans and they are not aware

of the thorny obstacles which must be overcome before their dreams for society can be realized. If the "ideology" is to have significant impact on American life there must be more in depth communication and understanding between the radicals and those they are trying to change.

Saul D. Alinsky is now an old "radical." He has been trying to change society for about forty years and is known as a foremost organizer of the poor. It is my contention, however, that his real significance is in his ability to articulate the democratic vision to common people and to move them to action. He has had a lifetime of experience so that he knows the direct and immediate concerns which make up the lives of the majority of Americans. He is a master at helping to create new ways of contending with these problems and of expressing the democratic folk tradition in a meaningful way. He has a knack for getting at the fundamental aspirations of people. He can be a bridge of understanding between the movement and the rest of society because he has shared in both. He deserves our attention because he is helping to build the ideology of our future.

Footnotes: Introduction and Chapter I

¹"The Port Huron Statement" of the Student for a Democratic Society at their Convention in 1962, from Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, The New Radicals (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 154. For further discussion and elaboration of these themes see Charles Reich, The Greening of America (New York: Random House, 1970), Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, The Soft Revolution (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), and Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

²Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), from the Preface by Louis Wirth p. xxiii.

³Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 89.

⁴Talcott Parsons, Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 28-29.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁷Manheim, op. cit., p. xxiii.

⁸Ibid., pp. 82-86.

⁹Edward Shils, "Tradition" Comparative Studies in Society and History (London, Cambridge University Press, 1971), vol. 13, April, 1971, p. 122.

¹⁰Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1956), p. 109.

¹¹Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, A Basic History of the United States (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1944), p. 210.

¹²Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, op. cit., p. 115. It is a very difficult and perhaps an impossible task to state exactly the central values which have held American society together. The difficulty is precisely because such values are not generally debated but are largely taken for granted. Still, if one is to make sense out of American history it is useful to point out at least some core values. The first might be the belief in equality before the law and other legal rights from English common law. Another would be the belief in the power of a written constitution. A third could be the right to hold property for financial gain. The American tradition has also included what Daniel Boorstin refers to as the principle of "seamlessness." This principle is related to the idea of federalism which has led to much local autonomy. And finally the quality of openness and experimentation should be included because Americans as a rule have been skeptical of rigid doctrines of conduct. See Daniel J. Boorstin, The Genius of American Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 161-89.

¹³John H. Ferguson and Dean E. McHenry, The American Federal Government (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1965), p. 22.

¹⁴Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., p. 118.

¹⁵Wilbert E. Moore, Social Change (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 18-20.

¹⁶Thomas A. Bailey, op. cit., p. 139.

¹⁷Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, op. cit., p. 210.

¹⁸Thomas A. Bailey, op. cit., pp. 143-7.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 147.

²⁰Louis M. Hacker, The Shaping of the American Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), vol. I, p. 247. It should be noted that once Jefferson was elected the practical problems of the office forced him in some cases to modify his beliefs. For example, he did not reverse the monetary system which had been set in motion by Alexander Hamilton nor did he hesitate to expand and use the navy to protect American interests abroad. The unconstitutional act of authorizing the treaty that resulted in the Louisiana Purchase probably represents the most flagrant departure from his principles.

²¹Ferguson and McHenry, op. cit., p. 155.

²²Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America (translated by Henry Reeve, New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), vol. I, p. 256.

²³Edmund Burke, "The Need for Aristocratic Rule," in Michael Curtis, ed., The Great Political Theories Vol. 2 (New York: Avon Books, 1962), p. 52.

²⁴Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 102-103.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 129-150.

²⁶See Louis M. Hacker, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 680-698 for a discussion of economic expansion and reform movements from the Civil War until 1900.

²⁷Ray Allen Billington, ed., The Frontier Thesis: Valid Interpretation of American History? (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1966). See also Sidney Lens, Radicalism in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969), pp. 59-148.

²⁸Thomas A. Bailey, op. cit., pp. 498-584.

²⁹Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, op. cit., p. 333.

³⁰Louis M. Hacker, Vol. 2, pp. 788-789.

³¹Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, op. cit., pp. 393-410.

³²Thomas A. Bailey, op. cit., pp. 679-697.

³³Louis M. Hacker, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 1125-1142.

³⁴See Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1962).

³⁵Thomas A. Bailey, op. cit., p. 950.

³⁶Charles Reich, op. cit., p. 21.

³⁷C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 111.

³⁸Theodore Roszak, op. cit., pp. 5-7, graphically described the mind set which is so dangerous to democratic practice:

It is the ideal men usually have in mind when they speak of modernizing, up-dating, rationalizing, planning. Drawing upon such unquestionable imperatives as the demand for efficiency, for social security, for large-scale coordination of men and resources, for ever higher levels of affluence and evermore impressive manifestations of collective human power, the technocracy works to knit together the anachronistic gaps and fissures of the industrial society...In the technocracy, nothing is any longer small or simple or readily apparent to the non-technical man...Within such a society, the citizen, confronted by bewildering bigness and complexity, finds it necessary to defer on all matters to those who know better. Indeed, it would be a violation of reason to do otherwise, since it is universally agreed that the prime goal of the society is to keep the productive apparatus turning over efficiently.

³⁹Robert Strausz-Hup, "Social Values and Politics: The Uninvited Guests," The Review of Politics, January, 1968, XXX: 1, 59-78.

⁴⁰Jaques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1964), p. 11.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 280-282.

⁴²John F. Kennedy, "Yale University Commencement Speech," New York Times, June 12, 1962, p. 20.

⁴³See the Documents section in Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, The New Radicals (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), see also Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

⁴⁴Charles Reich, op. cit., p. 4.

⁴⁵Hans Kohn, Political Ideologies of the Twentieth Century, Third Edition, Revised, (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1966), pp. 191-192.

⁴⁶Max Lerner, "The Discovery of the 'Irrational, Personal and Collective'," in Warren G. Bennis, Kenneth D. Benne, and Robert Chin, eds., The Planning of Change (New York: Holt Rhinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 117.

Chapter II

The Vision of Saul Alinsky

The Constitution and Bill of Rights have been weakened, imperceptibly but steadily. The nation has gradually become a rigid managerial hierarchy, with a small elite and a great mass of the disenfranchised. Democracy has rapidly lost ground as power is increasingly captured by giant managerial institutions and corporations, and decisions are made by experts, specialists, and professionals safely insulated from the feelings of the people. Most governmental power has shifted from Congress to the administrative agencies, and corporate power is free to ignore both stockholders and consumers. As regulation and administration have grown, liberty has been eroded and bureaucratic discretion has taken the place of the rule of law.¹

In the previous discussion various assumptions about societies in general have been set forth, including the belief that the real roots of stability and also of change lie in the dominant ideas which are shared by the members of a society. A brief historical review has illustrated that in the case of the United States, the values of freedom for the individual, equality, and human dignity have been a focal point of activity. It is evident that a salient aspect of the American tradition has been the struggle for this birthright to be claimed by ever more people and the dismal failure for the nation as a whole to converge the actual with the ideal. Thus, democratic ideas, such as equal opportunity for all, have functioned as an "ideology" in the sense of a competing set of values which have often been pushed to the background and in many cases have been given little more than lip service. However, in the third quarter of the Twentieth Century, there has been a resurgence of such ideals, partly in response to the threat posed by the corporate state with its emphasis on technological progress. Those who espouse democratic ideals are searching

for alternatives to the present direction of society, and some are arguing that what we need is a new "consciousness," a new way of seeing ourselves and a new way of looking at life itself.²

While it is difficult to seriously defend some of the alternatives which are proposed (e.g. a hippie commune in the desert or a pilgrimage to a guru in Nepal), it appears that those who talk in terms of "consciousness" and "mind set" have their fingers on the key to the problem. Such a conclusion would logically follow if the previous assumption is allowed that ideas are the prime movers of societies. The great ideas of democracy are elevating and inspiring, but they must be a part of our fundamental attitudes if they are to have power. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba have reminded us that the formal institutions of democracy such as universal suffrage and elected officials are not by themselves sufficient conditions for democracy to flourish; instead there must be also a belief that the ordinary man ought to actively participate in making decisions.³ This belief, a part of the revolt against contemporary trends in American life, is a sign of hope and a sign of life in our society which is so characterized by violence, pollution and apathy.

Unfortunately, the ranks of the dissenters have been so sparsely populated with mature citizens that it has not had as much effect on American life as one might wish. Rather, it appears that the scarcity of strong commitment to the democratic vision by those over thirty may be a major cause of the revolution by the youth.

The adults of the World War II period, trapped as they have been in the frozen posture of befuddled docility - the condition Paul Goodman has called "the nothing can be done disease" - have in effect divested themselves of their adulthood, if that term means anything more than being tall and debt-worried and capable of buying liquor without having to show one's driver's license.

Which is to say: they have surrendered their responsibility for making morally demanding decisions, for generating ideals, for controlling public authority, for safeguarding the society against the despoilers.⁴

In contrast to the picture of apathetic adulthood portrayed above, this chapter will concentrate on a man who has as strong a commitment to democratic ideals as any of the "young radicals" could hope to have. In fact, Saul Alinsky has held onto the democratic vision through almost forty years of work in which he has distinguished himself as the nation's most successful community organizer of the poor. Mr. Alinsky no doubt deserves serious study for his work as an organizer, but in addition he should be recognized because of his vision of what American society could be. Perhaps his greatest significance for present day Americans lies in his vision of this country as an actual participatory democracy and in the fact that he has been able to articulate that vision so that people are moved to action toward this dream.

The job ahead is clear. Every conceivable effort must be made to rekindle the fire of democracy while a few embers yet glow in the gray ashes of the American dream. Once it goes out it may take generations before a new fire can be started. The fire, the energy, and the life of democracy is popular pressure. Democracy itself is a government constantly responding to the continuous pressures of its people. The only hope for democracy is that more people and more groups will become articulate and exert pressure upon their government. It is short-sighted to attack the few major pressure groups in this country as "dangerous lobbyists" or "un-American," for although these pressure blocs are seeking primarily to further their own interests, their organizing and bring pressure to bear upon the government is participation and democratic activity which is infinitely more American, more democratic than the dry, dead rot of inactivity, of refusing to become involved in pressure groups. When we talk of democratic citizenship we talk and think in terms of an informed, active, participating, interested people - an interested and participating people is popular pressure!⁵

Saul Alinsky was born in a Chicago slum, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants. His later childhood was then spent moving around, first, with his mother and, then, with his father; as a result he attended enough schools to

end up with three or four high school diplomas.⁶ In 1926 he entered the University of Chicago where he majored in archaeology, but enrolled in related sociology courses. Later he was awarded a graduate fellowship in criminology and, as part of his study, he became closely involved with the Capone gang which he has since described as a "quasi-public utility" of Chicago. He never finished his graduate education, but instead took a job as a criminologist in the Illinois State Prison at Joliet. By the end of the 1930's, he had become disenchanted with the academic and professional world and began to be more active in movements to help such victims of injustice as southern sharecroppers.

Alinsky began his career as a community organizer in 1938 when he moved into the "Back of the Yards" which was described so vividly in Upton Sinclair's The Jungle. This was a slum filled with mostly Catholic immigrants who were being exploited by their employers and others of the establishment. With the help of parish priests and labor union leaders Alinsky worked with the neighborhood until it had a bloc powerful enough to put pressure on the meat-packing industry, the local merchants and the city government. The end result was what has been described as a "model, working-class community."⁷ Since then, Alinsky has organized many communities from New York to California; they have been communities of poor people who have learned, with his help, to stand on their own feet with their own leaders and fight for their rights as citizens. Such is the result of Alinsky's organizing of the powerless. He does it because he believes "in a democracy in which the masses participate, with all the tension and instability that this entails..."⁸

The major and fundamental point which characterizes all that Alinsky has said and done is his belief in people. His vision of what the United States should be like is an idealized version of a New England town meeting in which

everyone participates on an equal basis in the making of decisions. He basically assumes that local people (that means everyone) have the intelligence and the ingenuity to work out their own problems. This assumption is a powerful vision, an antidote to the feeling of powerlessness and to the inclination to leave it to the experts. The following quote from one of his speeches illustrates the message he has been preaching:

The democratic way of life springs from certain ideas, as liberty, equality, majority rule through free elections but protection of the rights of the minority, and freedom to subscribe to multiple loyalties to religious, economic, political and other groups rather than a total, singular, unqualified loyalty to the state. Its spirit is the importance and worth of the individual, and the ever-striving for the kind of world where the individual can achieve as much of his potentialities as possible....There can be no darker or more devastating tragedy than the death of a man's faith in himself, in his power to direct his future.⁹

Saul Alinsky is both old and new. He is old because he has been crusading to remedy the injustices of American society for a long time and because he speaks of democracy in terms that can be widely understool and accepted by Americans. He is new because his voice is part of the chorus that is calling for a reordering of priorities in our society. The fact that he has had long experience at working with the problems of the common man adds weight to his criticisms of what is wrong with America as well as to his suggestions on how to go about finding solutions.

It is not difficult to discover that America has problems. The newspapers tell it every day: crime corruption, pollution, militarism, unemployment, poverty and riots are the common stuff of the new media. It is not that the ordinary citizen wants a continuation of the present state of affairs. Rather it appears that many people feel powerless to do anything about it; as a result nothing is done and the idea grows that nothing can be done. There is a crisis of meaninglessness to which Alinsky alludes in the following:

Today everything is so complex as to be incomprehensible. What sense does it make for men to walk on the moon while other men are waiting in welfare lines; or in Vietnam killing and dying for a corrupt dictatorship in the name of freedom?...The establishment in many ways is as suicidal as some of the far left, except that they are infinitely more destructive than the far left can ever be. The outcome of the hopelessness and despair is morbidity. There is a feeling of death hanging over the nation.¹⁰

It is of course, far easier to point out the problems in America than it is to provide solutions for them. The rhetoric of the activists and protestors fairly bristles with accusations, but what is so notably absent is a workable alternative to the situations they deplore.¹¹ Alinsky offers a refreshing change to the despair because it is to helping people solve their problems that he has devoted his entire life. He starts by saying that the man who would change the world must start from where the world is. That is to say, a change agent must work from within the system. Why? Because there is no other realistic place to start. Because, as was discussed earlier, societies exist partly as a result of the ideas people have in their heads. So, to change society it is necessary to change people's ideas, and that is not done by people who have "dropped out." Alinsky is correct in insisting that a change agent must identify with the masses of people. He is on solid ground when he states that, "to assume that a political revolution can survive without the supporting base of a popular reformation is to ask for the impossible in politics."¹²

Alinsky has spent most of his career organizing "have-nots" to help them demand their rights from the "haves." He has become convinced that the major reason the disadvantaged are that way is that they are not actively involved in making the important decisions that affect their lives. Perhaps it is not illogical to assume then that part of the reason for our nation's present

problems is a lack of activity on the part of most citizens. The following quote from Politics and Voters would certainly seem to substantiate such a view.

The typical American voter falls short of the model citizen of a democracy described by democratic political theorists such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson. The ideal democratic citizen, for one thing, is highly concerned with public affairs and places high priority on doing his civic duty. The average American voter is only somewhat and sometimes interested in public affairs; the extent of his political activity is casting an occasional vote; and well over half of American adults do not even make that minimal contribution.¹³

It is in a situation of citizen apathy and despair such as ours that Alinsky's vision has real significance. His language is reminiscent of classical democratic theory, but he is talking about the same sort of participation and involvement in decision-making which students, Blacks, feminists and even GI's are demanding. And, unlike many of the activists, he has a realistic, a pragmatic view of the difficulty of changing things as well as a plan for doing so. This is not to say that Alinsky offers a panacea for the current problems of America. He does not have all the answers nor does he claim to. However, what he does offer is a renewed faith in ourselves and a vision of all the people actively participating in the affairs of the nation from the local level on up. The article of faith for a democracy which Alinsky preaches is that the answers to all the issues facing us will be found in the masses of people and nowhere else.¹⁴

At this point a cynic could ask Alinsky about the original source of the problems of poverty and exploitation. (If you say that the answers to all the problems are with people, then how do you explain the existence of the problems in the first place?) Alinsky probably would not have a clear reply. He is a great simplifier, more a man of action than of philosophical discourse.

However, he might well say that the source of the major problems is that a few people make all the decisions for the many and that they naturally make them with their own interests in mind; thus there is injustice. The remedy is to have as many people as possible involved so that more interests will be represented. It is only in the give and take of different interest groups that relative justice is achieved.

If one phrase or word could be used to describe Saul Alinsky, that word would be cosmopolitan or free-thinker. He is not dogmatic about anything except his insistence on people participating in making the decisions that affect their lives; he is a "relativist" rather than an "absolutist." He claims that there is no fixed truth and that there are no final answers. For him probability is no less at the heart of social mechanics than it is at the heart of modern physics. Such is to say that in this world where situations are constantly changing, the reforms must always be alert to new dangers to freedom and be quick to move in a direction which will avert them. Nor does Alinsky believe truth can be discovered by study, by being an "objective observer." Rather, it is only the man who is passionately involved in the situation who can get hold of the partial truth. "The free society organizer is loose, resilient, fluid and in the move in a society which is in a state of extraordinary and constant change...In the end he has one all-consuming conviction, one belief, one article of faith - a belief in people, a complete commitment to the belief that if people have the power, the opportunity to act, in the long run they will, most of the time, reach the right decisions."¹⁵

The phrase with which Alinsky would identify himself is "American radical." By "American radical" he means a person who genuinely and completely believes in mankind and for whom the common good is of the greatest personal value. Since,

in his evaluation, our nation has failed to live up to the rights and values which are propounded by the Judeo-Christian and the democratic traditions, it is the function of the radical to point us toward the creation of the kind of society where all men's potentialities can be reached. Such is his chosen life's work. "The very organization of a people so that they become active and aware of their potentialities and obligations is a tremendous program in itself. Here is the life principle of democratic planning - an awakening in the whole people of this common moral purpose. Not one goal, but a direction. Not one plan, once for all, but the conscious selection by the people of successive plans."¹⁶ This vision has solid roots in the American tradition which gives it power. Such a vision in the hands of Alinsky is an effective weapon of change because he expresses it in a manner which is readily understandable to the common man. It is relevant because it speaks to the predicament of present day Americans.

Although Alinsky claims that he has no dogma or fixed truth, he does have some sort of comprehensive world view, some philosophical grounding for his actions. In short, his vision is based on certain assumptions, and thus the validity of his vision depends, at least partially, on the soundness of his assumptions. One of his biases is his aversion to the academic world and his anti-intellectualism. Illustrative of this are the numerous criticisms he makes of formal education. For example: "Today the University of Chicago sociology department is just a tribe of head counters....So I had a lot of unlearning to do when I got out of college - including the fancy vocabulary I'd picked up."¹⁷ Or when discussing his debt to John L. Lewis, who taught him that an organizer must always develop a moral rationale for action: "This is one of many great lessons Lewis taught me. But it's not the kind of stuff

you learn in college."¹⁸ And finally: "An 'objective' decision is generally lifeless. It is academic and the word 'academic' is a synonym for irrelevant."¹⁹

Statements such as the foregoing reveal Alinsky's deep-seated belief that only those who are living and working in a situation are able to understand it. If he is protesting academic hypocrisy and scholarly shallowness and if he is concerned about students who immerse themselves in philosophical debate without any concern for the fate of the world, then he is to be commended. However, he is on dangerous ground if he would have all decisions made by those who are "passionately involved." A lynch mob is only one example of the injustice which has been perpetrated by men under the sway of unbridled emotion. Still, it appears that Alinsky's anti-intellectualism is aimed primarily at the tendency for us to leave government to the experts, or at those who would substitute academic discourse for purposeful action. For example, he has described some of his frustrations at being a graduate student:

In criminology, for instance, all the experts agreed that the major causes of crime were poor housing, discrimination, economic insecurity, unemployment, and disease. So what did we do? We went in for supervised recreation, camping programs, something mysterious called "character building." We tackled everything but the actual issues because the issues were controversial. Sometimes I'd say, "come on, let's stop this crap, we know what the causes of crime are." Then they'd say, "Don't be radical!"²⁰

Another of Alinsky's basic assumptions that deserves attention is his belief in people. Apparently, he has a blind faith that people in general are "good" but that they are somehow corrupted or that somehow what they do is turned into "evil." Nowhere does he clearly explain how it is that people are threatened by crime or by unemployment except that he deplores all the attention which is given to the structures of society. The world, he says, is deluged with solutions for problems, but most of the plans deal with the structure of society

and not with the substance itself - the people. He feels that we must remember that the structure is only secondary. "Let all apostles of planning never forget that what is most important in life is substance rather than structure."²¹

It should be quite easy for anyone living in our automated and depersonalized culture to give a cheer for Alinsky because he remembers people. He has sounded the horn against the forces of dehumanization, against "big business" which produces only for "consumers" and not for "people," against urban planners who talk in terms of "occupants" rather than real families, and against a military memo which lists a "body count" instead of individuals who bled and died. Alinsky, however, is indefensibly simplistic if he ignores the fact that the structures of society are made of people, too. As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have reminded us, social order is a product of human activity and since man is a creature of habit, institutions tend to form which take on identities of their own. Thus the relationship between man and institutions is a dialectical one.²² Man creates and then that structure has, in a sense, a life of its own which is a reality for planners of change to remember.

Perhaps another way to get at the basic assumptions which guide Alinsky's actions is by looking at some of the key words he uses. His favorite word by far is power and his definition is the ordinary one, i.e., the ability to get things done. Alinsky deplores the fact that people have an allergy to the use of the word power because it has "acquired overtones and undertones of sinister, corrupt, evil, unhealthy, immoral, machiavellian, and a general phantasmagoria of the nether regions."²³ For Alinsky the word is amoral. Power exists, and it may be used for good or for evil.

Power is the very essence of life, the dynamo of life....Power is an essential life force always in operation, either changing circumstances or opposing change....Power must be clearly seen without the stains of

popular prejudices - it must be understood for what it is, for the part it plays in our general life if we are to effectively organize communities for anything, including citizen participation.²⁴

Self-interest is a second term which Alinsky uses constantly, and again it should be noted that the term is not negative for him. He does not consider that self-interest is narrow selfishness. Rather, it is for him an important motivator of behavior that can be understood only in the context of wider moral principles. Self-interest thus is a shifting concept. "You may appeal to one self-interest to get me to the battlefront to fight; but once I am there, my prime self-interest becomes to stay alive, or if we are victorious my self-interest may, and usually does, dictate entirely unexpected goals..."²⁵ Alinsky concedes that people do not always know what their self-interest is and that they often act in contradictory ways, but he contends that they usually act according to what they think is their self-interest.

As a matter of fact, the concept of self-interest is one that Alinsky uses over and over again in organizing a community. He never assumes that people do things for altruistic reasons, but rather that they do things that they think are in their own interest to do. For example, when a Black ghetto organization has housing complaints, Alinsky does not advise them to approach the landlord and appeal to his better nature. Instead,

they drive forty or fifty of their members - the blackest ones they can find - to the nice suburb where the slumlord lives and they picket his home. Now we know a picket line isn't going to convert the slumlord. But we also know what happens when his white neighbors get after him and say, "We don't care what you do for a living - all we're telling you is to get those niggers out of here or you get out!" That's the kind of jujitsu operation that forces the slumlord to surrender and gets repairs made in the slums.²⁶

Thus the Blacks asked for repairs out of their self-interest, and the slumlord made the repairs when it was in his self-interest.

From what has already been said about Alinsky it should not be surprising to learn that another set of words which is part of his basic assumptions about life is conflict and compromise. "Conflict is the essential core of a free and open society. If one were to project the democratic way of life in the form of a musical score, its major theme would be a harmony of dissonance."²⁷ The counter theme of conflict is, of course, compromise, which occurs when the opposing groups come to an agreement. Such is the pragmatic way in which a free society operates. "A society devoid of compromise is totalitarian."²⁸ From his emphasis on conflict, power and self-interest it would appear that Alinsky's thought is a mixture of Marxian dialectical terms in combination with Hobbes' State of Nature.

A final term used by Alinsky which helps us to see his world view is the word ego. He does not use it in the normal psychological sense. Rather, for him it means a positive conviction and belief in one's ability to act, to create.²⁹ In the deepest sense ego means, for Alinsky, a belief in oneself, an acceptance of oneself. Ego, as he describes it, is a contagious sort of thing which sounds like what others have called maturity. It is a precondition to responsibility, and is very much a part of the vision which Alinsky has for society. In this particular part of the vision, he is solidly backed by Dr. Thomas A. Harris in his book I'm OK - You're OK.

We believe we have found an opening. This opening will be explored not by a nameless corporate society but by individuals are emancipated from the past and become free to choose either to accept or reject the values of the past. One conclusion is unavoidable: Society cannot change until persons change. We base our hope for the future on the fact that we have seen persons change.³⁰

It is not easy to summarize the world view which underlies Alinsky's vision, primarily because he is not known for carefully reasoned analyses which lead to

formal conclusions. As a man of action rather than of meditation he is a great simplifier, a trait which is at once a strength and a weakness. The strength is apparent in the way he sets out his vision so clearly and simply, i.e., a society in which everyone participates on an equal basis in making decisions for the common good. Stated in such terms it is a powerful vision, but by its simplicity it obscures the difficulty of large groups of people participating in meaningful and effective ways over long periods of time. Or, one would need to assume that the "iron law of oligarchy" is inoperative in Alinsky's world. Another obvious difficulty which is obscured by the simple statement of the vision is the Herculean task of defining the common good.

However, it would be doing Alinsky an injustice to characterize him merely as simplistic. He is a well-educated man with a lifetime of experience in practical politics. The words he uses, i.e., "power, self-interest, ego, conflict and compromise," are action words which have acquired meaning for him through passionate involvement. Alinsky is no day-dreamer. He is a hard-headed realist who insists that the world is full of contradictions that must be lived with and that reality must always be seen as both positive and negative. Truth for him is always relative and thus it is logical that he espouses no dogma except that of participatory democracy. His article of faith is that only through the dynamic of active citizens is it possible to achieve the justice and freedom which are the goals of mankind. Moreover, Alinsky's faith in the masses is a bright star on the horizon of an increasingly cybernetic world where few people express faith in themselves and even fewer leaders act as if they believed in the wisdom of the people.

The masses of people were and are the substance of society. If they continue inarticulate, apathetic, disinterested, forlorn and alone in their abysmal anonymity, then democracy is ended. It has been

stated and restated throughout these pages that substance determines structure and that the form of economy and politics will be and always has been a reflection of the active desires of a democratically-minded citizenry or the passive torpor of a people whose innate dignity and strength has atrophied from disuse.³¹

Footnotes: Chapter II

¹Charles A. Reich, The Greening of America (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 7-8.

²Ibid., especially pp. 217-263, which present a very romanticized picture of the new "consciousness."

³Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 2-3.

⁴Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 22.

⁵Saul D. Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 196.

^① ⁶Marion K. Sanders, The Professional Radical: Conversations with Saul Alinsky (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), pp. 12-13.

⁷Dickson Terry, "Fiery Leader of Social Reforms," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Sunday, April 5, 1970, p. 3F.

⁸Saul D. Alinsky, "Plato on the Barricades," The Economist, May, 1967, pp. 13-19.

⁹Saul D. Alinsky, Citizen Participation and Community Organization in Planning and Urban Renewal, presented before the Chicago Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, January 29, 1962. (Published by the Industrial Areas Foundation), pp. 16-17.

¹⁰Saul D. Alinsky, Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 40.

¹¹For examples see the documents section in Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, The New Radicals (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 89-310.

¹²Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, p. xxi.

¹³Hugh A. Bone and Austin Ranney, Politics and Voters (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1967), p. 56.

¹⁴Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 40.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 56

¹⁷Sanders, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁹Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, p. ix.

²⁰Sanders, op. cit., p. 25.

²¹Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, p. 56.

²²Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 49-57.

²³Saul D. Alinsky, From Citizen Apathy to Participation, presented at the Sixth Annual Fall Conference of the Association of Community Councils of Chicago, October 19, 1957, p. 5, (Published by the Industrial Areas Foundation).

²⁴Ibid., p. 6.

²⁵Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, p. 55.

²⁶Sanders, op. cit., p. 75.

²⁷Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, p. 62.

²⁸Ibid., p. 59.

²⁹Ibid., p. 61.

³⁰Thomas A. Harris, M. D., I'm OK - You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 267.

³¹Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, p. 193.

Chapter III

Social Change - Alinsky Style

The Importance of Organization

The role of the radical throughout the ages has been as an antidote to privilege. Whatever his failings and ineptitudes, he has tried to repair the balance between those who have too much and those who have too little....To level the material differences between men, to replace hate with love, division with unity, war with peace - these have been the goals of the radical. Whether they have been achieved, indeed whether they can be achieved, is another matter. But the radical's dream has sustained mankind since time immemorial, giving it hope and vision, purpose and meaning. It is the dream which has made nations great when they shared it, stagnant when they forgot it, and decadent when they lost it.¹

Saul Alinsky is one of the few American radicals of his age who is still of national importance. For almost forty years he has held to the radical vision and has pursued the radical goal of correcting the ballance between privilege and underprivilege. He shares this vision with the student activists, the anti-war demonstrators, the civil rights advocates, the Blacks, the Chicanos and others who refuse to be reconciled to the present order. However, unlike the majority of those who are fighting the status quo, Alinsky has demonstrated that, in some situations at least, he knows how to remedy some of the injustices. Protest demonstrations such as sit-ins, marches, etc., have been effective in so far as they have pointed out injustices and have placed them in the public consciousness, but by themselves such tactics do little to correct the injustices. What is necessary in addition is some sort of organization which can carry on sustained activity. It is only too obvious that a missing ingredient of the "New Left" has been effective organization and that, according to Alinsky, is a fatal ommission because without organization there is no power. "Regardless

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of what the situation is, people will not be able to do anything constructive, anything in the true democratic spirit for themselves, unless they have the power to cope with the situation whatever it may be and whenever it occurs."²

When Alinsky started his organizing career in the "Back of the Yards" in Chicago, he told the people who were being exploited, "The hell with charity - the only thing you get is what you're strong enough to get and so you'd better organize."³ He has been saying essentially the same thing to "have not" groups and to his organizers ever since, because he ~~still~~^{believed} believes that neither individual nor organization can negotiate without first having the power to compel the negotiations. And, getting the concessions is only part of the goal anyway. The rest of it includes an increased sense of individual worth as people work through their own problems in their own way. Alinsky is fond of a line from Finley Peter Donne's immortal Mr. Dooley. "Don't ask f'r rights. Take thim. An' don't let anny wan give thim to ye. A right that is handed to ye few nawthin has somethin the matter with it. It's more thin likely it's only a wrong turned inside out."⁴

Side by side with his vision of an equalitarian society of participating citizens, the second major theme which runs through all Alinsky has said and done ^{was} ~~is~~ his fight against "welfare colonialism." He detests charity or paternalism in any form and for whatever reason if it is anything more than emergency measure. His dislike stems from the fact that the typical welfare program has been a model of an undemocratic situation with the giving agency in a position of superiority where it dictates the terms while the receiver is reduced to a position of accepting handouts. Such is not only an unhealthy relationship but it also does nothing to eliminate the roots of the poverty. Poverty, Alinsky reminds us, is not only an economic phenomenon. Rather, he

says, an anti-poverty program must recognize that it must do something also about political poverty. Thus, he called the Johnson Program for the Great Society just a mess of "political pornography." His explanation is consistent with what he has said elsewhere:

First, I would have serious doubts about any really meaningful program to help and work with the poor until such time as the poor through their own organized power would be able to provide bona fide legitimate representatives of their interests who would sit at the programming table and have a strong voice in both the formulation and the carrying on of the program. This means an organized poor possessed of sufficient power to threaten the status quo with disturbing alternatives so that it would induce the status quo to come through with a decent meaningful poverty program. After all, change usually comes about because of a threat - rarely in history do we find that the right things are done for the right reasons.⁵

Alinsky's answer to the problem of powerlessness is organization. His answer to the problem of getting people active in decision-making is in building what he calls a people's organization. Consistent with his view of society as a battle ground, Alinsky sees a people's organization as a conflict group, a power group. A people's organization may have many names, and it may be big or small, but wherever it exists, its sole reason for being is to wage war on behalf of its members against injustice. Alinsky reminds us that, when we talk of a democratic citizenship, we think in terms of an informed, active, participating people. However, people can participate in a meaningful way only if two conditions are met: one is the opportunity to formulate a program based on an open discussion of the available options and the other is a medium through which they can express and achieve their program.⁶

How does one recognize a "people's organization?" What are the essential characteristics? Alinsky enumerated them in a speech which he presented before the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. First, he says, a true people's organization must be "rooted in the local tradition, the local indigenous

leadership, the local organizations and agencies, and in short, the local people."⁷ Second, its program is the result of the common agreements reached in the building of the organization and the driving force is the self-interest of "the local residents for the welfare of their children and themselves."⁸ Third, it has a program which represents the interests of the total community and which requires the participation of all the organizations of the local area as well as a "substantial degree of individual citizen participation." Fourth, it does not shy away from matters of controversy, but responds to popular pressure while trying to channel the "diverse forces of self-interest within the community into a common direction for the common good." And finally, a people's organization must concentrate on using indigenous leadership and on being "completely self-financed at the end of approximately three years."⁹

On the basis of the foregoing list, it appears that Alinsky envisions a "people's organization" as a sort of umbrella organization which includes representative elements from all the groups of a particular community. The rationale is based on the assumption that the community, even with its existing groups, is still not organized enough to represent all the interests of all the citizens, and thus there is the need of the new organization to fill the gaps. If one accepts the assumption that under-organization is the case, there is still the ^{sticky} ~~thorny~~ question of the relationship of the existing organizations to the new one. For example, it would seem logical that either the new organization would gradually drain away membership from the previously established ones which presumably are deficient, or else the already existing groups would rise to the occasion and begin to represent their members effectively in which case there would be little need for the new organization. Another remaining question

is how the diverse interests of a heterogeneous community can be equally represented in one large organization. These are real difficulties and they are illustrative of the tensions which always exist in a free society. The fact that Alinsky does not attempt to give them final answers is a mark of his faith in the democratic process.

These problems, however important they are, are still not the fundamental questions according to Alinsky. The basic issue is whether we really believe in democracy or not. For him there are only two alternatives: rule by all the people through their popularly chosen representatives or rule by an elite, that is, by a few who arbitrarily hold power. His choice is clear; his faith and his vision is that society should be run by as many people as possible. The problem is that the few rich tend to gather power for themselves and in the process tend to forget the values of justice and equality unless they are continually reminded of the interests of the poor. Then, too, the problem of representation in the United States has been compounded by technological progress which has given decision-making power to the "experts" and in effect has left the majority disenfranchised. For example, on questions of such magnitude as urban planning, welfare economics, tax legislation, farm subsidies, world trade and disarmament, public policy is increasingly decided on technical grounds by experts who are hired and who are not responsible to the electorate. However, if the interests of all the people can be represented in the making of policy, says Alinsky, then we can create a society where the "millions instead of the few can live in dignity, peace and security."¹⁰ But, in order for the poor and other disenfranchised people to gain representation they must first be organized, and that organization is the job on which Alinsky concentrates his efforts.

One thing I've learned in spades - though I didn't want to accept it for a long time - is this: Organization doesn't come out of an immaculate conception. It takes highly trained, politically sophisticated, creative organizer to do the job. And it can't be done just on a local basis because the problems today are regional and national so you need a national power organization. But to build it you've got to have pieces to put together, local pieces. And to build them you've got to have trained organizers. That's why I'm doing what I'm doing now - training the organizers.¹¹

The Organizer

The body which Alinsky ^{had} established to train organizers ^{was} is the Industrial Areas Foundation Institute (IAF) located in Chicago. At the IAF Institute people are trained to be professional organizers in long term (twelve month) sessions, summer sessions, shorter sessions and special seminars. The purpose is for "the development of personnel trained and competent in the building of mass power based organizations for the involvement of citizens."¹² The teaching ^{was} is done by Alinsky and his associates for students who have a "commitment to a free and open society" and who want to be organizers. Alinsky refers to it as "a school for radicals." Funds for the Institute have come from Gordon Sherman, president of the Midas Muffler Company, from the Ford Foundation and from Alinsky's lecture program.¹³

What do the students at the IAF Institute learn? First, they learn that the guiding star of everything they do must begin with respect for the dignity of the individual. "A successful organizer is characterized by the fact that he has learned to emotionally as well as intellectually respect the dignity of the people with whom he is working."¹⁴ This respect, Alinsky contends, is the basic precept of a democratic way of life. And, he says, when we respect the dignity of people, we learn that they must not be denied the right and the duty to participate as fully as possible in the working out of their problems. "To me a fascist is someone who has lost all faith in people and has gone to a position of

real cynicism, which is very different from realism."¹⁵ The "realism" which Alinsky wants in his organizers is that faith in the common man which is the spirit of democracy.

A second concept that the prospective organizers must learn is the difficulty of their chosen work. Effective organization for citizen participation takes a great deal of effort according to Alinsky. In any society there are always those who benefit from the status quo and in a huge bureaucratic nation such as ours the forces which resist any major changes are powerful indeed. So, says Alinsky, those who want to change society must start where society is and move slowly toward altering the prevailing order. There are no shortcuts.

Effective organization is thwarted by the desire for instant and dramatic change, or as I have phrased it elsewhere, the demand for revelation rather than revolution. It's the kind of thing we see in play writing; the first act introduces the characters and the plot, in the second act the plot and characters are developed as the play strives to hold the audience's attention. In the final act good and evil have their dramatic confrontation and resolution. The present generation wants to go right into the third act, skipping the first two, in which case there is no play, nothing but confrontation for confrontation's sake - a flare-up and back to darkness. To build a powerful organization takes time. It is tedious, but that's the way the game is played...¹⁶

Although it is ironic in view of Alinsky's anti-intellectualism, the analogy can be made that for him "organization" is a synonym for "education" and, to follow the analogy further, the organizer then becomes the teacher. The content of the teaching and hopefully of the learning is that of the skills necessary for the democratic process. Just as the teacher cannot learn for the students, so the organizer cannot by himself build the people's organization. But the organizer does serve as a stimulus, a catalyst, to spark the people into activity and the development of a program. As they begin to become active they will learn of their neighbors' problems and they will see that the problems are all inter-related. With the help of the organizer they will learn that by working

together, solutions can be found to common problems. And, as they find those solutions they will automatically develop faith in themselves and in their own abilities. It is Alinsky's vision that such a development is not only necessary and desirable, but that it is also highly probable. The goal of the organizer is to help make this probability a reality.

What sort of person can be successful as an organizer? ^{WAS} This is a question on which Alinsky has been working especially hard in the last few years since the IAF stopped doing the organizing itself and started training organizers at the Institute. They have developed a list of ideal qualities which they feel potential organizers should possess although they concede that the person does not exist who has all of them to the extent that he needs them. First, since an organizer is a change agent, he must be a question asker. He must be "driven by a compulsive curiosity that knows no limits."¹⁷ The question mark is his symbol and he goes forth to ask questions that agitate, that break through the traditional. Such questioning suggests that a related quality of an organizer is irreverence of the status quo. This does not mean an irreverence for life because reverence for human dignity is the starting point for all that Alinsky does. Rather the attitude of irreverence is held against dogma and ritual, against the prescribed way of doing things. It is a quality of being continually open to new possibilities.

An organizer, in Alinsky's thought, is one who is trying to create a new situation so it follows that he must have imagination and creativity. Not only must he be able to envision what the possibilities for the new life are like but he must also be able to feel with, to imagine himself in the shoes of the people he is trying to organize. Then too, Alinsky states that, "the organizer knows that the real action is in the reaction of the opposition."¹⁸ So, the

organizer must also be able to imagine the situation of the opposition in order to predict their reaction. However, he will not be able always to guess, and since the organizer is always trying something new, he is bound to have failures. Thus a sense of humor is part of his essential equipment. It will help him to keep his sanity and his sense of perspective. The organizer knows, too, that the most potent weapons in the struggle for change are satire and radicle.

It is assumed that the good organizer will have the radical vision of what the world could be and that he is sustained through the hard work by the realization of what he is trying to build. It is that vital center which can enable him to keep working and to pull all the diverse elements and interests of a community together into the organization. Of course, he must have the strong ego, which lets him act with confidence even though he is in a world where all values are relative and the situation is constantly changing. In short, the organizer must be a well-integrated, mature and responsible person.

This discussion of the "ideal" qualities of an organizer again offers weighty evidence that Alinsky not only is an experienced community organizer but also is a preacher of ideas; he is an ideologue. After all the years of activity when empirical evidence must often have threatened to shatter his faith in people, Alinsky can still affirm the sentiments he expressed more than twenty-five years ago:

The radical's affection for people is not lessened, nor is it hardened against them even when the masses of them demonstrate a capacity for brutality, selfishness, hate, greed, avarice and disloyalty. He is convinced that these attitudes and actions are the result of evil conditions. It is not the people who must be judged but the circumstances that made them that way. The radical's desire to change society then becomes that much firmer. Each blow makes him a stronger radical....Radicals are not repelled by moral malignancy and evil in people, but on the contrary regard with wonder the fact that the masses of people subjected to the kind of society in which they live, should retain so much decency and dignity. The radical constantly finds his faith in man fortified.¹⁹

Such are the powerful ideas which would seem to be a necessary part of the "cognitive universe" of an Alinsky organizer. It is only when grounded in such a faith in the innate worth of people that the radical organizer could ever keep working to build a democratic society.

Alinsky's Strategy and Tactics

In his many years of working for a free and open society where equality of opportunity, and justice prevail, Alinsky has formulated some general rules for organizers to remember. His first rule, paradoxically, is that there are no rules for revolution. By this he means that there is no absolute except the principle of the "preciousness of human life;" human life has value and it should be preserved and given opportunity for maximum development, but all other values are relative.²⁰ This is in keeping with his insistence on having no dogma or fixed truth. It is a difficult rule because it leaves the organizer always unsure he has the right answer, always questioning if there is not a better way. The organizer of a free society, in contrast to the architect of a totalitarian one, does not have a set of blue-prints to follow because the free society is constantly redefining its goals.

Whenever we think about social change, the question of means and ends arises. The man of action views the issue of means and ends in pragmatic and strategic terms. He has no other problem; he thinks only of his actual resources and the possibilities of various choices of action. He asks of ends only whether they are achievable and worth the cost; of means, only whether they will work.²¹

It should be remembered here that Alinsky's view of society is that of a battleground, a continual life and death struggle between those who "have" and those who "have not." He assumes, on the basis of historical evidence, that those who have will do everything in their power to keep and increase what they have. The job of the organizer then is to help the "have nots" in their perpetual battle. "The practical revolutionary will understand Goethe's conscience

is the virtue of observers and not of agents of action; in action one does not always enjoy the luxury of a decision that is consistent both with one's individual conscience and the good of mankind. The choice must always be for the latter. Action is for mass salvation and not for the individual's personal salvation."²² Alinsky seems to be saying that there are no law books by which judgements can be made by an outsider, but rather that the only people who can make the judgement are the organizer and the citizens involved who must keep the goal in mind and then, "anything goes" which is consistent with the goal. Such is the opportunistic method which has become a characteristic of Alinsky's organizational style.

Taken to its logical conclusion it seems that such extreme relativity is a dangerous position to hold. Alinsky seems to be perilously close to forgetting his previous rule of respect for the individual, if not in the case of the organization, then for the organizer. In effect he is asking the individual organizer to sacrifice his own beliefs as to what is right and wrong in order for the organization to gain some end. Or following that line of reasoning, he would conceivably suggest that an organization should carry out actions which are not considered ethical by some members in order for the total organization to benefit. Such actions, it seems, could tend to destroy both the organizer and the organization. At the very least it would seem that disagreements over tactics could be a potent source of conflict within the organization itself. For example, Alinsky has often worked with church leaders in his organizing activities and much of his support has come from churches. Conversely, some of the strongest criticism which has been leveled at him has come from churchmen who were appalled by his "unchristian" tactics.

If Alinsky has overstated himself and put his organizers into a dilemma, he at least has alerted us to the danger that we may spend so much time worrying about the ethics of our means that we do nothing to gain the ends of justice and equality. On the bookshelf in his office Alinsky has three carved wooden monkeys which graphically illustrate the maxim, "hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil." These he calls the "trinity of evil." They serve as a continuous reminder of his belief that total non-involvement is total immorality. Such is the position of the "non-doers," the passive ones who earn Alinsky's contempt because they are so afraid of doing something wrong that they do nothing at all. By their non-action they thus help to perpetuate the injustice and they are then part of the "enemy" which the organizer is helping to fight. But, for the true radical, the man who is concerned about his fellow human beings and who is involved in aiding them for the common good, Alinsky has set forth a series of maxims which illustrate his view of the relativity of the ethics of means and ends.

- 1) One's concern with the ethics of means and ends varies inversely with the degree of one's personal vested interest in the issue.
- 2) The judgement of the ethics of means is and has been dependent upon the political position of those sitting in judgement.
- 3) In war the end justifies almost any means.
- 4) The judgement must be made in the context of the times in which the action occurred and not from any other chronological vantage point.
- 5) Concern with ethics increases with the number of means available and vice versa.
- 6) The less important the end to be desired, the more one can afford to engage in ethical evaluation of means.
- 7) Success or failure is a mighty determinant of ethics.
- 8) The morality of a means depends upon whether the means is being employed at a time of imminent defeat or imminent victory.
- 9) Any means which is effective is automatically judged by the opposition as being unethical.
- 10) You do what you can do with what you have and clothe it with moral arguments.²³

A summary of the foregoing list might be, "it all depends." That is to say; there are no absolutes, the world is relative so, when deciding on the rightness or

wrongness of a tactic, it all depends on the particular situation. The question remains whether the world really is that way, but at least it is certain that Alinsky sees it that way. His view is that the world is constantly on the move presenting ever new obstacles for the organizer to overcome. Since no two situations are precisely the same, then it follows for him that the tactics and the goals are also different each time. Again one is reminded of Alinsky's anti-intellectualism which comes through his insistence that people do not learn abstractly, but only through experience. General theories, Alinsky feels, become meaningful only through specific instances.

For all his denial of universals or absolutes, it is clear that Alinsky does have certain general principles for organizers to keep in mind. One rule is directly related to the above discussion of learning by experience. On this, Alinsky says that the first step in building a people's organization is to understand the traditions and habits of the community. This means working from within the system, and it is not a matter of personal choice. It is essential to remember, says Alinsky, that a real organization of the people begins where people are and is rooted in the experiences of the people themselves. "To know a people is to know their religions. It is to know the values, objectives, customs, sanctions, and the taboos of these groups."²⁴ If the people's organization is to be a genuine outgrowth of the community, then these aspects must be expressed through its program.

Closely related to this point is Alinsky's "philosophy of education" for a people's organization. The root purpose of a people's organization is education, and the education is to help them help themselves. But, the organizer does not come right out and say this because it would be useless if he did. Instead, the people learn by doing. The people will not necessarily be conscious of why they

are doing certain things, but in Alinsky's opinion most people tend to act first and think afterward of the reasons why they acted. So the educational slogan for an Alinsky organizer is: "Get people to move in the right direction first. They'll explain to themselves later why they moved in that direction and that explanation will be better learning for them than anything we can do."²⁵

Other general rules which have already been discussed are: respect and dignity of the individuals with whom you are working, and never accept charity nor act in a paternalistic manner. Another assumption of Alinsky's to which I have referred in his dualism - his Marxian dialectic, his insistence upon seeing all of life as a battle. "Political realists see the world as it is: an arena of power politics moved primarily by perceived immediate self-interests, where morality is rhetorical rationale for expedient action and self-interest."²⁶

Alinsky sees contradictions everywhere, but he maintains that such duality is the essence of reality. He refers to one of the laws of physics which is that every positive carries a negative. Such also is a law of society. For example, a primary goal of Americans has been to be affluent, to have many material goods. The goal itself may be seen as positive but the built-in negative which is now becoming more apparent is that our material affluence is so polluting the environment as to endanger life itself. The organizer and the citizen must be alert to this at all times because the final outcome can never be predicted. In all the action and the reaction, a degree of probability is the most which can be hoped for. The direction is clear but not the end-point.

To begin organizing a community, says Alinsky, the organizer must first get rid of his myths. One of the myths is that he will be welcomed as a savior by the people of the community. The chances are that he will be regarded as a dangerous threat by the local establishment figures and as a suspicious outsider

by the majority of the people. That is because there is no such thing as a disorganized community and because people do not change easily from the prevailing pattern of action or non-action. A slum, for example, is organized in the sense that people are living in a more or less settled pattern. The people have a way of life. "They may be suffering from various forms of deprivation and discrimination. They may have accepted anonymity and resigned in apathy. They may despair and feel hopeless about their children inheriting a little better world...call it organized apathy or organized non-participation but that is their community pattern."²⁷

So, the first step in organizing a community is community disorganization. The prevailing pattern of apathy and despair must be displaced with new pattern of citizen participation. Alinsky's general solution to this problem of a stagnant situation is to get people fighting mad. "That organizer dedicated to changing the character of life of a particular community has an initial function of serving as an abrasive agent to rub raw the resentments of the people of the community; to fan the latent hostilities of many of the people to a point of overt expression."²⁸ The job to be done is to get people to move and to be active so that the status quo cannot continue unperturbed. At the beginning point the people who are being organized are still relatively immobilized by their fear of the establishment and by their own feelings of inferiority. Thus the emphasis is and must be on action.

It would be a grave injustice, however, to get people mad about an issue and hopeful that something could be done without also helping them to do something about it. That is where the people's organization comes in. It is Alinsky's belief that power (the ability to get things done) migrates to two poles, money and numbers. The establishment has the money and the status which has enabled

them to be in their privileged position. The disadvantaged have the resource of numbers available to them if they are organized. The creation of the organization, then, is the beginning of the solution to the problem, because then those who were being exploited have some chance of changing their situation. And, once they have the power to make changes, they begin to be the active, informed and responsible citizens of which a democracy consists.²⁹

When he enters a community the first thing an organizer must do is to get to know the people and to let them know him. This means primarily that the people learn to accept the organizer and to trust him and that the organizer learns what problems are uppermost in the minds of the people. Once he knows the problems, then he can start to build the organization by turning the problem into an issue.

People may have serious problems - but they do not have issues, they have a bad scene. An issue is something you can do something about, but as long as you feel powerless and unable to do anything about it, all you have is a bad scene. Through action, persuasion and communication the organizer makes it clear that organization will give them the power, the ability, the strength, the force to be able to do something about these particular problems. It is then that a bad scene begins to break up into specific issues, because now the people can do something about it.³⁰

The question of issues is very important, and also very complicated, says Alinsky, because the organizer has several factors to keep in mind. First, the issues to be worked upon must be specific, immediate and feasible.³¹ People simply will not be moved to act if issues are too abstract and too long range. (For example, it is easier to get people to work for the improvement of a neighborhood school than it is to get them to work for general desegregation because the problems of the school presumably can be corrected in a relatively short time by simple and direct action while the more complicated problem of segregation will doubtless defy local efforts at solution.) And yet the organization must have enough issues to attract and involve the total range of the community.

A mass organization must be built on many different issues - housing, jobs, school, consumer prices, representation and power at the decision-making centers, health, crime, and every other aspect of life that affects the welfare and future of the local people and their children....When there are many different objectives there is constant daily activity and a sense of purpose and action and victory. People begin trading for each other's support, and alliances are formed between groups....This is the stuff of which Organization is made.³²

The purpose, of course, is to create a mass power base, an organization that really represents the interests of the people and which has the power to confront the establishment. Such organization is both desirable and necessary because the democratic process cannot function without all the various interests of society being represented. In the United States, for example, the democratic process is hampered by the lack of representation of various minority groups. That is the reason Alinsky has worked so much with the Blacks. The big danger Alinsky sees is not "Black Power," but the very fact that there is no "Black Power." Suppose, says Alinsky, our bigoted white society suddenly decided that "from now on we will accept our non-white neighbors as full equals possessed of every right, opportunity and freedom enjoyed by whites. They will sit with us as equals at the decision-making table representing their people. 'Send us your representatives.' Who would come forth? Who represents these people?"³³ The tragedy we have now is that no one represents them because they are not organized and they do not have chosen representatives.

The biggest job an organizer has, therefore, is to create in people the feeling that they can work together to do something about their own situation. This means that the people must know what power is, what sources of it they have, and how to use it. Alinsky would often have the organizer start by suggesting something dramatic or symbolic in order to demonstrate the idea. For example, Alinsky maintains that ghetto residents have potential power simply

because of their numbers, but that they feel powerless before City Hall. So Alinsky might suggest that they get fifty busloads of people together on a certain date and all of them go together to City Hall to register to vote. Such a tactic can be very effective because the people get a feeling of satisfaction about having done something together, because they have impressed themselves with how big a group they are and because the chances are that the newspapers will be there to find out why 2,000 people came together to City Hall. Thus, in one simple action the ghetto residents have gotten recognition and have learned that they, in fact, have the ability to do things if they cooperate and organize.

Alinsky has devoted an entire chapter in his newest book to the discussion of general rules of power tactics which he has used both to build an organization and to carry out the program of the organization. The following list provides a summary of the ideas which have proven to be most valuable.

- 1) Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.
- 2) Never go outside the experience of your people.
- 3) Wherever possible go outside the experience of your enemy.
- 4) Make the enemy live up to their own book of rules.
- 5) Ridicule is man's most potent weapon.
- 6) A good tactic is one that your people enjoy.
- 7) A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.
- 8) Keep the pressure on by always acting and reacting to utilize all events of the period.
- 9) The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.
- 10) If you push a negative hard and deep enough it will break through into its counterside.
- 11) The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative. You cannot risk being trapped.
- 12) Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.³⁴

These are tactics which have been compared to those of guerrilla warfare and that, says Alinsky, is because the opposition is always stronger than you are. So the power of the establishment must be used against itself in a sort of political jujitsu. For example, when one of Alinsky's organizations was fighting with a school superintendent, the organization threatened a boycott. The

superintendent's office countered by threatening to arrest any picketers, an action which it had power to do. So the organization "leaked" the information to the press which published a critical article on the organization. However, the result was that the schools actually closed because of all the publicity of the threatened boycott.³⁵ Again, Alinsky would warn that these are only general principles and not standard procedures. The organizer must always assess each new situation for its own particular configuration of people, pressures and power. Then he can choose the tactic which seems most appropriate for the particular goal at that particular time.³⁶

Through all of this discussion of Alinsky's tactics and of means and ends, we should not forget the purpose of the organizer or of the organization. In any specific situation, the goal may be to create a disciplined, broad based power organization that is capable of wringing concessions such as better jobs, better schools, better garbage collection, better housing, 'etc., from the establishment. Such goals are commendable, but we would be doing an injustice to Alinsky if we forgot his commitment to the democratic ideal. His ultimate purpose is to educate citizens so they can participate in the planning of their own destiny.

There should not be too much concern with specifics or details of a people's program. The program items are not too significant when one considers the enormous importance of getting people interested and participating in a democratic way. After all, the real democratic program is a democratically-minded people - a healthy, active, participating, interested, self-confident people who, through their participation and interest become informed, educated and above all develop faith in themselves, their fellow men, and the future. The people themselves are the future. The people themselves will resolve each problem that will arise out of a changing world. They will if they, the people, have the opportunity and power to make and enforce the decision instead of seeing that power vested in just a few. No clique, or cast, power group or benevolent administration can have the people's interest at heart as much as the people themselves.³⁷

Conclusion

During the past fifteen years it has become increasingly common to find individuals and groups who are protesting the inequalities and injustices of United States society. Unfortunately, one of the most prevalent characteristics of the protestors has been the sporadic nature of their activities. In response to a specific event such as the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. the demonstrators exhibited a unity which, if sustained, could be a powerful force to challenge the status quo. However, for the most part, the "movement" has been so fragmented and so lacking in over-all organization that its effects have been minimal. Alinsky is at one with those who are challenging the current social order to live up to the highest ideals of liberty and equality. His important addition is a realization that organization for sustained activity is a necessary part of the arsenal of would-be social changers.

Through years of practical experience in the rough and tumble of the American scene, Alinsky has demonstrated that "have-not" groups can organize to gain a power base from which to challenge the status quo. Such organization is not easy but it is essential. It takes hard work and it requires a trained organizer with the radical vision to act as a stimulus and as a catalyst. Alinsky has aided the cause of organization by establishing the IAF Institute as a training school for radicals and by his personal example in continuing to speak and to organize from coast to coast.

Alinsky's style of organization is based on at least two premises: one is that people should never be subjected to charity; the other is that all values are relative except the dignity of human life. From these seemingly unrelated premises it follows for Alinsky that the "have-nots" should organize themselves for power using any means available and demand their rights from

those who "have." The organizer, Alinsky warns, does not begin on the basis of moral principles. Rather he begins by appealing to people's self-interest and in the process presumably they will become knowledgeable about how their problems and their neighbors' problems are related to the wider problems, and thus they will become the mature and responsible citizens which are necessary for the functioning of a democracy.

For Alinsky, the end to be sought is a free society where citizens have the opportunity to work together on their common destiny. This end is so important that the organizer should use any means available which help to reach the goal. The tactics will constantly change in response to the changing situation and yet the picture is not one of chaos. Instead, the dynamism of such social change is filled with hope because the radical organizer has the vision and the faith that free people working together can eliminate injustice and inequality, that they can find ways to live together in freedom and peace.

Footnotes: Chapter III

- ¹ Sidney Lens, Radicalism in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969), p. 1.
- ² Alinsky, quoted by Patrick Anderson, "Making Trouble is Alinsky's Business," The New York Times Magazine, October 9, 1966, p. 35.
- ³ Marion K. Sanders, The Professional Radical: Conversations with Saul Alinsky (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 30.
- ⁴ Saul D. Alinsky, From Citizen Apathy to Participation (Chicago: The Industrial Areas Foundation, 1957), p. 9.
- ⁵ Saul D. Alinsky, "The War on Poverty - Political Pornography," The Journal of Social Issues, XXI (January, 1965), pp. 45-46.
- ⁶ Saul D. Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 196-198.
- ⁷ Saul D. Alinsky, You Can't See the Stars through the Stripes (Chicago: The Industrial Areas Foundation, 1968), p. 7.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 7.
- ⁹ Ibid., pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁰ Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, pp. 196-198.
- ¹¹ Sanders, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
- ¹² From the Fact Sheet published by the Industrial Areas Foundation Institute, Chicago, p. 1.
- ¹³ Dickson Terry, "Fiery Leader of Social Reforms," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, (Sunday, April 5, 1970), p. 3F.
- ¹⁴ Alinsky, From Citizen Apathy to Participation, p. 8.
- ¹⁵ Marshall Rosenthal, "Jerry and Abbie Couldn't Organize a Luncheon Much Less a Revolution," Rolling Stone, (March 4, 1971), p. 34.
- ¹⁶ Saul D. Alinsky, Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals (New York: Random House, 1971), p. xx.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 72.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 74.
- ¹⁹ Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, pp. 90-91.
- ²⁰ Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, pp. 45-47.

²¹Ibid., p. 24.

²²Ibid., p. 21.

²³Saul D. Alinsky, "Of Means and Ends," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXII, (January, 1967), pp. 109-116.

²⁴Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, p. 78.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 169-170.

²⁶Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, p. 78.

²⁷Alinsky, From Citizen Apathy to Participation, p. 8.

²⁸Ibid., p. 3.

²⁹Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, pp. 104-106.

³⁰Ibid., p. 119.

³¹Saul D. Alinsky, Citizen Participation and Community Organization in Planning and Urban Renewal (Chicago: The Industrial Areas Foundation, 1962), p. 4.

³²Sanders, op. cit., p. 49.

³³Alinsky, You Can't See the Stars through the Stripes, p. 6.

³⁴Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, pp. 127-130.

³⁵Charles E. Silberman, "Up From Apathy - The Woodlawn Organization," Commentary, XXXVII (May, 1964), pp. 52-53

³⁶Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, pp. 130-140.

³⁷Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals, p. 55.

Chapter IV

Alinsky in Action

Because of our vision of how men should live and the contrast with our knowledge of how they do live, the most urgent theoretical question for the New Left is: How do we change society? How do we redistribute power in order to redistribute wealth? How do we overcome those who enjoy power and wealth and won't give them up? How do we stop the fanaticism of civilian and military leaders who feel it is America's duty to establish its power (or its puppets) wherever possible in the world and do not care how many people, Americans or others, they kill in the process?...Guerilla warfare arose as an answer to overwhelming centralized military power, and perhaps we are in need of a kind of political guerilla warfare as an answer to the power of mass society. Enclaves of freedom might be created in the midst of the orthodox way of life that would become centers of protest and examples to others. The new radicals must give much thought and direct most of their action to the techniques of organization, pressure and change.¹

Now that Alinsky's vision and his methods have been discussed, it is time to turn attention to some concrete examples of his organizing. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of all the community organizing that Alinsky has done nor will it attempt to compare or contrast him with other organizers and their methods. Rather, the discussion is meant to illustrate how Alinsky has helped specific communities to organize and thereby to gain decision-making power. Some of Alinsky's pronouncements on the current American scene will be included along with critical comments and a few tentative conclusions.

In the past Alinsky has concentrated his efforts on working with and organizing "have-not" groups. These were the Mexican-Americans in Southern California, the Poles, Lithuanians, and Italians in New York City and Chicago. The poor in those ethnic groups were at the bottom rung of the American social ladder. Then later, he worked mostly with Blacks, with ghetto residents of

Chicago, Buffalo, Rochester, Detroit and Kansas City.² His goal in all of these communities has been to help create a democratic society by organizing people to participate. More recently, in the Institute he has established to train organizers, Alinsky has been concentrating some of his efforts on organizing the middle classes in America. Why? Because, says Alinsky, the masses in America today are the middle class. Even a coalition of all the Blacks, the other minorities and "all the underdog factions of American society could not begin to rival the vast middle-class power base, those people 'who are dieting while the have-nots are dying.'"³ Alinsky concluded that in order to effectively challenge the status quo, the middle classes must be organized to participate in decision-making to a greater extent than they have been.

It is logical that a radical believer in democracy such as Alinsky would work with the poor because it is a sad fact that the poor in America still need a lot of help before they can come close to sharing in our society on a basis of equality. This has been true throughout the history of the United States and it has been noted by observers both at home and abroad. For example, Gunnar Myrdal, who published An American Dilemma in 1944, pointed out the lack of organizational power and thus the lack of representation of the lower classes.⁴ Almost twenty years later Michael Harrington vividly portrayed the plight of the minorities, the aged and others at the bottom of the American social system who are still without an effective means of participation in the benefits or the responsibilities of American life.⁵ Perhaps the best representative of these minority groups has been the Black American about whom numerous studies have been published which show the wide disparities between the opportunities for participation that are open to Blacks as compared with the majority of our white society.⁶

It is appropriate, therefore, that the illustrations of Alinsky's organizing are cases in which he has helped Negro-Americans to find solutions to their problems. Among others these problems include squalid housing, low job opportunities and unemployment, low pay and poor health care. Nor is their poverty confined simply to physical matters. Rather the Blacks in the ghetto have generally exhibited the despair and apathy which are the basic ingredients of any lower class community. Charles Silberman has characterized the basic problem of Negro-Americans as an identity problem which he says is caused by the general feeling of powerlessness.

'Our healing gift to the weak,' as Eric Hoffer has wisely written, 'is the capacity for self help. We must learn how to impart to them the technical, social and political skills which would enable them to get bread, human dignity, freedom and strength by their own efforts.' For in the last analysis their rejection of the conventional offers of help - the resentment they show - springs less from the injustice ~~per~~ ^{se} than from their sense of inadequacy and impotence.'

As we have seen in the discussion of Alinsky's vision and methods, he is well aware of the ghetto syndrome of general poverty, lack of political influence and the sense of despair and apathy. And, Alinsky's organizational goals include some remedy for all three parts of the syndrome. First of all he does aim to help correct the physical abuses of poor housing, unemployment or whatever are the pressing problems of the area. Second, he plans that the people's organization will provide an effective channel for popular participation in the democratic process. And, finally, he is sure that the people's sense of dignity and self-esteem cannot help but be measurably improved as they are able to work out together the solutions to their problems.

The Woodlawn Experience

Probably the most famous example of Alinsky in action is in Woodlawn, an area just to the south of the University of Chicago. The area (approximately 80,000 people) is practically all Black as a result of a substantial influx of Blacks from the South since 1940. The slum landlords have benefited most from this migration, because they have sliced up the old middle-class homes to create multiple unit dwellings from which they collect exorbitant rents. "Woodlawn has everything one would need to create a macabre picture of slum life: high school dropouts, crime, unemployment, and a high percentage of welfare recipients."⁸ The result was a declining neighborhood filled with people who were becoming progressively poorer and more apathetic.

In the late 1950's there were several organizations and churches who attempted to do something to stop the downward trend, but mostly their efforts were too limited and too short-lived to be effective. Finally several clergymen began to meet together because of their common concern over the fate of the neighborhood. They appealed for help from the nearby University of Chicago and also from City Hall, but neither was disposed to give much attention to their plea. In 1960, after much deliberation, they invited Saul Alinsky and the IAF to come and help organize the Woodlawn community. The result was the Temporary Woodlawn Community (TWO) which Charles Silberman has described as "the most important and the most impressive experiment affecting Negroes anywhere in the United States..." He further states that:

The formation of TWO represents the first instance in which a large, broadly representative organization has come into existence in any Negro district in any large American city. The Woodlawn organization is set up as a federation of other representative groups: some eighty-five or ninety in all, including thirteen churches (virtually all the churches of any influence in the community), three businessmen's associations, and an assortment of block clubs, neighborhood associations,

and social groups of one sort or another. All told, the organizations represented in TWO have a membership of about 30,000 people; some 1,200 of them attended the organization's second annual convention in May of 1963.⁹

How did TWO come into existence and how has it continued to function? The answer can be found by reviewing Alinsky's general strategy for organizing a community: 1) discover specific grievances of the people in the community, 2) discover the natural leaders and get them together, 3) stimulate discussion of how an organization could help solve local problems, 4) organize to do something, preferably something dramatic, which gives quick and visible results. In Woodlawn, the IAF soon found that the people had at least three main grievances which could be useful in helping to build the organization. They wanted to improve their neighborhood schools, but were continually disregarded by the Chicago School Superintendent. They were angry because various local merchants were overcharging and giving short weights. Finally, they were afraid that the University of Chicago would extend its campus into their area and leave them with even less housing.¹⁰

As soon as they could get the local leaders and some people to work together, the IAF started immediately to act on all three of the grievances. Their tactic to remedy the exploitation of the merchants was quite simple. They first had a big parade to a central location where a set of scales was set up along with an adding machine. Then the people went shopping at all the stores in the area, only instead of going home at once with the merchandise they first brought their purchases back to be weighed and tallied. The false weights and the incorrect bills were broadcast over a loudspeaker along with the name of the store. This so-called "square deal" campaign was at least a limited success. The people had fun exposing the crooked businessmen. They saved money, and they got promises of fair practices in the future. The psychological boost to them

from knowing that they could do something about the injustices to which they were subjected was tremendous.¹¹

Soon, after the organization gained some strength, they decided to do something about getting improvements in their schools. To this end they viciously attacked the Chicago School Superintendent. They had mass demonstrations of irrate parents at City Hall, and they also organized some school boycotts for concrete objectives such as toilet paper in the schools, more and better books, etc.¹² In order to broaden the organization and to work on as many issues as possible, TWO also organized rent strikes and pickets to protest against the slum landlords who were raking profits off crowded and deteriorating housing. But, says Alinsky, the thing which really welded the Woodlawn Organization together was the University of Chicago, which attacked him because of his insistence that the planning of the urban renewal program should involve the people of Woodlawn.¹³

A fight with the University of Chicago was just what Alinsky needed to help strengthen the organization even more, because a fear and a distrust of the University was the one common threat on which everyone in Woodlawn could agree. So, when the University talked of bulldozing the ghetto to improve the campus, Alinsky had no trouble arousing people to protest. The University then attacked Alinsky as a trouble-maker and accused him of "rubbing raw the resentments" and of "arousing dormant hostilities." That is exactly what the IAF was doing and their reason for doing it was to dig into the resignation, hopelessness and despair of the local people and to get them to articulate their wants and needs.

The very action of elevating these dormant hidden hostilities to the surface for confrontation and ventilation and conversion into problems is in itself a constructive and most important social catharsis. The alternative would be the permitting of incessant accumulation and compounding or submerged frustrations, resentments and hostilities in

large segments of our population; with the clogging of all channels for relief evolving a nightmarish setting for a probable backfiring of actions generated by irrational, vindictive hate with tragically destructive consequences to all parties.¹⁴

Throughout this paper, it has been emphasized that Alinsky views society as a battleground. Wherever he goes he seems to breed conflict and controversy, but this, he says, is not because he causes it, but because he uncovers it. In Woodlawn he was criticised for this by outsiders such as the University of Chicago and by people inside the community who accused him of cultivating hatred and antagonism. But Alinsky insists that the apathy of a slum is only a cover up for the feeling of hopelessness. Charles Silberman also pointed to this when he stated that "slum residents will not stir unless they see a reasonable chance of winning, unless there is some evidence that they can change things for the better."¹⁵ Accordingly, the IAF in Woodlawn concentrated on getting the people agitated enough to act together to change their situation. Thus the organization became a channel through which the people could express their resentments rather than having them come out in the form of a riot.

All this is not to say that Woodlawn changed overnight into a prosperous community; nor is it to say that everyone in the neighborhood was suddenly an active citizen. At most the Woodlawn Organization can claim to represent about one-half of the people of Woodlawn and not even everyone who was involved is convinced that what happened was a great success. Still, there is no other organization which can claim to represent more than a tiny fraction of Woodlawn. Also TWO did force the University to negotiate its proposal to move into the edge of Woodlawn and ended with the concession that new housing would be built before the old housing was demolished. In addition to its success in fighting the University, the slum landlords, and the unfair merchants, one observer has concluded that TWO can rightfully claim the following laurels:

- 1) City-wide influence in the struggle for integrated, higher-quality schools;
- 2) the relaxation of employment barriers in several stores;
- 3) the creation of a better understanding of welfare problems through meetings with public-aid officials and cooperation with the local welfare office;
- 4) the creation of an ecumenical spirit with the community...;
- 5) the creation of a strong citizens' group to watch over future urban renewal programs in Woodlawn....¹⁶

Another observer also concluded that TWO has won substantial material victories for the people of Woodlawn. He chooses, however, to emphasize not so much what TWO has done for the people as what it has done to them. The people now feel a sense of dignity and of pride in themselves which is not measurable, but which has such a favorable effect on community morale. He concedes that the problems are not over and that the people of Woodlawn still need help from outside to solve their problems. But the big difference is that now the people of Woodlawn have a sense of dignity which enables them to admit their needs, to help formulate the program and then to accept the help.¹⁷

Such a result would be a big step toward Alinsky's goal of building a participatory democracy, for his basic social theory is "that no amount of social work conducted by outsiders, no amount of welfare allotments, or indeed anything sponsored by the establishment, will be an adequate substitute for indigenous participation in the formation of the destiny of the dispossessed."¹⁸

Alinsky in Rochester

Rochester, New York, the home base for Eastman Kodak, is the site of the second major organization which illustrates Alinsky in action. Until 1964 Rochester was a complacent city, proud of its prosperity (Alinsky called it Smugtown, U.S.A.) and proud of the way it was taking care of all its citizens. Then in the summer of 1964 Rochester was shocked and humiliated by race riots

which left several people dead, hundreds wounded and with property damage estimated as high as one million dollars.¹⁹ Race riots hit many cities that summer, but in Rochester, which boasted of its generous welfare program, the disturbances which followed the arrest of a Black youth on a minor offense was totally unexpected.

The immediate result of the riots was a great deal of soul searching in Rochester. The local leaders asked themselves why such a thing should happen in their progressive metropolis. Some located the seeds of violence in the poor housing and lack of education, while others attributed the riots to idleness or troublemakers. Whatever the reason, it seemed obvious that the Blacks in Rochester simply did not have the opportunity to participate in the general prosperity of the city nor were they participating in making decisions.

In 1964 Rochester's 35,000 Negroes accounted for about one-tenth of the city's population. Living in a slum area, they worked at construction or low pay service jobs, or were on relief. For, although the city's major industries adhered to equal opportunity policies, Negroes with their minimum skills and education, could not meet most job requirements. Eastman Kodak, the largest employer of all, had recently begun to actively recruit Negro workers; but, after the riot, the industrial relations pointed out to a New York Times reporter: "We're not in the habit of hiring bodies. We need skills. We don't grow many peanuts in Eastman Kodak!"²⁰

Whatever the reasons for the racial violence, the city was on edge and trying to decide what should be done to avert more trouble. Many white clergymen felt a special obligation to bind up the city's wounds. The result was that in January, 1965, the Rochester Area Council of Churches invited Saul Alinsky and the IAF to come to Rochester to help organize the Black community. The invitation immediately touched off a controversy in Rochester because Alinsky and his tactics were already known. He was denounced as a "hatemonger" and a "rabble-rouser" by the local press and various members of the local establishment voiced their opposition to his coming. When asked why they invited Alinsky,

the clergymen replied: "No one else was available in whom we had faith.... There is a missing dynamic in Rochester contributing to anarchy and bitterness - the lack of structural organization among the inner-city people that would give them a voice, cohesion and a sense of identity."²¹

Rochester leaders expected the worst when Alinsky sent his top organizer, 34 year old Edward T. Chambers, to begin work in the spring of 1965. Nor did they feel better when Alinsky came in June to the convention of the organization that was being formed and denounced the city, which is dominated by Eastman Kodak, as "a Southern plantation transplanted in the North."²² The controversy, of course, was just what Alinsky wanted as he and his men continued to organize the Black people of Rochester. The militant body which emerged took the appropriate name of FIGHT which stands for Freedom, Integration, God, Honor, Today.

In June of 1965 FIGHT adopted a constitution and elected its first president, the Reverend Franklin Florence, a Church of Christ minister.²³ Minister Florence, as he likes to be called, is an angry and articulate Negro who wears a "Black Power" button. As the president of FIGHT, he represents approximately 130 Negro groups ranging from churches and block clubs to pool-room clubs. It is debatable exactly how many people he represents (FIGHT claims to represent two-thirds of Rochester's Negroes), but even critics admit that it represents the total Negro community to a degree never before achieved by any organization.²⁴ As for the white clergy and other whites who invited Alinsky and who are supporting the Black community in its efforts, they have formed the Friends of FIGHT in a gesture which shows that they are well aware of the resentment of Blacks against Whites.

What has FIGHT done? First they waded into a controversy over an urban renewal project which had been planned by the city before there was any effective

representation from the Third Ward where most of the Blacks live. The situation is a prime example of the sort of "welfare colonialism" which so infuriates Alinsky. The city was quite willing to give handouts, but it had not previously given any thought to having Blacks represented in the planning boards. At a public hearing on the project, FIGHT turned out more than a thousand people which succeeded in impressing upon City Hall the idea of serious negotiations. In the end FIGHT won provision for new housing to be built before the old housing was torn down as well as other concessions. FIGHT also has gotten several of its members onto the board of directors of the local poverty program, and it controls an urban renewal citizen's committee.

In September, 1966, FIGHT began a new battle which was to cause even more controversy in Rochester. As part of their demand for more opportunity in the job market, they asked Eastman Kodak to set up a training program for 500 to 600 Blacks. Rev. Florence explained: "We knew if we could get Kodak in line, every other business would follow...we're not talking about the man who can compete," Florence pointed out to Kodak officials, "we're talking about the down-and-out, the man crushed by this evil system, the man emasculated who can't make it on his own. He has a right to work."²⁶ And he went on to propose that FIGHT recruit and Kodak train (including fundamentals such as reading and arithmetic) these unemployables over an eighteen month period for entry level jobs with the company.

What followed the demand was a confused mass of charges and counter-charges. There were various meetings through the Fall of 1966. Kodak said that if it granted the demand, it would be guilty of discrimination in favor of FIGHT. The Blacks shouted back that Kodak had ignored Rochester's poor in order to hire workers from other cities. Finally, an assistant vice-president of Kodak agreed to the demands and signed a statement, but before the rejoicing could begin, the

president of the company publically repudiated the agreement and the battle was on again with new fury.²⁷ The whole town was in an uproar including Kodak, the Council of Churches and the controversy raged even within FIGHT itself.

Minister Florence showed up at the annual meeting of Kodak on April 25, 1967, as a stockholder (he owned one share) to protest the hiring practices of Kodak. He also persuaded others to give their proxies to FIGHT in an attempt to put pressure on Kodak. However, this tactic failed at that time as 84 per cent still voted for management.²⁸

A look at the Rochester experience adds weighty evidence to substantiate Alinsky's argument that welfare is not the answer to the pressing problems of the poor. However, the Rochester experience also illustrates a major weakness in Alinsky's method of organizing through conflict. Time Magazine reported that Saul Alinsky has possibly antagonized more people than any other living American, and indeed he does set out to make people mad.²⁹ His explanation is that the poor and the disenfranchised must get angry enough so they will move to redress the balance of power in contemporary America. Polarization is the necessary precursor to constructive action; however, the danger is that it is much easier to get a conflict started than it is to manage it or to make it work toward constructive ends.

In Rochester, for example, the city had some very painful splits after the IAF helped to stir up antagonisms. At one point, Black power, rather than interracial cooperation, was the rallying cry of FIGHT. But it is not enough to say that there was a simple polarization of Black against White. The most painful split was perhaps between the poor and the middle class Negroes. Churches and other predominantly white groups also were split over the abrasive tactics of the IAF.³⁰ Alinsky would doubtless say that this sort of painful conflict in

the city was analogous to the pain of a surgical operation, that it is a necessary evil to be undergone before new health can be regained. Perhaps so, but one wonders if the "cure" could have been carried out with less pain and with fewer scars through less militant tactics. Peter Rossi and Robert Dentler also alluded to this point in The Politics of Urban Renewal:

The style of organizational tactics developed by Alinsky is very different from that developed in the more usual community organization manuals. Alinsky has adapted the tactics of labor unions to the organization of communities seeking for issues that would stimulate residents to band together. The communities organized by the IAF often take postures of combat that are far from the search for consensus that more frequently characterizes at least the language of community organizers in the more traditional manuals.³¹

This emphasis on conflict is the major tactic which bothers Alinsky's critics. "He puts all his chips on protest" complains one Washington poverty official who doubts whether Alinsky has any real program to go with it.³² Others have said that whatever his intentions, Alinsky is actually contributing to racism and class warfare by trying to build solid groups on the basis of fear and hostility. An example of this took place in Syracuse, New York, where a group of militant Blacks using Alinsky tactics took control of the local poverty (OEO) agency. They were so abrasive and aggressive that they lost support of the local businessmen and then of the majority of the poor they were claiming to represent. The upshot was that after eight months, on June 30, 1967, the OEO office was closed and the funds stopped so that in effect the militants had killed the poverty program, polarized the city and thus worsened their own situation by being noncooperative.³³

Alinsky most probably would comment on the Syracuse situation by saying that the federal war on poverty funds are generally being used to suffocate natural leadership which would threaten the establishment. So, in acting militantly, the Blacks have freed themselves of an agency which offers only temporary

relief. The only lasting solution, in Alinsky's opinion, is that the poor develop their own leadership and their own program for self-help.³⁴ That may be, but even Alinsky admits that the poor will need to get some help from the establishment, and it would seem reasonable that in some situations, at least, they can get more help by being polite than by being studiously rude. That is not the way it works, says Alinsky:

The whole concept of organizing people on an altruistic basis, the way white liberals tried to do something for the Blacks, is a lot of crap. This just isn't the way life is. Invariably, the right things get done for the wrong reasons. So the organizer looks for the wrong reasons to get right things done.³⁵

Alinsky gets strong support for his conflict tactics from Charles Silberman in Crisis in Black and White. Silberman states that what the Blacks in America need more than anything else is to feel as though they are men; that they won't feel that way until they are in a position to make or to influence the decisions that affect them.

The point is that changes of the sort Negroes now demand, at the speed they insist upon, cannot be provided without considerable conflict.... There is nothing in American history, past or present, to suggest that Negroes can gain their rightful place in American society without direct confrontation. In Frederick Douglass' words, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters."³⁶

Aside from criticism of his conflict tactics, the other major criticism which is leveled at Alinsky and his organizers is that he refuses to enter into alliances. In fact, he often attacks liberal groups or others who might be considered his allies. Not that Alinsky wants his organizations to be isolated, rather he seems to take the moralistic stance that "we can do it better than you," and so he tries to get everyone to join his organization.³⁷ When asked why he insisted on having only one people's organization in an area,

Alinsky answered that it was for purely pragmatic reasons. He repeated the old adage that there is strength in numbers and quoted Benjamin Franklin: "We must all hang together or we shall most assuredly hang separately."³⁸ There is an obvious advantage to the organization that can claim to represent all the citizens of a certain area, but there is a danger too. Alinsky seems to be so intent on adding numbers to gain power that he forgets his commitment to pluralism. It is thus legitimate to criticize him where he has undermined some local groups in order to strengthen his own.

The fact that Alinsky does not have a set program provides his critics with still another source of criticism. He is not a civil rights worker or a supporter of any particular group, ethnic or otherwise. He is not particularly concerned with integration or segregation, but he is concerned with self-determination. When there is a question as to which particular goal to pursue at a particular time, he follows the maxim: "the greatest good for the greatest number." His major goal is to help people gain the power to choose their own paths; he is not much concerned with which paths they choose. This is because he has faith that people will make the right choices.³⁹

Paradoxically, he is also aware that once he helps people to gain power, they may also use it in discriminatory ways. He has no illusions about the nobility of poverty. For example he says of the American Labor Movement:

The C.I.O. was the militant champion of America's workers. In its ranks, directly and indirectly, were all of America's radicals; they fought the corporate structure of the nation and won. Today, merged with the A.F. of L., it is an entrenched member of the establishment and its leader supports the war in Vietnam.⁴⁰

And even his own Back of the Yards Council in Chicago, which he helped organize on the basis of equality, is now part of the racist, discriminatory culture. That, says Alinsky, is because the issues of democracy are never settled once

and for all. The tendency is for the "have nots" to change their mentality as soon as they become the "haves." So, there are no permanent solutions and the radical must always keep working for further extensions of justice.

Proxies and Beyond

In Rules for Radicals Alinsky devotes considerable space to a discussion of the use of stock proxies, a tactic which was first used in the Kodak-FIGHT battle. Although the initial encounter was indecisive, the public response was favorable, and Alinsky became convinced that he had chanced upon a tactic which could have a great future. At his speaking engagements which followed the April, 1967, annual meeting, Alinsky described the Rochester situation as one in which Kodak was acting irresponsibly. He asked groups and individuals to give their proxies to FIGHT to enable them to apply pressure in the form of public opinion. The case started to get national publicity, and eventually FIGHT got some major concessions.⁴¹ However, the big gain for Alinsky was that he saw a handle to the Silent Majority, the middle classes in America. As more and more newspapers picked up the story, people began writing to Alinsky and offering him their proxies not only for Kodak but for other companies as well.

...the real importance of those letters was that they showed a way for the middle class to organize. These people, the vast majority of Americans, who feel helpless in the huge corporate economy, who don't know which way to turn, have begun to turn away from America, to abdicate as citizens. They rationalize their action by saying that, after all, the experts and the government will take care of it all. They are like Have-Nots who, when unorganized and powerless, simply resign themselves to a sad scene. Proxies can be the mechanism by which these people can organize, and once they are organized they will re-enter the life of politics. Once organized around proxies they will have a reason to examine, to become educated about, the various corporation policies and practices both domestic and foreign - because now they can do something about them.⁴²

What will happen with the "Proxies for the People" tactic is hard to predict. It is still in the planning stage and has not been used to any great extent as yet. Alinsky sees a great future for it, because he believes it is a way to get people together around a concrete issue and from there to become educated about the realities of society and how they as average citizens can affect them.

The way you can hit them is if you get thousands of people going to the stockholders meeting, the proxies really become passports to People Power. Let's have the kind of scene in Yankee Stadium where a motion is made and seconded that GM will not take any war contracts. And with all the media there the GM board chairman says, "All those in favor, Aye," and 75,000 people get up and yell "Aye." Then he looks at them and he says: "Representing 94 percent of the proxies, I vote Nay and therefore it stays, so ordered, on to the next order of business." That's the last thing in the world General Motors wants to expose themselves to! What the hell's going to happen to this myth that the corporations belong to the people? That goes up the goddam smokestack, it makes the corporation look ludicrous.⁴³

It is easy to be more than a little skeptical about Alinsky's belief that a few thousand nondescript stockholders can change the policy of a major American corporation. The fact is that most owners have very little say in decision-making even if they are major stockholders. Instead, the real power is vested in the hired managers who have the technical expertise needed for efficient corporate planning. The idea that stockholders do run the company is a popular myth, nevertheless.

With even greater unction although with less plausibility, corporate ceremony seeks also to give the stockholders an impression of power. When stockholders are (or were) in control of a company, stockholders' meetings are an occasion of scant ceremony. The majority is voted in and the minority is voted out, with such concessions as may seem strategic, and all understand the process involved. As stockholders cease to have influence, however, efforts are made to disguise this nullity. Their convenience is considered in selecting the place of the meeting. They are presented with handsomely printed reports, the preparation of which is now a specialized business. Products and even plants are inspected. During the proceedings, as in the report, there are repetitive references to your company. Officers listen

with every evidence of attention to highly irrelevant suggestions of wholly uninformed participants and assure them that these will be considered with the greatest care. Votes of thanks from women stockholders in print dresses owning ten shares 'for the excellent skill with which you run our company' are received by the management with well-simulated gratitude. All present show stern disapproval of critics. No important stockholders are present. No decisions are taken. The annual meeting of the large American Corporation ¹⁴⁴ is, perhaps, our most elaborate exercise in popular illusion.

When asked if he really believed that public opinion was so important to a corporation that they would change policy on that basis, Alinsky said, "Yes, they are scared to death of public opinion. Public opinion is their customer. Why do you think they spend money on advertising? That's the only reason you see corporations like Gulf Oil and Standard Oil talking about pollution."⁴⁵

Whatever happens with the proxies, Alinsky sees such a tactic as simply a beginning in the effort to get the majority of Americans to be active, to take opportunities to make decisions for themselves. He has faith that once the middle-class gets together on an issue to act, it will discover the thrill of participation, and it will then find many other issues on which to keep involved. "Once a people are organized they will keep moving from issue to issue. People Power is the real objective; the proxies are simply a means to that end.

Conclusion

As an organizer, Alinsky has distinguished himself primarily in working with the poor. His emphasis has been there because he is convinced that the "have-nots" can not take their rightful place as responsible citizens of a free society until they are organized for political power and have legitimate representation. The Woodlawn Organization and FIGHT in Rochester are only two examples of the many organizations he and his organizers have helped to build so that poor people could make their weight felt in the planning of their

destiny. In an era of increasing government centralization as well as of a growing bureaucratic welfare program, Alinsky's voice has been heard loud and clear, saying that such programs will not reach the desired ends as long as the intended recipients themselves are denied a part in the formation of the policy. The fact that the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen would indicate that his view is correct.

In Woodlawn or in Rochester or wherever Alinsky has organized, the one aspect which most characterizes him is his conflict tactics. He and his organizers seemingly cultivate an abrasiveness which is meant to antagonize. For this he has drawn heavy criticism from those who feel that men should be appealed to purely on the basis of reason and that the search should always be for consensus rather than for discord. Alinsky has retaliated by pointing out that people who feel hopeless, such as ghetto residents, usually do not do anything to change the situation until they become so angry that they act and that conversely, those who are in a position of privilege usually do not give up or share their position until they are forced to do so. Thus polarization is a useful tactic because it leads to a confrontation from which can emerge a more equitable distribution of power. Whether the "enemy" is the University of Chicago or Eastman Kodak, Alinsky has demonstrated that poor people can organize to fight for their rights and that in the process they will become more responsible citizens who feel pride in themselves because they have learned how to participate.

More recently, Alinsky has become convinced that the greatest danger to participatory democracy is the apathy and inactivity of the vast, relatively affluent middle-class. He is, therefore, concentrating more of his efforts on training his students to organize the "Silent Majority" so that they too can

regain a faith in themselves and in their neighbors as they actively participate in decision-making. His goal for the middle-class is the same as for the poor and again he would start his organization on the basis of self-interest which may be anything from pollution to unemployment. In addition, Alinsky believes that the middle classes can effectively become involved through the use of stock proxies to make changes in corporate policy which in the United States is so closely tied to government policy. Whatever one's judgement of Alinsky's conflict tactics or of the proxy tactic, it is important that Alinsky be recognized because he has demonstrated that he knows how to help people to organize and that his concerns are of importance to the future of American society.

Footnotes: Chapter IV

¹Howard Zinn, "Marxism and the New Left," in Alfred F. Young, ed., Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968), pp. 369-371.

²From an unsigned article in The Economist, "Plato on the Barricades," (May, 1967), p. 15.

³Michael Kernan, "Saul Alinsky on Goldbrick Radicals," in Boston After Dark, (December 8, 1970), p. 7.

⁴Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1944). On pages 712 and 713, Myrdal discusses the scarcity of active people in the lower classes. "Americans in the upper and middle are great 'joiners' and 'supporters' of all sorts of schemes for the common good. If a proposal makes sense to people, their participation and purse can be counted on. But somehow the associations seldom reach down to the masses of people. In spite of all this lively organizational activity, America has had few protracted zealous movements among the people. There has frequently been popular unrest among farmers and workers in America; they have been dissatisfied and have dimly felt the need of one reform or another. Occasionally there have been bloody clashes: resort to violence both by employers and by workers in settling labor disputes has, until recently, been rather characteristic of America. Undoubtedly a general influence on the course of national and local politics has been exerted by the masses through democratic elections. But for some reason these forces, working in the masses, have seldom crystallized into orderly mass organizations."

⁵See Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1962).

⁶For example see U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders Report, [Kerner Commission] (New York: Dutton, 1968), also Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark, The Negro American, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), Julius Lester, Look Out Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama! (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1968), and Sidney Verba, "Democratic Participation," The Annals, vol. 373, (1967), 53-78.

⁷Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in Black and White (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 317.

⁸Stephen C. Rose, "Power Play in the City," Crossroads, (January-March, 1967), 11.

⁹Charles E. Silberman, op. cit., pp. 318-319.

¹⁰Stephen C. Rose, op. cit., p. 11.

¹¹Charles E. Silberman, op. cit., pp. 325-350.

¹²Marion K. Sanders, op. cit., p. 38.

¹³Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁴Saul D. Alinsky, Citizen Participation and Community Organization in Planning and Urban Renewal, presented before the Chicago Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, January 29, 1962, (Published by the Industrial Areas Foundation), p. 13, see also, Peter H. Rossi and Robert A. Dentler, The Politics of Urban Renewal: The Chicago Findings (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), especially pp. 283-287 for a discussion of how citizen participation adds legitimacy to urban planning.

¹⁵Charles E. Silberman, "Up from Apathy - The Woodlawn Experiment," Commentary, 37, (May, 1964), 55.

¹⁶Stephen C. Rose, "The Future of Democracy in the Metropolis: Saul Alinsky and His Critics," Christianity and Crisis, XXIV, (July 20, 1964), 145-150. See also Lyle E. Schaller, Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 90-114.

¹⁷Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in Black and White, pp. 347-348.

¹⁸Stephen C. Rose, "Power Play in the City," 12.

¹⁹See Newsweek, (August 10, 1964), 26-28, and U. S. News and World Report, (August 10, 1964), 37-39.

²⁰Chicago Business Industrial Project, an unpublished case study prepared by the Northwestern University School of Business, p. 2.

²¹Patrick Anderson, "Making Trouble is Alinsky's Business," New York Times Magazine, (October 9, 1966), 30.

²²Ibid., 31.

²³Chicago Business Industrial Project, Case Study, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁴Patrick Anderson, op. cit., 32.

²⁵See James Ridgeway, "Saul Alinsky in Smugtown," The New Republic, (January 21, 1967), 11-13. See also "The Gadfly of the Poverty War," unsigned article in Newsweek, (September 13, 1965), 30-32.

²⁶Chicago Business Industrial Project, Case Study, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁷See "The Fight that Swirls Around Eastman Kodak," Business Week, (April 21, 1967), 38-41. See also Barbara Carter, "The Fight Against Kodak," The Reporter, (April 20, 1967), 28-31.

- ²⁸Chicago Business Industrial Project, Case Study, op. cit., p. 6.
- ²⁹"Radical Saul Alinsky: Prophet of Power to the People," unsigned essay in Time, (March 2, 1970), 56-57.
- ³⁰Barbara Carter, op. cit., pp. 28-31.
- ³¹Rossi and Dentler, op. cit., p. 226.
- ³²"The Gadfly of the Poverty War," Newsweek, (September 13, 1965), 30-32.
- ³³Lawrence Davis, "Syracuse: What Happens When the Poor Take Over," The Reporter, (March 21, 1968), 19-21.
- ³⁴See "Strength Through Misery," Time, (March 18, 1966), 28-29.
- ³⁵Marion K. Sanders, op. cit., p. 72.
- ³⁶Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in Black and White, p. 218.
- ³⁷Robert Pruger and Harry Pecht, "Assessing Theoretical Models of Community Organization Practice: Alinsky as a Case in Point," The Social Service Review, 43, (June, 1969), 123-135.
- ³⁸Personal interview with Saul D. Alinsky, Chicago, Illinois, (September 16, 1971).
- ⁴⁰Saul D. Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, p. 17.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 170. See also Marion K. Sanders, op. cit., p. 84. "If the blacks are to get a piece of the economic pie they've got to become part of the corporate economy. This was one of the unexpected things that came out of the battle with Eastman Kodak in Rochester. The big gain was that Xerox got into the picture. They've helped set up a black-owned company (FIGHTON) which is a subcontractor making a product for Xerox. That's going to work out in terms of a lot of jobs. That's getting into the corporate economy, which is where the jobs and money are."
- ⁴²Saul D. Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, pp. 178-179, see also Marion K. Sanders, op. cit., p. 68, "I've come to see very clearly that this country is predominantly middle-class economically. Almost four-fifths of our people are in that bracket, so that's where the power is. Hell, we would have to be blind not to see that this is where organization has to go. This became plenty clear when we were fighting Eastman Kodak and went into the proxy deal. We had to go to the churches and the other middle-class groups that owned stocks and had proxies they could turn over to us. That's where we found the strength to carry on the fight for the organization of the poor in Rochester. We saw the same thing when Cesar Chavez staged the grape boycott - a middle-class consumer boycott. So that's the job we've got to take on and train organizers to do."

⁴³Marshall Rosenthal, Rolling Stone, (March 4, 1971), 38.

⁴⁴John Kenneth Galbraith, The New Industrial State (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 84.

⁴⁵From personal interview with Saul Alinsky, Chicago, Illinois, September 16, 1971.

⁴⁶Saul D. Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, p. 181.

Chapter V

The Significance of Alinsky

The people of the United States face many crises in the 1970's. Foremost among these are pollution, population and the continuing threat of militarism symbolized by the Pentagon. These are problems of such magnitude that they overwhelm us all if we think seriously about them. So, the tendency has been not to think about them at all, but to withdraw and to escape into the suburbs where each fearful family can live with a split-level home, a two-car garage and a color TV. Some of their children, however, have repudiated this way of life and have questioned the value structure on which it is founded. They have been searching for new ways and in the process they have forced many of their parents to question the direction this nation has been heading. The biggest single problem is that so many contemporary Americans feel so powerless and so purposeless. We seem to have lost faith in ourselves. Instead we have misplaced our faith by relying upon science and expertise in the attempt to manage the complexities of today's world. The result is a threatening of the democratic process and a weakening of the spirit of the nation.

A significant aspect of the current social and political scene in the United States is a confusion over values and priorities. Such confusion is not entirely new, for our history has included many examples of individuals and groups who held differing opinions as to our destiny. Through all the dissent a dominant theme, however, has been that financial gain and increased production are among the highest goals to be pursued. This materialistic bent has become so powerful as to threaten other values with the result that many are now rejecting our

consumeristic, technocratic society that sustains itself by continued exploitation of the world's resources and the world's peoples. The movement to search for alternatives is gaining momentum and is including an ever wider spectrum of people who are united by the common desire to find new meaning and new order.

Present day "radicals" do not need to go outside of the American tradition to find the foundations on which to build a new society. In the past the United States has exhibited a dynamism which was due in part to the American dream. This was the counter-theme of full civil liberties and perfected democratic institutions which was talked about by Paine and Jefferson. Later it was written about by Tocqueville, and it has been appealed to ever since by most of the reformers in American history. However, since World War II, we have heard from our national leaders that America has reached its revolutionary goals, that she has "made it" as a nation and thus she must now operate on the politics of consensus.¹ The plight of her minority groups as well as the actions of the United States in Vietnam and other places are glaring witnesses that such claims are monstrously false. Americans need to be reminded of the fact that the possession of democracy is not like the possession of an acquired ability such as bicycle riding, something to be acquired once and then retained with little effort. Instead, democracy is and must be a living institution which is constantly changing its face to fit the changing times.

The developments of the Twentieth Century have put unprecedented strains on the process of "government by the people." One example is the tremendous increase in the numbers of people to be taken into account. And, along with population growth have come the sweeping changes in transportation and communication which have helped to produce sprawling urban complexes. Science and technology which, particularly in the United States have added to the material

prosperity, have also been the major causes of the pollution which threatens life itself. Paradoxically, in the fast pace of American life it is often more common for people to receive communication from around the world by satellite than to communicate with their next door neighbors. Such a paradox points to the fact that we may have found the "good life" but that we may have lost part of ourselves in the process. The part that seems to be missing includes faith in our ability to manage the world. This missing part also includes the shared democratic ideas of our heritage which are part of the challenging ideology.

In the present confusion over priorities and values in America, Saul Alinsky is one who has been reminding us of the democratic ideals of our heritage. His experience is a prime example of how to "simplify ideas, establish a claim to truth," and "demand a commitment to action..." He has a vision and that vision is the simple one of participatory democracy in which the majority of citizens are actually involved in making decisions at every level of government, or at least their popularly chosen representatives are making decisions. He has demonstrated that even the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society can be organized to participate in making decisions. He does not offer any permanent solutions to the problems which face us. What he does offer is a renewed faith in ourselves and our neighbors, a faith that together we can continue to work toward the ideals that were expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

The free-society organizer is loose, resilient, fluid, and on the move in a society which is itself in a state of constant change. To the extent that he is free from the shackles of dogma, he can respond to the realities of the widely different situations our society presents. In the end he has one conviction - a belief that if people have the power to act, in the long run they will, most of the time reach the right decisions. The alternative to this would be rule by the elite,

either dictatorship or some form of political aristocracy. I am not concerned if this faith in people is regarded as a prime truth and therefore a contradiction of what I have already written, for life is a story of contradictions. Believing in people, the radical has the job of organizing them so that they will have the power and the opportunity to best search for those values of equality, justice, freedom, peace, a deep concern for the preciousness of human life, and all those rights and values propounded by Judeo-Christianity and the democratic political tradition. Democracy is not the end but the best means toward achieving these values. This is my credo for which I live and, if need be, die.²

Alinsky reminds us that the price of democracy is the ongoing pursuit of the common good by all the people. His faith is that, though the problems which face us are formidable, the most serious obstacle to their solution is apathy. Such non-action, which he calls "civic sclerosis," is a fatal disease of democracy. His prescription for treatment is action. His vision of all citizens participating in a free and open society has special meaning for Americans because it is rooted in our tradition. It remains to be seen whether such participation can combat the danger of nuclear annihilation or of slower death from a poisoned environment, but it does seem evident that the situation will not improve without some sort of action that is calculated, purposeful, and effective. Alinsky offers a vision to be sought and he offers examples of actions which can help make it a reality. He will not be offended if we disagree with his tactics, but we will do both him and ourselves an injustice if we do nothing.

Footnotes: Chapter V

¹Harvey Wheeler, Democracy in a Revolutionary Era: The Political Order Today (Santa Barbara, California: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1968), pp. 64-153.

²Saul D. Alinsky, Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals, (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 11-12.

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SAUL ALINSKY: MAN WITH A VISION

by

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B. S., McPherson College, 1967

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Science

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1971

Thesis Abstract

Saul Alinsky: Man with a Vision

It is assumed that a major factor in the nature and structure of a society is the complex of ideas commonly shared by the members of that society. These ideas include a picture of the way society should be in relation to some concept of ultimate reality as well as certain shared expectations of the rights and duties of members of the society which are congruent with that picture. Both social change and social stability are in part determined by these shared ideas. Ideology is defined as those ideas which are held and propagated by a minority but which are not completely accepted by the society and are therefore acting as challengers of the status quo. In the United States there has been a tradition of a challenging ideology coming from various reformers who have called for an extension of equality, individual freedom and human dignity. Particularly, the challenges have focused around issues of business and finance. In the past decade there has been a resurgence of such an ideology partly in response to the depersonalizing forces of an expanded technology.

Saul Alinsky has a vision for America which is part of the challenging ideology. His vision is of a country in which decisions are made by an actively participating and informed citizenry through their elected representatives. Alinsky's analysis is that America's major problems stem from a lack of citizen participation. His prescription is for more people to be organized so that they have the power to influence decisions. Through years of experience he has developed tactics for organizing people on the basis of self-interest using

conflict as a base for his method. His goal is for every citizen to have a voice in determining the common good. He has pursued this goal through years of organizing poor people though now he is concentrating more on organizing the middle class. Alinsky's major significance is in his vision because it is rooted in the American tradition. He is also important because he knows how to articulate this vision in simple and direct ways which move people to action.