

Hillary Clinton's 1969 Thesis on Saul Alinsky

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“THERE IS ONLY THE FIGHT...”

An Analysis of the Alinsky Model

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So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l’entre deux guerres Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure

Because one has only learnt to get the better of words For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which

One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate

With shabby equipment always deteriorating In the general mass of imprecision of feeling, Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer By strength and submission, has already been discovered Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope To emulate—but there is no competition—There is only the fight to recover what has been lost And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business. T.S. Eliot, “East Coker”

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**CHAPTER I
SAUL DAVID ALINSKY: AN AMERICAN RADICAL**

With customary British understatement, The Economist referred to Saul Alinsky as "that rare specimen, the successful radical."

FOOTNOTE 1 (note—all such numbers in the text refer to footnotes)

This is one of the blander descriptions applied to Alinsky during a thirty year career in which epithets have been collected more regularly than paychecks. The epithets are not surprising as most people who deal with Alinsky need to categorize in order to handle him. It is far easier to cope with a man if, depending on ideological perspective, he is classified as a "crackpot" than to grapple with the substantive issues he presents.

For Saul Alinsky is more than a man who has created a particular approach to community organizing, he is the articulate proponent of what many consider to be a dangerous socio/political philosophy. An understanding of the "Alinsky-type method" (i.e. his organizing method) as well as the philosophy on which it is based must start with an understanding of the man himself.

Alinsky was born in a Chicago slum to Russian Jewish immigrant parents, and those early conditions of slum living and poverty in Chicago established the context of his ideas and mode of action. He traces his identification with the poor back to a home in the rear of a store where his idea of luxury was using the bathroom without a customer banging on the door.

2

Chicago itself has also greatly influenced him:

Where did I come from? Chicago. I can curse and hate the town but let anyone else do it and they're in for a battle, There I've had the happiest and the worst times of my life. Every street has its personal joy and pain to me. On this street is the church of a

Catholic Bishop who was a big part of my life; further down is another church where the pastor too has meant a lot to me; and a couple miles away is a cemetery—well, skip it. Many Chicago streets are pieces of my life and work. Things that happened here have rocked a lot of boats in a lot of cities. Nowadays I fly all over the country in the course of my work. But when those flaps go down over the Chicago skyline, I knew I'm home. (all boldface type indicates blockquoting)

3

Although Alinsky calls Chicago his “city”, the place really represents to him the American Dream—in all its nightmare and its glory.

He lived the Dream as he moved from the Chicago slums to California then back to attend the University of Chicago. Alinsky credits his developing an active imagination, which is essential for a good organizer, to his majoring in archaeology. An imagination focusing on Inca artifacts, however, needs exposure to social problems before it can become useful in community organizing. Exposure began for Alinsky when he and other students collected food for the starving coal miners in southern Illinois who were rebelling against John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers.

Lewis became a role model for Alinsky who learned about labor's organizational tactics from watching and working with Lewis during the early years of the CIO. Alinsky soon recognized that one of the hardest jobs of the leader is an imaginative one as he struggles to develop a rationale for spontaneous action:

For instance, when the first sit-down strikes took place in Flint, no one really planned them. They were clearly a violation of the law—trespassing, seizure of private property. Labor leaders ran for cover, refused to comment. But Lewis issued a pontifical statement, ‘a man's right to a job transcends the right of private property,’ which sounded plausible.

4

After graduating from the University of Chicago, Alinsky received a fellowship in criminology with a first assignment to get a look at crime from the inside of gangs. He attached himself to the Capone gang, attaining a perspective from which he viewed the gang as a huge quasi-public utility serving the people of Chicago. Alinsky's eclectic life during the thirties, working with gangs, raising money for the International Brigade, publicizing the plight of the Southern share cropper, fighting for public housing, reached a turning point in 1938 when he was offered the job as head of probation and parole for the City of Philadelphia. Security. Prestige. Money. Each of these inducements alone has been enough to turn many a lean and hungry agitator into a well-fed establishmentarian.

Alinsky rejected the offer and its triple threat for a career of organizing the poor to help themselves. His first target zone was the Back of the Yards area in Chicago; the immediate impetus was his intense hatred of fascism:

...I went into 'Back of the Yards' in Chicago. This was Upton Sinclair's 'Jungle.' This was not the slum across the tracks. This was the slum across the tracks from across the tracks. Also, this was the heart, in Chicago, of all the native fascist movements—the Coughlinites, the Silver Shirts, the Pelley movement... I went in there to fight fascism. If you had asked me then what my profession was, I would have told you I was a professional antifascist.

5

Alinsky's anti-fascism, built around anti-authoritarianism, anti-racial superiority, anti-oppression, was the ideological justification for his move into organizing and the first social basis on which he began constructing his theory of action. Working in Chicago and other communities between 1938 and 1946 Alinsky refined his methods and expanded his theory. Then in 1946, Alinsky's first book, *Reveille for Radicals*, was published. Since Alinsky is firstly an activist and secondly a theoretician, more than one-half the book is concerned with the tactics of building "People's Organizations."

There are chapter discussions of "Native Leadership," "Community Traditions and Organizations," "Conflict Tactics," "Popular Education," and "Psychological Observations on Mass Organizations." The book begins by asking the question: What is a Radical?

This is a basic question for Alinsky who proudly refers to himself as a radical. His answer is prefaced by pages of Fourth-of-July rhetoric about Americans: "They are a people creating a new bridge of mankind in between the past of narrow nationalistic chauvinism and the horizon of a new mankind— a people of the world."

6

Although the book was written right after World War II, which deeply affected Alinsky, his belief in American democracy has deep historical roots—at least, as he interprets history:

The American people were, in the beginning, Revolutionaries and Tories. The American People ever since have been Revolutionaries and Tories...regardless of the labels of the past and present... The clash of Radicals, Conservatives, and Liberals which makes up America's political history opens the door to the most fundamental question of What is America? How do the people of America feel? There were and are a number of Americans—few, to be sure— filled with deep feelings for people. They know that people are the stuff that makes up the dream of democracy. These few were and are the American Radicals and the only way we can understand the American Radical is to understand what we mean by this feeling for and with the people.

7

What Alinsky means by this "feeling for and with the people" is simply how much one person really cares about people unlike himself. He illustrates the feeling by a series of examples in which he poses questions such as: So you are a white, native-born Protestant. Do you like people? He then proceeds to demonstrate how, in spite of protestations, the Protestant (or the Irish Catholic or the Jew or the Negro or the Mexican) only pays lip service to the idea of

equality. This technique of confrontation in Alinsky's writing effectively involves most of his readers who will recognize in themselves at least one of the characteristics he denounces. Having confronted his readers with their hypocrisy, Alinsky defines the American Radical as "...that unique person who actually believes what he says...to whom the common good is the greatest value...who genuinely and completely believes in mankind...."

8

Alinsky outlines American history focusing on men he would call "radical," confronting his readers again with the Alinsky outlines American history focusing on men he would call "radical," confronting his readers again with the "unique" way Americans have synthesized the alien roots of radicalism, Marxism, Utopian socialism, syndicalism, the French Revolution, with their own conditions and experiences:

Where are the American Radicals? They were with Patrick Henry in the Virginia Hall of Burgesses; they were with Sam Adams in Boston; they were with that peer of all American Radicals, Tom Paine, from the distribution of Common Sense through those dark days of the American Revolution... The American Radicals were in the colonies grimly forcing the addition of the Bill of Rights to our Constitution.

They stood at the side of Tom Jefferson in the first big battle between the Tories of Hamilton and the American people. They founded and fought in the LocoFocos. They were in the first union strike in America and they fought for the distribution of the western lands to the masses of people instead of the few...They were in the shadows of the underground railroad and they openly rode in the sunlight with John Brown to Harpers Ferry...They were with Horace Mann fighting for the extension of educational opportunities...They built the American Labor movement... Many of their deeds are not and never will be recorded in America's history.

They were among the grimy men in the dust bowl, they sweated with the share croppers. They were at the side of the Okies facing the California vigilantes. They stood and stand before the fury of lynching mobs. They were and are on the picket lines gazing unflinchingly at the threatening, flushed, angry faces of the police. American Radicals are to be found wherever and whenever America moves closer to the fulfillment of its democratic dream. Whenever America's hearts are breaking, these American Radicals were and are. America was begun by its Radicals. The hope and future of America lies with its Radicals.

9

Words such as these coupled with his compelling personality enabled Alinsky to hold a sidewalk seminar during the 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago. He socratically gathered around him a group of young demonstrators on the corner of Michigan and Bilbo on Monday night telling them that they were another generation of American Radicals.

10

Alinsky attempts to encompass all those worthy of his description "radical" into an ideological Weltanschauung:

What does the Radical want? He wants a world in which the worth of the individual is recognized...a world based on the morality of mankind...The Radical believes that all

peoples should have a high standard of food, housing, and health...The Radical places human rights far above property rights. He is for universal, free public education and recognizes this as fundamental to the democratic way of life... Democracy to him is working from the bottom up...The Radical believes completely in real equality of opportunity for all peoples regardless of race, color, or creed.

11

Much of what Alinsky professes does not sound “radical.” His are the words used in our schools and churches, by our parents and their friends, by our peers. The difference is that Alinsky really believes in them and recognizes the necessity of changing the present structures of our lives in order to realize them.

There are many inconsistencies in Alinsky’s thought which he himself recognizes and dismisses. He believes that life is inconsistent and that one needs flexibility in dealing with its many facets. His writings reflect the flavor of inconsistency which permeates his approach to organizing. They also suggest Alinsky’s place in the American Radical tradition.

In order to discuss his place, it is necessary to circumvent his definition of “radical” based on inner psychological strength and commitment, and to consider more conventional uses of the term. Although there is great disagreement among writers about the definition of “radical” and among radicals themselves over the scope of the word’s meaning, there is sufficient agreement to permit a general definition.

A radical is one who advocates sweeping changes in the existing laws and methods of government. These proposed changes are aimed at the roots of political problems which in Marxian terms are the attitudes and the behaviors of men. Radicals are not interested in ameliorating the symptoms of decay but in drastically altering the causes of societal conditions. Radicalism “emphasizes reason rather than reverence, although Radicals have often been the most emotional and least reasonable of men.”

12

One of the strongest strains in modern radicalism is the eighteenth century Enlightenment’s faith in human reason and the possible perfectibility of man. This faith in the continuing improvement of man was and is dominated by values derived from the French and American Revolutions and profoundly influenced by the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution shifted the emphasis of radicalism to an urban orientation. Alinsky holds to the basic radical tenets of equality and to the urban orientation, but he does not advocate immediate change. He is too much in the world right now to allow himself the luxury of symbolic suicide. He realizes that radical goals have to be achieved often by non-radical, even “anti-radical” means. For Alinsky, the non-radical means involve the traditional quest for power to change existing situations. To further understand Alinsky’s radicalism one must examine his attitude toward the use of power. The key word for an Alinsky-type organizing effort is “power.” As he says: “No individual or organization can negotiate without power to compel negotiations.”

13

The question is how one acquires power, and Alinsky’s answer is through organization: “To attempt to operate on good will rather than on a power basis would be to attempt something

which the world has never yet experienced—remember to make even good will effective it must be mobilized into a power unit.”

14

One of the problems with advocating mobilization for power is the popular distrust of amassing power. Americans, as John Kenneth Galbraith points out in *American Capitalism*, are caught in a paradox regarding their view toward power because it “obviously presents awkward problems for a community which abhors its existence, disavows its possession, but values its existence.”

15

Alinsky recognizes this paradox and cautions against allowing our tongues to trap our minds: **We have become involved in bypaths of confusion or semantics... The word ‘power’ has through time acquired overtones of sinister corrupt evil, unhealthy immoral Machiavellianism, and a general phantasmagoria of the nether regions.**

16

For Alinsky, power is the “very essence of life, the dynamic of life” and is found in “...active citizen participation pulsing upward providing a unified strength for a common purpose of organization...either changing circumstances or opposing change.”

17

Alinsky argues that those who wish to change circumstances must develop a mass-based organization and be prepared for conflict.

He is a neo-Hobbesian who objects to the consensual mystique surrounding political processes; for him, conflict is the route to power. Those possessing power want to retain it and often to extend the bounds of it. Those desiring a change in the power balance generally lack the established criteria of money or status and so must mobilize numbers.

Mobilized groups representing opposed interests will naturally be in conflict which Alinsky considers a healthful and necessary aspect of a community organizing activity. He is supported in his prognosis by conflict analysts such as Lewis Coser who points out in *The Functions of Social Conflict* that:

Conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the group and maintains its boundaries against the surrounding social world.

18

In order to achieve a world without bounds it appears essential for many groups to solidify their identities both in relation to their own membership and to their external environment. This has been the rationale of nationalist groups historically and among American blacks presently. The organizer plays a significant role in precipitating and directing a community’s conflict pattern. As Alinsky views this role, the organizer is

...dedicated to changing the character of life of a particular community [and] has an initial function of serving as an abrasive agent to rub raw the resentments of the people of the community; to fan latent hostilities of many of the people to the point of overt expressions... to provide a channel into which they can pour their frustration of the past; to create a mechanism which can drain off underlying guilt for having accepted the previous situation for so long a time. When those who represent the

status quo label you [i.e. the community organizer] as an ‘agitator’ they are completely correct, for that is, in one word, your function—to agitate to the point of conflict.

19

An approach advocating conflict has produced strong reactions. Some of his critics compare Alinsky’s tactics with those of various hate groups such as lynch mobs which also “rub raw the resentments of the people.”

20

Alinsky answers such criticism by reminding his critics that the difference between a “liberal” and a “radical” is that the liberal refuses to fight for the goals he professes. During his first organizing venture in Back of the Yards he ran into opposition from many liberals who, although agreeing with his goals, repudiated his tactics. They were according to Alinsky “like the folks during the American Revolution who said ‘America should be free but not through bloodshed.’”

21

When the residents of Back of the Yards battled the huge meat-packing concerns, they were fighting for their jobs and for their lives. Unfortunately, the war-like rhetoric can obscure the constructiveness of the conflict Alinsky orchestrates. In addition to aiding in formation of identity, conflict between groups plays a creative social role by providing a process through which diverse interests are adjusted.

To induce conflict is a risk because there is no guarantee that it will remain controllable.

Alinsky recognizes the risk he takes but believes it is worth the gamble if the conflict process results in the restructuring of relationships so as to permit the enjoyment of greater freedom among men meeting as equals. Only through social equality can men determine the structure of their own social arrangements. The concept of social equality is a part of Alinsky’s social morality that assumes all individuals and nations act first to preserve their own interests and then rationalize any action as idealistic. He thinks it is only through accepting ourselves as we “really” are that we can begin to practice “real” morality:

There are two roads to everything—a low road and a high one. The high road is the easiest. You just talk principles and be angelic regarding things you don’t practice. The low road is the harder. It is the task of making one’s self-interest behavior moral behavior. We have behaved morally in the world in the past few years because we want the people of the world on our side. When you get a good moral position, look behind it to see what is self-interest.

22

The cynicism of this viewpoint was mitigated somewhat by my discussing the question of morality with Alinsky who conceded that idealism can parallel self-interest. But he believes that the man who intends to act in the world as- it-is must not be misled by illusions of the world-as-we-would-like-it-to be.

23

Alinsky claims a position of moral relativism, but his moral context is stabilized by a belief in the eventual manifestation of the goodness of man. He believes that if men were allowed to live free from fear and want they would live in peace. He also believes that only men with a

sense of their own worth and a respect for the commonality of humanity will be able to create this new world.

Therefore, the main driving force behind his push for organization is the effect that belonging to a group working for a common purpose has had on the men he has organized. Frustration is transformed into confidence when men recognize their capability for contribution. The sense of dignity is particularly crucial in organizational activity among the poor whom Alinsky warns to beware of programs which attack only their economic poverty.

Welfare programs since the New Deal have neither redeveloped poverty areas nor even catalyzed the poor into helping themselves. A cycle of dependency has been created which ensnares its victims into resignation and apathy. To dramatize his warning to the poor, Alinsky proposed sending Negroes dressed in African tribal costumes to greet VISTA volunteers arriving in Chicago. This action would have dramatized what he refers to as the "colonialism" and the "Peace Corps mentality" of the poverty program.

24

Alinsky is interested in people helping themselves without the ineffective interference from welfarephiles. Charles Silberman in his book, *Crisis in Black and White* describes Alinsky's motivation in terms of his faith in People:

The essential difference between Alinsky and his enemies is that Alinsky really believes in democracy; he really believes that the helpless, the poor, the badly-educated can solve their own problems if given the chance and the means; he really believes that the poor and uneducated, no less that the rich and educated, have the right to decide how their lives should be run and what services should be offered to them instead of being ministered to like children.

25

This faith in democracy and in the people's ability to "make it" is peculiarly American and many might doubt its radicalness. Yet, Alinsky's belief and devotion is radical; democracy is still a radical idea in a world where we often confuse images with realities, words with actions. Alinsky's belief in self-interested democracy unifies his views on the use of the power/conflict model in organizing and the position of morality and welfare in the philosophy underlying his methodology.

CHAPTER I FOOTNOTES:

1 "Plato on the Barricades," *The Economist*, May 13-19, 1967, p. 14.

2 "The Professional Radical," *Harper's*, June, 1965, p. 38.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

6 Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1946), p. 4.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

9 *Ibid.*

- 10 Saul D. Alinsky, private interview in Boston, Massachusetts, October, 1968.
- 11 Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, p. 23.
- 12 John W. Derry, *The Radical Tradition* (London: MacMillan, 1967), p. vii.
- 13 Dan Dodson, "The Church, POWER, and Saul Alinsky," *Religion in Life*, (Spring, 1967), p. 11.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 John Kenneth Galbraith, *American Capitalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), p. 26.
- 16 Dodson, p. 12.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1956), p.8.
- 19 Dodson.
- 20 Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 331.
- 21 Alinsky interview, Boston.
- 22 Dodson.
- 23 Saul D. Alinsky, private interview in Wellesley, Massachusetts, January 1969
- 24 Patrick Anderson, "Making Trouble is Alinsky's Business," *The New York Times Magazine* (October 9, 1966), p. 29.
- 25 Silberman, p. 333.

CHAPTER II

THE ALINSKY METHOD OF ORGANIZING: THREE CASE STUDIES

The Alinsky method of community organizing has two distinct elements. One, the "Alinsky-type protest" is "an explosive mixture of rigid discipline, brilliant showmanship, and a street fighter's instinct for ruthlessly exploiting his enemy's weakness."

1

The second, modeled after trade union organization methods, involves the hard work of recognizing interests, seeking out indigenous leaders, and building an organization whose power is viewed as legitimate by the larger community.

It is difficult to discuss these two components separately because they are woven into the organizational pattern according to situational necessity. Some organizational situations need the polarizing effect of "rubbing raw the sores of discontent" while others with well-defined resentments need leaders. Another distinctive feature of the Alinsky method as mentioned in the previous chapter is the use of military language. As Silberman points out, such language is appropriate for groups engaged in "war-like" struggles for

...the only way to build an army is by winning a few victories. But how do you gain a victory before you have an army? The only method ever devised is guerrilla warfare: to avoid a fixed battle where the forces are arrayed and where the new army's weakness would become visible, and to concentrate instead on hit-and-run tactics

designed to gain small but measurable victories. Hence the emphasis on such dramatic actions as parades and rent strikes whose main objective is to create a sense of solidarity and community.

2

Although Alinsky's goal of community solidarity and his war on powerlessness has been co-opted into the rubric of the federal welfare programs, there is a continuing mistrust of his tactics. As has been suggested, there is no set pattern for each of his organizational efforts. There are, however, tactical guidelines which can be applied in order to fulfill the following criteria of an Alinsky organization:

- (a) It is rooted in the local tradition, the local indigenous leadership, the local organizations and agencies, and, in short, the local people.
- (b) Its energy or driving force is generated by the self-interest of the local residents for the welfare of their children and themselves.
- (c) Its program for action develops hand in hand with the organization of the community council. The program is in actual fact that series of common agreements which results in the development of the local organization.
- (d) It is a program arising out of the local people carrying with it the direct participation of practically all the organizations in a particular area. It involves a substantial degree of individual citizen participation; a constant day to day flow of volunteer activities and the daily functioning of numerous local committees charged with specific short-term functions.
- (e) It constantly emphasizes the functional relationship between problems and therefore its program is as broad as the social horizon of the community. It avoids, at all costs, circumscribed and segmental programs which in turn attract the support of only a segment of the local population.
- (f) It recognizes that a democratic society is one which responds to popular pressures, and therefore realistically operates on the basis of pressure. For the same reason it does not shy away from involvement in matters of controversy.
- (g) It concentrates on the utilization of indigenous individuals, who, if not leaders at the beginning, can be developed into leaders.
- (h) It gives priority to the significance of self-interest. The organization itself proceeds on the idea of channeling the many diverse forces of self-interest within the community into a common direction for the common good and at the same time respects the autonomy of individuals and organizations.
- (i) It becomes completely self-financed at the end of approximately three years. This not only testifies to its representative character in that the local residents support their own organization financially, but insures to the local council the acid test of independence: 'the ability to pay one's way.'

3

Discussing Alinsky's tactics apart from his actions is like discussing

current theories of international relations without mentioning Vietnam. We will consider three of the organizations which Alinsky helped build. The first of the three is the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council which is the prototype community organization dating back to the late 1930's.

Alinsky's involvement with the Council led to the establishment of the Industrial Areas Foundation which subsequently coordinated other organizing activities. One of the most important of these was The Woodlawn Organization, a black community group in Chicago. Alinsky frequently encounters blacks who view Alinsky's efforts as just one more example of white man's power politics game. He tells such critics that, "Sunglasses, Swahili, and soul food won't win power for blacks."

4

Thirdly, we will look at the organizational problems involved in the Rochester black community's confrontation with the Kodak Company.

THE BACK OF THE YARDS NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, focused attention on the stockyards in Chicago and the deplorable conditions of life in the area surrounding the Yards. This area, Back of the Yards, was bigamously wedded to the meat-packing industry and the Roman Catholic Church. The meat factories provided jobs and the Church ministered to the spiritual and social needs of its parishioners. The waves of Polish, Slovak, and Irish immigrants before World I, and Mexican immigration after, supplied both workers and parishioners. The immigrants also successively lowered the wage scale and fragmented the Church into bickering nationalistic divisions.

The area's depressed economy was accompanied by acute environmental problems such as overcrowded housing, insufficient sanitation, unpaved streets, few recreational facilities, high delinquency and crime rates, and inadequate schools

5

Alinsky remembers the Back of the Yards as "the nadir of American slums, worse than Harlem."

6

Alinsky's experiences in the Back of the Yards formed the basis for his approach to organizing, but they are difficult to trace. Most of the information related to Alinsky's role in the formulation of the Neighborhood Council comes from Alinsky. He gives a third person account in *Reveille for Radicals*, and he is always ready to reminisce about that experience. Evelyn Zygmuntowicz's account of the formation of the Council, which is considered "authoritative" by the present members of the Council, does not mention Alinsky once by name except in the bibliography. When questioned about the omission in the Zygmuntowicz thesis, Alinsky attributed it to his great success in building an organization which did not need him

7

That Alinsky participated in the organizing, and that his participation led to the development of his organizational strategy is undebatable. It is generally accepted among organizers, reporters, and academics that Alinsky was the moving force behind the struggle.

An examination of the available material about the Council's formation affirms that assumption. The organization of the Back of the Yards began at a meeting in the local YWCA to plan a community recreational program. Before the meeting in the Spring of 1939 the Back of the Yards had been the scene of various community projects initiated by settlement houses, the Church, and unions. The Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee, an affiliate of the CIO, began organizing the employees of Swift, Armour, Wilson, and the other meat houses with relatively little opposition.

The lack of management opposition might have been anticipated since by the late 1930's many of the companies started moving out of the Chicago Yards. The success of the union organizing encouraged others both in and out of the community. A non-resident social worker initiated the meeting at the YWCA out of which came the "Call to a Community Congress":

For fifty years we have waited for someone to offer a solution— but nothing—has happened. Today we know that we ourselves must face and solve these problems. We know what poor housing, unemployment, and juvenile delinquency means; and we are sure that if a way is to be found we can and must find it

We have stopped waiting. We churchmen, businessmen, and union men have formed the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council. This Council is inviting representatives of all the organizations—church, business, social, fraternal, and labor to participate in a conference...to thoroughly discuss the problems of joint action which can effectively attack the evils of disease, bad housing, crime, and punishment.

8

Alinsky who helped draft the Call continued using his straightforward, self-interest approach to convince the community that working together was the only hope for them.

For example, he never approached a Catholic priest in terms of Christian ethics but on the basis of self-interest such as the welfare of this Church, even its physical property.

9

Alinsky's recognition of the Catholic Church as an "integral and dynamic factor in the experience and lives of the people" won him the support of the Senior Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, the Most Reverend Bernard J. Shiel, D.D.

10

His support helped bring together the conflicting nationalistic Catholic Churches. Then hostility between the Church and the unions lessened as both recognized the necessity of cooperation. The primary question was, however, "cooperation" for what? The By-Laws of the Council (adopted May, 1939) idealistically stated that

...this organization is founded for the purpose of uniting all organizations within the community known as 'Back of the Yards' in order to promote the welfare of all residents of that community regardless of their race, color, or creed, so that they may all have the opportunity to find health, happiness and security through the democratic way of life.

11

Alinsky remembers the atmosphere in the neighborhood as
...a hell hole of hate...

When people talk about Back of the Yards today, some of them use lines like ‘rub resentments raw’ to describe my organizing methods. Now do you think when I went in there or when I go into a Negro community today I have to tell them that they’re discriminated against? Do you think I go in there and get them angry? Don’t you think they have resentments to begin with, and how much rawer can rub them?... What happens when we come in? We say ‘Look, you don’t have to take this; there is something you can do about it. You can get jobs, you can break the Segregation patterns. But you have to have power to do it, and you’ll only get it through. organization. Because power just goes to two poles—to those who’ve got money, and those who’ve got people. You haven’t got money, so your own fellowmen are your only source of power. Now the minute you can do something about it... You’re active. And all of a sudden you stand up. That’s what happened in Back Of the Yards.

12

The process of “standing up” however, took time.

The Neighborhood Council’s two immediate goals, to achieve economic security and to improve the local environment, catapulted it into a power struggle with the meat companies. Vigorous activity stalled during World War II because there were few groups ready to follow John L. Lewis’s lead and interfere in any way with the war effort. During the War the Council did solidify its support among all groups it constitutionally represented. Organized business, for example, had been catalogued among the members of the Council but did not officially form The Back of the Yards Businessmen’s Association until 1945. Local residents were kept informed of each other’s resentments through a community newspaper, the Back of the Yards Journal.

The Journal still operates on a cooperative basis with the owner and a special board of governors, representative of the Council, controlling the weekly paper’s policy. The organization the Council and its early achievements in consolidating power particularly impressed Bishop Sheil. After the first annual Community Congress in 1940 he described it as “one of the most vivid demonstrations of the democratic process that I have ever witnessed.”

13

Bishop Sheil enthusiastically introduced Alinsky to Marshall Field who suggested to Alinsky that he carry his model and ideas of organizing to other areas of the country by means of a tax-exempt foundation. When Alinsky was convinced that Field did not just want him out of Chicago, he accepted the position Executive Director of the Industrial Area Foundation (IAF) working with a beginning capital of \$15,000.

14

The Council moved into action after the War by fully supporting the Packinghouse Strike of 1946, providing the community with an opportunity to mobilize financial, medical, and moral help for the strikers. Coordinated through the Council, the Churches opened soup lines and

child care centers; businessmen supplied food; landlords ignored unpaid rents; physicians offered free services.

15

The community backing of the strike resulted both in a good settlement for the workers and in a more powerful voice for the Council. The Illinois legislature heard that loud voice when the Council voted in 1948 to lead a city-wide sales tax strike against the state administration's proposed cut in ADC funds.

16

The state House of Representatives admitted to having been swayed by public pressure directed by the Council and restored the funds. As the Council's political sophistication increased, it moved beyond the tactical level of demonstrating community solidarity, manipulating public pressure, and threatening uncooperative residents with ostracism. In a 1949 confrontation with the city's Health and Building Commissioners over its enforcement of the housing codes, the Council's Housing Committee compiled enough statistics to embarrass the housing authorities and prepared to release them to the newspapers. As a threat is often as effective as action, houses were repaired. The Council also took legal action against the Pennsylvania Railroad on behalf of the residents whose health and property were damaged from engine smoke, and against the meat factories whose stench fouled the air. The Railroad was fined by the Municipal Court of Chicago and the packers were forced to construct buildings to house their garbage.

17

In addition to each of its varied activities, the Council assumed an educational function by carefully explaining every project to the residents. Occasionally the educative process was an end in itself as in the case of the Council's efforts to introduce basic facts of nutrition to the community. During the Spring of 1945 nutrition was discussed at union meetings, in Sunday sermons, and at school assemblies. No resident could move through his neighborhood without being reminded to drink his orange juice.

18

More often the educational program was directed toward specific actions such as the creation of a local credit union. Although financial experts explained the credit operation, the union was managed by Council members who gained their expertise through action.

19

The importance of popular participation in the Council's activities, essential in any community action project, was summed up in the 1948 Annual Report of the Executive Secretary.

While the achievements of the Council are great in themselves, underlying each individual achievement is the thread of the most important objective that we are working toward...the most important element in democracy. By that I mean participation. I mean the recognition on the part of the people that democracy is a way of life which can only be sustained through the part of the people. Only when the people recognize that theirs is the decision, the right, and the duty to shape their own life, only then will democracy expand and grow. That is why the cardinal keynote of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council is: 'We, the people will work out our own

destiny.’ It is for this reason that I am asking you to keep in mind clearly that every single achievement which I can report tonight has behind it a history of participation, of fighting and of awakening of a burning passion for justice and brotherhood of man by thousands of our people.

20

For the last thirty years the hope expressed by the Council’s motto has often been realized as the carefully nurtured community power in Back of the Yards affected the city, the state, and even the nation. However, much of the community’s influence is traceable not to its “burning passion” but to its most illustrious resident, Mayor Richard J. Daley. Mayor Daley’s assumption of political power in the early 1950’s curiously parallels the Council’s growth in power. Many of the Mayor’s staff are also residents and share the Mayor’s loyalty to the neighborhood. Whatever one may say about Daley, he has a genuine concern for the “forgotten” (white?) man, and almost echoes Alinsky rhetoric when speaking about the Council. As he said in 1966,

...If we had in every neighborhood, in every community, an organization such as yours we would have a much better city...The efforts to solve our problems must come from the leadership of the community which is so excellently displayed in your great organization. The leadership and the solution must come from a willingness of the people to participate in solving their problems. No governmental body...will resolve these problems alone. ...What a great picture of the final essence of American government this presents. The businessmen, the religious leaders, the teachers, all sitting down together, all trying to find the answers, trying to do something to help better their community.

21

Such words from the Chicago political establishment are anathema to Alinsky not only because of his habitual anti-establishment stance, but also because of present conditions in Back of the Yards. The lower class white workers in the area feel threatened by the accelerating pace of social change. They fear the loss of their factory or clerical jobs to automation and their homes to Negroes.

The Council’s ability to fulfill most of the residential needs had locked the neighborhood so that few residents ever leave. One criticism of the Alinsky method is that such strong community organizations tend to “nail down” a neighborhood, retarding social and political development.

The collective manifestation of such retardation is reactionary, segregationist politics. Alinsky recognized such tendencies in the Autumn of 1968 when he walked through the neighborhood seeing Wallace posters and “White Power” slogans on fences and car bumpers.

23

The Council’s social worker, Phyllis Ryan, attributes much of the frustration in the area to the younger residents who often do not even know about the Council and its universalist credo.

24

Alinsky remembers that many young people from the yards area formed a crypto-fascist cadre in the late 1930's. He fought against and for them once and may do so again.

THE WOODLAWN ORGANIZATION

The obstacles confronting Alinsky in Organizing the Back of the Yards were mitigated by several factors. The Roman Catholic Church as well as the meat industry provided a cohesiveness to the community which facilitated attempts at mobilization. Various social pressures accompanying the Depression opened possibilities for entrance into the political structure to groups such as labor. The Depression itself produced widespread questioning of the assumptions underlying existing social conditions which legitimized popular efforts to change them.

And the War years were good ones for organizing simultaneously against fascism at home as well as engendering community spirit. All in all, many of the problems associated with community organizing in the 1960's were not cause for anxiety in Back of the Yards. There was, for example, little questioning of the traditionally accepted meaning of "community" as "a group whose members occupy a given territory within which the total round of life can be pursued."

25

The rapidity of social change in modern America has not merely altered the previous description but has rendered it inapplicable. Its inapplicability, however, was not fully apparent as Alinsky continued his organizing efforts through the 1950's. Operating with territorially defined assumptions, he applied his model to poor areas all over the world. There is little information regarding the actual organizing situations between 1946 and 1960, and Alinsky is vague about them. One of the most, significant of IAF's efforts during these years is the Community Service Organization, a coalition of approximately thirty Mexican-American communities in California.

26

Alinsky often worked through the Catholic Church, and at the urging of his friend Jacques Maritain even consulted with the Vatican about development problems in southern Italy.

27

A small group of organizers including Caesar Chavez, of California grape strike fame, and Nicholas von Hoffman, now an editor of the Washington Post, were trained during the 1950's. Alinsky's base of operations, the IAF, remained in Chicago, and his involvements there led eventually to organizing the Woodlawn section of Chicago. The organization of Woodlawn typifies many of the problems of the 1960's just as Back of the Yards did in the 1930's. It also illustrates changes in Alinsky's theory and technique which are crucial to an understanding of his evolving socio/political philosophy. Overcrowded, dilapidated housing, an increasing crime rate, high unemployment, characterized Woodlawn in 1960 as "the sort of obsolescent, decaying, crowded neighborhood which social workers and city planners assume can never help itself."

28

With its predominantly black population, Woodlawn exemplified the disorganized anemic areas resulting from massive Negro migration to northern cities. The deterioration of the community, located in an oblong area south of the University of Chicago, began during the Depression and accelerated after World War II, so that by 1960 the only people benefiting from the area were absentee slum landlords. Many groups especially ministers, tried to “stem the tide of slum culture” but with very limited success.

29

The neighborhood’s problems were compounded by the threat of urban renewal. The Chicago Defender, a Negro newspaper, in its series entitled “The Battle of Woodlawn” characterized the threat as follows:

In the century since the Negro won freedom from slavery in America, the battle for freedom has never ceased and a variety of racial organizations his run the gauntlet of devious bans...to keep the Negro less than a free and equal American...

But nothing has been more difficult to contend with than the newest strategy of racial discrimination introduced in the past decade... Called urban renewal, it has been difficult to fight because its idea is basically good—tear down the slums and build new homes...

But the experience of a decade has demonstrated beyond doubt that in many cases urban renewal has meant Negro removal...

And increasingly as urban renewal spread, the question in the community has been: how do you fight a bulldozer and crane?

30

How, indeed, are bulldozers and cranes halted when they move with the encouragement of such powerful forces as a city administration and a university behind them? In the Spring of 1959 this question brought together a group of three Protestant ministers and one Catholic priest determined to do whatever they could to preserve the community. The action of these religious leaders was indicative of their times.

As Alinsky observed in 1965,

The biggest change I’ve seen in the twenty years or so that I’ve been involved in social action is the role the churches are playing. Back in the 1930’s and 40’s an organizer might expect to got some help from the. CIO or from a few progressive AFL unions. There wasn’t a church in sight. But today they have really moved into the social arena, the political arena. They have taken over the position organized labor had a generation ago. They are the big dominant force in civil rights.

31

Thus, Alinsky was hardly surprised when the clergymen approached him for help. He turned away the original small group, telling them to return when they had a more representative committee and sufficient financial resources to support organizing activity. The emphasis on financing is Alinsky’s version of the “sink or swim” doctrine.

A community which can first organize to achieve financial independence has already begun to fight. The clergymen returned as members of the Greater Woodlawn Pastor’s Alliance with

support from many secular groups and with grants from the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, the United Presbyterian Board of Missions and the Emil Schwartzhaupt Foundation. In addition to these grants, the community itself had raised \$27,000. Alinsky was persuaded to move into the miasma of black inequality, white racism, city politics, university selfishness, and federal indifference. But, just how does one organize a miasma? The organizing followed the flexible pattern of first sending IAF field men into the neighborhood to discover grievances, and to spot the elusive “indigenous” leaders, and then bringing the leaders together to plan action involving the community in a demonstration of power. Nicholas von Hoffman, the original field representative, answers the question about beginning offhandedly: “I found myself at the corner of Sixty-third and Kimbark and I looked around.”

32

Von Hoffman elaborated on his views during a conversation with the author, but he found it difficult to verbalize the process whereby a “leader” is recognized.

33

He stressed the importance of listening to people as one attempts to get the “feel” of an area, but, as with most successful organizers, he finally relied on his impressions and intuitions, Von Hoffman remembers the primary problem in organizing Woodlawn was the lack of community leadership among the black residents. That blacks themselves recognized the void was pointed out by a staff member of the original Temporary Woodlawn Organization (TWO) in explaining the primary aim of TWO:

We’re trying to say to Negroes across the city, once you wake up and start fighting back for true representation and begin to criticize and go after the next politicians who do not stand for what you want, then other Negroes who have been intimidated and frightened will overcome their fears.

Once a small group of Negroes really are emancipated—psychologically and fundamentally emancipated—and begin to fight without fear for their full constitutional rights you’ll have more than the seeds of a general social revolution. You’ll have the beginning of one.

34

Dedicated to “fighting back” the recruited leaders had to devise a strategy during the Spring of 1960 for TWO’s membership, which by then included approximately sixty local businesses, fifty block clubs and thirty churches representing at least forty thousand of Woodlawn’s one-hundred thousand residents. TWO’s first project was a “Square Deal” campaign to implement a new Code of Business Ethics covering credit practices, pricing, and advertising. During the early canvassing of the neighborhood to discover grievances, von Hoffman and others had heard many complaints regarding the local merchants who overcharged and short weighted their customers’ purchases. this type of complaint was one of the more “visible” resentments and could serve as a focus for an initial organizing attempt. Most of the merchants patronized by the community were in the area and could be directly affected through economic pressure. The Square Deal campaign was publicized by a big parade through the Woodlawn shopping district, and by public weighings of packages

suspected of being falsely marked. 35 Cheating merchants agreed to comply with the Code, and their capitulation impressed the residents with TWO's effectiveness.

What TWO really needed, according to the Alinsky prescription, was an enemy in order to translate community interest into community action. The University of Chicago unwittingly fulfilled that role with its announcement on July 19, 1960, that it intended to extend its campus south into Woodlawn. There had been a history of hostility between the University and the community over the University's Negro removal tactics in other south side areas, and over its general disdain for the problems of the black slums.

The University for its part, saw itself as one of the few first-rate attributes of the entire city necessarily possessing a longer-range vision than that held by a present-oriented populace. The University, with the support of the Mayor and business groups, was accustomed to having its way and expected no more than a few protests in response to its announcement. Before the creation of TWO there had been few protests. One of the characteristics of what Silberman refers to as the "life style" of a slum is its pervasive apathy.

36

Those who live in our slums have learned that they are on the bottom of the social scale but that they often have more to lose from bucking the system than their middle class counterparts. Personal experience with city politics in Chicago during the years 1960- 1964 demonstrated to me the arbitrary power which many politicians hold over their constituents. Welfare checks can be withheld because of "Unacceptable behavior." The precinct captain carefully tours his neighborhood before each election reminding everyone how to vote. How could an individual, even if supported by friends, risk the loss of a patronage job for some abstract principle when the tangible fact of a family's needs faced him?

Silberman summarizes the conditions afflicting Woodlawn and still affecting our nation's slums:

Quite frequently, therefore, the apathy that characterizes the slum represents what in many ways is a realistic response to a hostile environment.

But realistic or not, the adjustment that is reached is one of surrender to the existing conditions and abdication of any hope of change. The result is a community seething with inarticulate resentments and dormant hostilities repressed for safety's sake, but which break out every now and then in some explosion of deviant or irrational behavior.

The slum dwellers are incapable of acting, or even joining, until these suppressed resentments and hostilities are brought to the surface where they can be seen as problems—i.e. as a condition you can do something about.

37

TWO's initial articulation of resentments against the University was not an instance of "rubbing raw the sores of discontent." Representing the community, it merely asked the University for more detailed plans of its land needs because more than fifteen-thousand people were involved in any expansion. The University insensitively refused the request. TWO then demanded that the usually acquiescent city defer its approval of the University plans until city planners worked out a comprehensive prospectus on Woodlawn's future.

TWO accompanied its demand with the threat of demonstrators lying in front of bulldozers and hundreds of demonstrators at a City Plan Commission hearing.

38

The demands, threats, and demonstration created effective countervailing political pressure resulting in the deferment of city approval.

The University, probably with private assurances from the city officials, still did not take TWO seriously and continued alienating the Woodlawn residents. One example of their political ineptitude occurred in the treatment accorded local businessmen. Businessmen are not usually the ardent backers of community action since it is aimed at the status quo that supports them, but after being insulted by spokesmen from the University at an informational gathering called to explain the proposed expansion, the Woodlawn Businessman's Association voted unanimously to join TWO's fight.

39

With their plans blocked and the forces of the community arrayed against them, the University of Chicago launched a smear campaign against Alinsky and the IAF.

The attack, outlined in Silberman and other articles, was a strange one to launch in Chicago, as its primary thrust concerned the IAF's involvement with the Catholic Church. In a city whose leadership is publicly Roman Catholic, it makes little sense to fault a man for being "involved" with the Church. It is true, as University publicity men pointed out to the city newspapers, that Catholic groups had aided Alinsky's work since 1940, but never under the delusion that they were aiding a "hate" distributor, nor aiding a Catholic conspiracy to foil integration. 40 Both of these charges were echoes of ones that Alinsky had heard before and answered before. He once again pointed to the record of the Archdiocese in the advocacy of integration. Monsignor John J. Egan, director of the office of Urban Affairs of the Catholic Bishop of Chicago, had challenged one of the University's former urban renewal plans thus incurring that institution's hostility.

41

Monsignor Egan vigorously defended Alinsky from the University attack and summed up the attitudes of many religious leaders who have supported Alinsky in the following response to a question about why he had worked with the IAF:

We felt the Church had to involve herself in helping people develop the tools which would enable them to come to grips with the serious economic, social, and moral problems which were affecting their lives, families, and communities.

We also knew that there was needed a tool which would enable them to participate in a dignified way in the democratic process and which would give them the training necessary for achieving in action the meaning of the democratic way of life and of realizing their human and divine dignity.

The Industrial Areas Foundation appeared to us to be the only organized force with the skill, experience, and integrity to supply these tools and organize in neighborhoods which had such a desperate need for them.

42

Most reports about the development of TWO stress the ecumenical nature of the undertaking. And Alinsky credits himself with being the second most important Jew in the history of Christianity.

43

TWO's fight with the University had implications for subsequent community action programs because it directly questioned the concept of bureaucratically- controlled social planning. When the City Plan Commission came up with its comprehensive program for the Woodlawn area in March of 1962 without having consulted the community, TWO independently hired a firm of city planners to examine the Commission's plan. Jane Jacobs, nationally recognized planning expert, was so impressed with TWO's efforts that she agreed to become a special consultant.

44

Mrs. Jacobs secured the help of other planners to prepare proposals for the area that could be implemented without moving the present population out. Before the days of "maximum feasible participation" the residents of Woodlawn were asking to voice their opinions to the sociologists and planners supposedly concerned with their welfare. Still, however, their existence was ignored by the University, until those men most sensitive to shifts in public participation, the politicians, decided to act.

Mayor Daley's personal tête à tête method of dealing with political crises deserves careful study. Groups war with one another for years until brought together in his auspicious presence in some back room in the city hall. After a few hours of undisclosed activity everyone emerges smiling. In the Summer of 1963 Daley forced the Chancellor of the University to meet with representatives from TWO and to agree on a compromise which would create homes as others were demolished and afford TWO majority representation on the citizens planning committee.

45

With the Mayor's help, TWO had won an important battle, although in most of its other struggles TWO and the Mayor were squared off against each other. One example of such a struggle was TWO's sponsorship of a mass bus ride to register voters at the city hall. On August 26, 1961, more than two-thousand Woodlawn resident boarded buses for the ride downtown. They had been warned by the local machine politicians not to arrive en masse, but in the psychology of Chicago politics, a warning has the connotation of meaning that somebody is worried. For the residents of Woodlawn the realization that they could affect the city administration was a revelation in line with what Alinsky regards the prime achievement of a concerted popular effort. For Alinsky, as for many of the participants, the forty-six buses were a manifestation of newly found dignity. Men with dignity could attain some control over their lives as TWO continued to demonstrate in its fight for non-segregated schooling, decent housing, and sufficient police protection.

Their tactics included picketing the School Board and suburban homes of slum landlords; filing suit against the Board of Education for their perpetuation of de facto segregation; publicly dumping garbage in front of the sanitation commission's headquarters; sitting-in at banks which handled slum landlords' business. In many cases the abrasive tactics paid off

with the cancellation of double shifts in the schools, the increased hiring of Negroes by city businesses, growing responsiveness from the machine politicians, and even some property repair. TWO by 1964 was a pressure group within the city. Its title was changed from the Temporary Woodlawn Organization to The Woodlawn Organization.

Its development had paralleled that segment of the civil rights struggle which reached its climax in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. TWO stood as a remarkable accomplishment and the Reverend Arthur Brazier, then head of TWO, summarized Alinsky's contribution: "Saul has done more to alert black people on how to develop real Black Power than any man in the United States." 46 The Silberman book, *Crisis in Black and White*, admittedly pro- Alinsky, is the definitive source both for understanding the development of TWO and for setting it within the early 1960's context of our continuing racial crisis. Silberman considers TWO's greatest contribution to be "its most subtle: it gives Woodlawn residents the sense of dignity that makes it possible for them to accept help."

47

Unfortunately, the help was soon coming into Woodlawn under the auspices of the War on Poverty in a project that both perverted Alinsky's philosophy and misused his methodology. In 1965 the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) made a grant of \$927,341 to TWO to train several hundred unemployed school dropouts, many of whom were members of two area gangs, the Blackstone Rangers and the Disciples. The gangs were involved in the planning and administration of the program, with some members drawing salaries as recruiters or instructors.

The decision to include the gangs rather than merely dealing with individuals was dictated by conditions within Woodlawn. The two gangs, among the most notorious in Chicago are bitter enemies whose wars have terrorized the south side for years. TWO, if it were to maintain its legitimacy, had to contend with them.

TWO's efforts to reach the gangs were coordinated by the Reverend John R. Fry, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Woodlawn. Although white, the Reverend Mr. Fry managed to gain the confidence of the Blackstone Rangers and offered them the use of church facilities. His congregation agreed with his work and when the federal grant was awarded, the church became the center for the training programs. The political risks of such a program, bypassing City Hall and employing young "criminals", were obvious. The first sign of trouble came in November, 1967, when OEO fired Jerome Bernstein who had served as agency liaison to TWO.

48

His removal was precipitated by pressure applied from the Mayor's office and the Police Department through Congressional Representatives such as Rep. Roman Pucinski.

49

With coincidental timing the Chicago Tribune, a conservative Republican defender of the Democratic city administration, ran a series of articles on gangs in the city emphasizing the Blackstone Rangers' role in TWO's anti-poverty project. Then came the announcement early in June, 1968, that the Permanent Investigations Subcommittee of the Senate Government

Operations Committee would hold hearings to determine whether OEO funds were being used to buy peace on Chicago's south side by bribing the two gangs.

50

The Subcommittee's chairman, Senator John L. McClellan (D. Ark.) had been "out to get the OEO, particularly the Community Action Programs, and had chosen the Woodlawn grant as his target. It was a predictable choice not only because of the existing hostility between city hall and TWO but also because of antagonism from the official community action agency. McClellan's investigators spent months "scrounging around the South Side of Chicago for dirt to discredit the OEO job. project."

51

It should not have been too difficult a job because of the loopholes in such a gamble. There are obviously going to be gang members taking advantage of the federal money; and the investigators found them.

There will also be community members dissatisfied with either the goals or the performance of the program for their own personal reasons; and the investigators found them. Other groups in the city are going to resent the opportunity offered to the gangs through TWO; and they were certainly vocal about their damaged interests.

And, of course, there is the political system which usually feels threatened by innovation; and McClellan rallied them. The hearings opened on June 20, amid headline-grabbing charges that the Reverend Mr. Fry aided the Rangers' illegal activities. The central accusation made by an ex-Ranger chief, was that Fry had allowed the church to be used as an arsenal.

52

The police had raided the church and discovered a cache in its basement, although Fry and other church authorities claimed the police knew the weapons were there because they had helped supervise their storage. Amid charges and countercharges the Reverend Arthur Brazier called the McClellan hearing a "political conspiracy to discredit a program conducted by a black community and controlled by black people."

53

Mayor Daley answered Brazier in his bluntly revealing manner by calling the charge "totally-absurd" and stressing that "we would have nothing to do with gang structure or financing them." 54 OEO Director Bertrand M. Harding issued a statement on June 24, answering some of the allegations made during the hearings and said that "[W]e at OEO believe it imperative that some means be developed to reclaim these poor, hard-core youth...to test whether the mechanisms of the gang structures could not assist in shifting attitudes toward productive adult citizenship."

55

There is about TWO's fiasco—from the Reverend Mr. Fry's earnest ineptitude to the project's "South Side" elements—an incredible naïveté. Nathan Glazer has explained it saying that it is as if someone had been convinced by a sociologist that change and reform are spurred by conflict and decided that, since all good things can come from the American Government, it ought to provide conflict, too."

56

Alinsky's lessons in organizing and mobilizing community action independent of extra-community strings appear to have been lost in the face of the lure of OEO money. TWO's control over a local program designed for obtaining jobs had shown some progress until the Washington manna arrived. Operating with many of Alinsky's assumptions, OEO's effort stumbled under a proliferation of pressures. TWO, however, still exists despite the ravages of bureaucracies, Black Power demagogues, and internal conflicts. That it survives at all is a testament to its adaptability built in by its democratic/representative features. TWO's presence in the community and its autonomous cooperation with the neighborhood gangs is frequently credited for the lack of racial violence in Woodlawn.

ROCHESTER'S FIGHT

Although TWO, created in the early 1960's, is credited with channelling frustration away from rioting, after the burning summer of 1964, community action entered a new phase marked by increasing black militancy and unrealistic federal promises.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 launched the War on Poverty with many of the premises of the Alinsky method. Before examining Alinsky's effect on the federal planning, one other example of independent organizing will be described because it adds to an understanding of Alinsky's strengths and weaknesses. FIGHT in Rochester, New York, was a direct response to the riots in that city in July 1964. The riots, resulting in hundreds injured and millions of dollars in property damage, had a profound effect on a city which Alinsky dubbed "Smugtown, U.S.A.."

57

Gerald Astor's description of Rochester is worth repeating: "...an upstate conservative city, a culture bastion amid the apple knockers...founded upon high-skilled industry, dominated by an oligarchy and infected with a severe case of ghettoitis."

58

Once again, clergymen led the move toward organization. Their first choice was not Alinsky, but the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which they invited into the city under the auspices of the Rochester Area Council of Churches.

59

When the SCLC non-violence doctrine proved ineffective in this riot-torn ghetto, Alinsky was asked for his help. The Council's invitation to Alinsky coupled with a two-year pledge of \$50,000 polarized the city. Such polarization between those who believed in him and those who denounced him as a hate-monger delighted Alinsky: "In order to organize, you must first polarize. People think of controversy as negative; they think consensus is better. But to organize, you need a Bull Connor or a Jim Clark."

60

With memories of fire houses dancing in their heads, the residents of Rochester settled down for a long, bitter conflict. For a variety of reasons they were initially surprised. First of all, there was no Bull Connor in Rochester and the city administration was not so stupid as Jim Clark. When the incipient FIGHT organization complained about housing or garbage pick-up, the city administration arranged a settlement. It was also six years after TWO's beginning and, as Ed Chambers, the IAF field man, said, "...the enemy is more sophisticated."

61

FIGHT (the acronym stood for: Freedom, Integration, God, Honor, Today until Independence replaced Integration) became an official Alinsky model People's Organization in June, 1965, when it adopted its constitution and elected its first president. The president, the Reverend Mr. Franklin Florence, led FIGHT's coalition of over one-hundred organizations as the black community won control of an urban renewal citizens committee and placed three directors on the board of the local anti-poverty program.

62

Chambers recounted the strategy of escalated demands used by FIGHT in its struggle with the city-controlled agency:

We subjected them to constant harassment. Our first issue was that the public business can't be conducted in private, If their board went into private session, we would force our way in. They finally realized FIGHT is here to stay.

They said to themselves, 'We'd better give those people something to shut them up.' So they gave us three people on their board and \$65,000.

63

The \$65,000 Federal anti-poverty grant awarded in 1966 to FIGHT to train one-hundred Negroes to pass the civil service examinations, added to FIGHT's negotiating strength.

64

FIGHT used its new respectability to petition the New York State Education Commissioner to use greater speed in ending de facto school segregation. FIGHT also arranged for on-the-job training at Xerox for fifteen blacks. All of these activities were preparation for FIGHT's challenge to the Rochester-based Eastman Kodak Company.

The company with 40,000 nonunionized workers is the largest employer in the area. FIGHT charged Kodak with ignoring the needs of blacks, and asked the company to train 500 Negro youths for semi-skilled positions. "If Kodak can take pictures of the moon, it can create jobs for our people," said Florence.

65

His words were amplified by threats of direct action such as picketing the plants and even the homes of Kodak executives. The President of Kodak in 1966, William S. Vaughn, agreed to talk with FIGHT and designated assistant vice-president John G. Mulder to handle the negotiations. On December 30, 1966, Mulder and Florence signed this joint statement: "The FIGHT organization and Kodak agreed to an objective of the recruitment and referral (to include screening and selection) of 600 unemployed people over a 24-month period, barring unforeseen economic changes affecting the Rochester community."

66

There were immediate unforeseen changes but they were political rather than economic ones. Shortly before the joint statement, Vaughn had been made chairman of the board and Kodak's new President, Louis K. Eilers, publicly, reneged on the proposal. Eilers instead asked FIGHT to cooperate in a company project which he described as "the white hope for the poor of Rochester." 67 The black poor were not interested in any white hope. James Ridgeway skillfully counterposed Florence's reaction to Eilers with Eilers' attitudes:

'They talk about America being a melting pot,' said Florence, 'but the question right now is not whether black can melt, but whether they can even get into the pot. That's what FIGHT has been trying to do— get some of them into the pot at Kodak...

'From what I have been able to learn of other Alinsky efforts this one seems to be developing according to his pattern,' Eilers said. 'An issue is picked. Community conflict is created by much talk, noise and pressure and the creation of confusion.

'In our case, the issue the Alinsky forces chose to be related to is the employment of Negroes. It is more and more clear, however, that all the talk about unemployment is only an issue or device being used to screen what FIGHT is really doing—and that is making a drive for power in the community.'

68

Eiler's words were particularly ironic as Alinsky had tried to stay out of Rochester. In every organizing effort his goal is to become dispensable as quickly as possible, and with FIGHT's strong black awareness, he left even more of the decisions to the FIGHT leadership. He helped develop a parallel group of whites, the Friends of FIGHT, because he believes that Negroes need white allies.

The relationship between FIGHT and their Friends was an uneasy one until they joined forces against Kodak. The need for a new strategy to use against Kodak brought Alinsky back into the fight. Influenced by the white liberal support offered to FIGHT, he decided to "Fight Kodak" through stock proxies: "Liberals can go to cocktail parties and let their proxies do the work."

69

Alinsky moved around the country presenting the FIGHT side of the controversy, concentrating on church groups. He spoke to the National Council of Churches and the National Convention of Unitarians. When the latter group voted its stock proxies behind FIGHT and against racism, 'senators and congressmen affected by church pressure became interested.

70

Alinsky also attempted to coordinate a nationwide boycott of Kodak goods which was a failure within the tradition of unsuccessful national boycotts. Eventually, recognizing FIGHT's legitimate demands and responding to political pressure, Kodak wired FIGHT: "Kodak recognizes that FIGHT, as a broadbased community organization, speaks in behalf of the basic needs of the Negro poor in the Rochester area."

71

Kodak agreed to work with FIGHT but made it very clear that, "[W]e're not in the welfare-business, that's the government's job." 72 Although FIGHT in 1967 considered the telegram a victory. in 1969, three years after the abortive Florence/Mulder agreement, Kodak has renewed its delaying tactics. The company is supposedly waiting to see what happened with the Community Development Corporation Bill (S-30), but at the rate that the ninety-first Congress is moving it could be a long wait. So there will not be a new plant built in the ghetto during the next few years; where does FIGHT turn next? This is still an unanswered question and for many black and white Rochester residents no longer an urgent one. FIGHT leaders

consider the organization's greatest accomplishment to be the new spirit with which it infused the black community. 73 And, ironically, many whites thank FIGHT for stabilizing the post-riot community.

CHAPTER II FOOTNOTES:

1 Anderson, p. 28.

2 Silberman, p. 335.

3 Saul D. Alinsky, "Citizen Participation and Community Organization in Planning and Urban Renewal" Speech presented before The Chicago Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, January 29, 1962 (The Industrial Areas Foundation: Chicago, Illinois), pp. 7-8.

4 "Agitator Zeroes in on the Suburbanites," Business Week, February 8, 1969, p. 46.

5 Evelyn Zygmuntowicz, "The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council and Its Health and Welfare Services" (unpublished Master of Social Work thesis, Loyola University, 1959), p. 9.

6 "Agitator Zeroes in on the Suburbanites," p. 46.

7 Alinsky interview, Wellesley.

8 Zygmuntowicz, p. 28.

9 "The Professional Radical," p. 45.

10 Zygmuntowicz, p. 42.

11 The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, 27th Annual Report (Chicago, Illinois: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, 1966), p. 1.

12 "The Professional Radical, p. 46.

13 Zygmuntowicz, p. 29.

14 "The Professional Radical," p. 46.

15 Zygmuntowicz, p. 53.

16 Ibid., p. 54.

17 Ibid., p. 60.

18 Ibid., p. 65.

19 Ibid.

20 The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, Annual Report of the Executive Secretary (Chicago, Illinois: Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, 1948), p. 1.

21 27th Annual Report, pp. 27-28.

22 D.J.R. Bruckner, "Alinsky Rethinks the Idea of Community," Washington Post, February 20, 1969, p. G1.

23 Alinsky interview, Wellesley.

24 Phyllis Ryan, Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council Social Worker, private interview in Chicago, Illinois, January, 1969.

25 Ely Chinoy, Sociological Perspective (New York: Random House 1954), p. 30.

26 Silberman, p. 322.

- 27 Alinsky interview, Boston.
- 28 Silberman, p. 320.
- 29 Stephen C. Rose, "Saul Alinsky and His Critics," *Christianity and Crisis*, (July 20, 1964), p. 149.
- 30 Ernestine Cofield, "Ministers vs. Evils of Urban Renewal," *Chicago Defender Magazine*, November 19, 1962, p. 9.
- 31 "A Professional Radical Moves In On Rochester," *Harper's*, July, 1965, p. 53.
- 32 Silberman, p. 328.
- 33 Nicholas von Hoffman, interview by telephone in Washington, D.C., October, 1968.
- 34 Cofield, "Ministers vs. Evils of Urban Renewal," p. 9.
- 35 Silberman, p. 324.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 337.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 339-341.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 Very Rev. Msgr. John J. Egan, "The Archdiocese Responds," *Church Metropolis*, (Summer, 1965), p. 16.
- 43 Alinsky interview, Boston.
- 44 Ernestine Cofield, "How University of Chicago Was Stopped By A Fighting Community," *Chicago Defender Magazine*, November 21, 1962, p. 9.
- 45 Stephen C. Rose, "Power Play City," *Crossroads*, (January-March, 1967), p. 12.
- 46 Gerald Astor, "The 'Apostle' and The 'Fool'," *Look* (June 25, 1968), p. 31.
- 47 Silberman , p. 348.
- 48 David Sanford, "South Side Story," *The New Republic*, (July 6, 1968), p. 13.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 "Support of Chicago Gangs," *Congressional Quarterly*, June 28, 1968, p. 1590.
- 51 Sanford,
- 52 McClellan and the Informers: Bigotry's Bedfellows," *The Christian Century*, (July, 1968), p. 887.
- 53 William Jones, "TWO Chief Assails Testimony," *Chicago Tribune*, June 22, 1968, p. 4.
- 54 William Jones.
- 55 "Support of Chicago Gangs."
- 56 Nathan Glazer, "The Grand Design of the Poverty Program," *Poverty: Power and Politics*, ed. Chaim I. Waxman, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), p. 290.
- 57 Anderson, p. 30.
- 58 Astor, p. 34.

59 Anderson, p. 30.

60 Astor, p. 34.

61 Anderson, p. 31.

62 James Ridgeway, "Attack on Kodak," The New Republic, January 21, 1967, p. 30.

63 Anderson, p. 87

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 89.

66 Ridgeway, p. 31.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., p. 30.

69 Astor, p. 34.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Anderson, p. 92.

CHAPTER III

"A PRIZE PIECE OF POLITICAL PORNOGRAPHY"

One of the more intriguing puzzles to solve concerns Alinsky's relationship to the War on Poverty. That he greatly influenced the legislation seems evident. That he despises the effects of that legislation is undeniable. The key to the puzzle involves both Alinsky's effect on the poverty warriors and his response to them. Daniel P. Moynihan who helped draft the original poverty legislation has described his understanding of the origins and failures of the community action programs in his book *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*. Moynihan writes in a spirited style but even his behind-the-scenes stance does not make his argument less confusing.

He dissects the so-called "opportunity theory" articulated by Lloyd E. Ohlin and Richard A. Cloward both of the Columbia School of Social Work. He points to the theory as the basis for many of the premises underlying the Economic Opportunity Act. 1 Moynihan sets up a sequence leading from the Cloward/Ohlin thesis to the Mobilization for Youth (MFY) project in New York City to the federal legislation which is perhaps chronologically correct but seems to miss the point.

If, as Moynihan states, "the central concept of each program (MFY and OEO) is that of opportunity"

2

then what did the "maximum feasible participation" clause mean? Moynihan indirectly defines it in the following way:

The community action title, which established the one portion of the program that would not be directly monitored from Washington, should provide for the 'maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and the members of the groups' involved in the local programs. Subsequently this phrase was taken to sanction a specific theory of social change, and there were those present in Washington at the time who would have drafted just such language with precisely that object.

3

Moynihan continues explaining that his understanding of the original purpose of the clause was to ensure the participation of persons, especially in the South, who were normally excluded from the political process.

4

But, in such areas real participation in decision-making would precipitate social change on a scale far wider than extension of opportunity to partake in already functioning results of decision-making suggests. Part of the trouble with Moynihan's analysis is that he defines neither "participation" nor "social change" as operative terms. There are, of course, rhetorical allusions to the need for men to play greater roles in shaping their own lives, and to the dire state of twentieth-century America. He echoes Gunnar Myrdal's warnings that the country has far to go in insuring democratic participation on all levels of the political system, but he concludes that the community action programs "with their singular emphasis on 'maximum feasible participation' of the poor themselves comprise the most notable effort to date to mount a systematic social response to the problem Myrdal outlined.

5

Yet, there is little sense of what Moynihan refers to when he uses that word "participation" especially as the keystone to a "systematic social response." He even questions the entire theory of participation using a quote from the work Bernard J. Frieden and Robert Morris did on alienation:

'Least convincing have been those analyses which have asserted that the fact of participation by the poor, in itself, will significantly alter the conditions deplored, as for example, the belief that civic participation in itself leads to a reduction in deviant behavior.

6

Somehow Alinsky's use of participation as a process through which individuals determine the action to be taken by a community organization has been lost in the academic/bureaucratic crossfire.

What OEO and Moynihan seem to mean by "participation" involves the incorporation of the poor and "deviant" into the mainstream not through their participatory planning but through their acquiescent participation.

In his appropriately titled article, "By or For the Poor?", Andrew Kopkind discusses the contradictions inherent in the participation clause:

What was new and exciting about the War on Poverty was that it gave hope of putting some political and economic power into the hands of the 'under-class' of the poor, as labor legislation had strengthened the bargaining power of workers three decades earlier.

Through the Wagner Act, the workers got recognition; they used their new power to win economic benefits. In the same way, the maximum feasible participation clause in the OEO legislation promised recognition and thus power to the poor.

7

Recognition of the problem of poverty among legislators perhaps, but there was little realization among them that their legislating participation might result in any alteration of power.

Moynihan occasionally acknowledges the incompatibility of legislating participatory planning (i.e. “true” participation) and expecting a conservative Congress to continue funding it once they perceived what they had writ. One of these instances occurs in a long passage about Alinsky:

The blunt reality is that sponsors of community action who expected to adopt the conflict strategy of Saul D. Alinsky and at the same time expected to be recipients of large sums of money, looked for, to paraphrase Jefferson, ‘what never was and never will be.’

Alinsky emerges from the 1960’s a man of enhanced stature. His influence on the formulation of the antipoverty program was not great. Indeed it was negligible, in that a primary motive of these efforts was to give things to the poor that they did not have. Alinsky’s law, laid down in Reveille for Radicals, which appeared in 1946, was that in the process of social change there is no such thing as give, only take. True or not, by the time the community action programs began to be founded, he had behind him some three decades of organizing poor or marginal neighborhoods (white as well as black) and in every instance this process had taken the form of inducing conflict and fighting for power.

Was there not something to be learned here? Could it be that this is somehow the normal evolution once such an effort is begun?...Alinsky’s view was nothing if not explicit and public: social stability is a condition reached through negotiated compromise between power organizations. (His origins, of course, are in the trade union movement, specifically the United Mine Workers).

The problem of the poor is not only that they lack money, but that they lack power. This means that they have no way of threatening the status quo, and therefore that there can be no social change until this organizational condition is changed.

Organization first, antipoverty program second. Early in the life of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Alinsky was willing to contemplate that Federal funds, bypassing City Hall and channeled directly to indigenous organizations, might be used to bring such organizations into being. But his own experience and practice belied any such possibility. Throughout his career he had begun his organizing campaigns with cash in hand, completely independent of the power structure with which he wished to bargain. His entire analysis of the process of social change argued that official community action programs would soon fall under the direction of City Hall.

8

If, indeed, the purpose of the War on Poverty was to “give”, then most of its Alinsky-like rhetoric about “helping the poor help themselves” and opening “opportunity” and bringing “hope to all who contemplate their future in terms of their discouraging present” went no deeper than the public relations division. 9 Alinsky’s periodic outbursts about the hypocrisy of

the War on Poverty have provided unforgettable copy—especially his labeling the entire effort a “prize piece of political pornography...a huge political pork barrel, and a feeding trough for the welfare industry, surrounded by sanctimonious, hypocritical, phony, moralistic——.”

10

Sargent Shriver candidly challenged Alinsky by declaring that the War on Poverty had done “more for the Negro in 25 months than Alinsky has in 25 years.”

11

Which is precisely Alinsky’s point, for as he replied: “We (the Industrial Areas Foundation) spend \$100,000 a year, and Shriver compares us with the U.S. Government. Shriver says he’s done more for the Negro than we have. He’s telling the truth. We’ve never done anything for the Negroes; we’ve worked with them.”

12

The one poverty war campaign for which Alinsky served as consultant, was the short-lived Federal pilot training program for organizers at Syracuse University. When the trainees organized slum dwellers against city agencies, the city government complained loudly to Washington and the funds were withdrawn.

13

This incident foreshadowed the eventual enactment of the amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act passed in December, 1967, which provided that local governments would have the option of bringing their community action agency under their official control.

14

Even with the unenforceable assurance that one-third of the representatives on the local board must be “poor” with bypass powers given to the director, Representative Edith Green’s (D. Ore.) amendment strengthened the positions of Mayors such as Daley, who already controlled their local agency, and effectively moved every other agency under the umbrella of City Hall. The amendment also opened the way for concerted attacks on the high-risk programs such as TWO’s. Moynihan reprints Alinsky’s 1965 prognosis for the War on Poverty: Unless there are drastic changes in direction, rationale and administration, the anti-poverty program may well become the worst political blunder and boomerang of the present administration.”

15

Moynihan lays the blame for not recognizing the validity of Alinsky’s perspective on the administrators of the program and the social scientists who devised, the theory of participation without realizing the meaning their words would assume in practice. One of the arguments in Moynihan’s book is that “social science is at its weakest, at its worst, when it offers theories of individual or collective behavior which raises the possibility, by controlling certain inputs, of bringing about mass behavioral change.”

16

A good point, but one that Alinsky made eleven years earlier in a speech before the Association of Community Councils in Chicago:

We face a danger in undue emphasis of attention on process, so that we may well lose sight of the purpose. Too much concern with process reaches a point, as is obvious,

in a number of parts of this field, whereby the devotion to process has not only resulted in the loss of purpose, but it becomes an academic greenhouse for the nurturing of intellectual seedlings which could never grow in the hard, cold world outside

17

Alinsky's 1965 speech about the War on Poverty went beyond pornography and process into areas where Moynihan treats softly, city hall patronage and welfare industry -centrism. Before the Green Amendment Alinsky observed that most city halls, acting through committees composed of the party faithful, controlled the local antipoverty funds.

18

Poverty funds were frequently used to stifle independent action in the name of "community consensus" or if programs did bypass city hall the officials would disown them in order to take themselves "off the hook."

19

Another aspect of the poverty war which Alinsky criticized was its "vast network of sergeants drawing general's pay."

20

He illustrated the "startling contrast" between many salaries before and after assuming positions with OEO. It seems as though "nowhere in this great land of ours is the opportunity more promising than in the Office of Economic Opportunity."

21

Even more disturbing to Alinsky than the city hall patronage, which is predictable, is the attitude of professional social workers: "The anti-poverty program may well be regarded as history's greatest relief program for, the benefit of the welfare industry."

22

The requirement of maximum feasible participation raised questions for those institutionally involved in aiding the poor. For example, who was to select the one-third? The welfare industry's vested interests naturally made it anxious to get a piece of the new action. Frequently the desire for involvement led welfare professionals into subverting those programs in which they had no part .23 Alinsky concludes his critique by commenting on the crucial question: What can be done to make a poverty program functional?

First, I would have serious doubts about getting a poverty program to help and work with the poor until such a 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 alterations so that it would induce the status quo to come through with a genuine, decent meaningful poverty program.

24

This is usual Alinsky talk but, Moynihan notwithstanding, there is evidence that from 1965 at least Alinsky's views were very influential within certain circles of poverty warriors. (There is

still a good argument that ideas first practiced by Alinsky influenced the actual writing of the legislation even though the authors might not have acknowledged him).

In February, 1965, OEO issued a Community Action Program Guide attempting to define the ambiguous participation clause by strongly urging the involvement of poor people in political action. 25 The relationship between the Newark riots in the Summer of 1967, and the local poverty agency which was one of the few in the country to operate autonomously, is still a matter of investigation.

26

A cartoon in a 1968 VISTA publication depicts an over-zealous VISTA volunteer striking out at all available targets often hitting those, such as Alinsky, who are supposedly on his side. (Appendix I) There is a great lesson in that VISTA cartoon. All too often the War on Poverty with confused intentions and armed with misinterpreted social theory fulfilled Moynihan's concluding description of the community action programs: "...the soaring rhetoric, the minimum performance; the feigned constancy, the private betrayal; in the end...the sell-out."

27

CHAPTER III FOOTNOTES:

1 Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding* (New York: The Free Press 1968).

2 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

7 Andrew Kopkind, "By or For the Poor?" *Poverty: Power and Politics*, ed. Chaim Waxman, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), pp. 226-227.

8 Moynihan, pp. 185-186.

9 National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, *Report of the Council, Focus on Community Action* (Washington, D.C.: The National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, 1968), p. x.

10 Anderson, p. 94.

11 Astor, p. 34.

12 *Ibid.*

13 John Kifner, "A Professional Radical Rallies the Poor," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1967, p. 10E.

14 Moynihan, p. 158.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

17 Saul D. Alinsky, "From Citizen Apathy to Participation," Speech presented at the Sixth Annual Fall Conference Association of Community Councils of Chicago, October 19, 1957 (The Industrial Areas Foundation: Chicago, Illinois), p. 10.

18 Saul D. Alinsky, "The War on Poverty—Political Pornography," *Poverty: Power and Politics*, ed. Chaim I. Waxman, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), p. 173.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

25 Barbara Carter, "Sargent Shriver and the Role of the Poor," *Poverty: Power and Politics*, ed. Chaim I. Waxman, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), p. 208.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

27 Moynihan, p. 203.

CHAPTER IV PERSPECTIVES ON ALINSKY AND HIS MODEL

Around the edges of Alinsky's critique of the War on Poverty are vestigial reminders that he himself is not blameless. As a model builder he is somewhat accountable for even the misguided application of that model. There are also areas of action for which he is more directly responsible, so that any evaluation of Alinsky must include both his accomplishments and his methodology. Before discussing either, however, it is necessary to say something about the man himself.

One of the primary problems with the Alinsky model is that the removal of Alinsky drastically alters its composition.

Alinsky is a born organizer who is not easily duplicated, but, in addition to his skill, he is a man of exceptional charm. The *Economist* article, calling him the "Plato on the Barricades," described it in this way:

His charm lies in his ability to commit himself completely to the people in the room with him. In a shrewd though subtle way he often manipulates them while speaking directly to their experience. Still he is a man totally at ease with himself, mainly because he loves his work which always seems to be changing—new communities, new contests, new fights.

1

Thus, keeping in mind the difficulties that the less-than-charming encounter in their organizing attempts, let us evaluate method and methodology referring to the three case studies investigated. Although the long-term effectiveness of Alinsky's organizing efforts cannot yet be assessed, the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council is a well-established community organization. As previously noted, the Council's democratic enthusiasm has yielded to chauvinistic defensiveness. Randomly selected issues of the Back of the Yards Journal illustrate the self-centered smugness of a neighborhood with political influence.

The Journal's pages, are filled with progress reports about area improvements sponsored jointly by the Council and City Hall. The Council's Executive Secretary, once Alinsky's fellow-radical, has held his position for over twenty-five years and, if the neighborhood does not "change" (i.e. integrate) he could hold it for another twenty-five.

Change is the key to the situation in Back of the Yards today just as it was in 1939, only now the residents are the status quo. When a community is organized around the concept of self-interest as Back of the Yards and other Alinsky-organized areas have been, it is natural that self-interest remains the theme of that community's cohesion.

The Council has through the years helped to superimpose an identity upon the area. John Haffner, who has worked for the Journal since it began, remembers the old "jungle" and is proud that few residents move from Back of the Yards.

2

The lack of mobility among the residents is often cited as a criticism of Alinsky for "nailing down" the neighborhood. 3 This criticism has been applied in a slightly altered form to Woodlawn. Philip M. Hauser, head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, believes that "[t]he methods by which Alinsky organized TWO may actually have impeded the achievement of consensus and thus delayed the attaining of Woodlawn's true objectives." 4 Even questioning whether Professor Hauser knows what those "true objectives" are, his comment is suggestive of other academic criticism of the Alinsky model's results. Dr. Harold Foy, editor of *Christian Century*, and Dr. Frank Reissman of the New York Institute for Developmental Studies, are two other outspoken critics. Dr. Foy's objections center on Alinsky's abrasive manner and avowed intention to alter the-existing balance of social power. He has charged Alinsky with encouraging "a political movement whose object is to establish control over urban society by raising up from its ruins a 'power structure' dictatorship based on slum dwellers" 5 Such amorphous hysteria is characteristic of Dr Foy. Dr. Reissman, however, presents a formidable critique in his article "The Myth of Saul Alinsky."

6

He incorporates a spectrum of objections the most important of which concerns Alinsky's apparent inability to move toward anything in the way of developing a movement or a national program or national organization.

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Reissman constructs his critique around Alinsky's emphasis on socialism and the results of that localism which Reissman considers ineffective. He uses an estimate made by Nicholas von Hoffman, that only 2% of a community are ever activated in any IAF organizing drive, to demonstrate the non-representative nature of the mobilization.

The point is valid but of little significance since in any organization the leaders are among the most active members, and decision-making necessarily excludes some elements at times. A more critical question, which Reissman only implies involves the long-range effectiveness of recruited leaders. The only visible national figure to emerge from an IAF endeavor is Caesar Chavez who began as an organizer. Reissman has a better argument when he moves from the internal structure of the local organizations to their activities. The question, as Reissman

phrases it, is whether Alinsky politicizes an area or simply directs “people into a kind of dead-end local activism?”

8

Reissman answers his own question by focusing on Chicago where the most publicized of Alinsky’s efforts have taken place. They have not for all their noise shaken the hold of the Daley machine.

9

Perhaps, the Alinsky model’s emphasis on local issues and goals determined locally diverts energies from wider or coalition organizations.

Reissman postulates that Alinsky’s opposition to large programs, broad goals, and ideology confuses even those who participate in the local organizations because they find no context for their actions. Yet, Reissman’s proposed solution depends on the “organizer-strategist-intellectual” to “provide the connections, the larger-view that will lead to the development of a movement.”

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Almost as an afterthought he adds: “This is not to suggest that the larger view should be imposed upon the local group; yet, it should be developed, in part, by nationally oriented leadership.”

11

This position is accepted by some New Left strategists who, although, disenchanted with Alinsky-like faith in individuals, apply many of his tactics in confrontation politics.

The problems inherent in such an approach, including elitist arrogance and repressive intolerance, have become evident during recent university crises. The engineers of disruption, lacking Alinsky’s flexibility in dealing with their “enemy” (i.e. administrators, trustees, etc.), become hardened into non-negotiable situations. Conflicts then run the possibility of escalating into zero sum games where nobody wins.

Although Alinsky, publicly dismissed the Reissman critique in 1967, he began developing a coherent radical strategy to deal with the trends of the 1970’s. Underlying criticism such as Hauser’s and Reissman’s is the debate over the merits of consensus and conflict both as a means for understanding social processes and for achieving social goals. Alinsky, the exemplary conflict advocate, dismisses the consensus theorists:

One thing we instill in all our organizers is that old Spanish-Civil War slogan: ‘Better to die on your feet than to live on your knees,’ Social scientists don’t like to think in those terms. They would rather talk about politics being a matter of accommodation, consensus– and not this conflict business. This is academic drivel. How do you have consensus before you have conflict? There has to be a rearrangement of power and then you get consensus.

12

As with most of Alinsky’s political analyses there is a convincing ring to this one; however, “reality”, which Alinsky champions, is not so facilely analyzed. The juxtaposition of consensus and conflict has been a matter of dispute among social scientists since Plato.

For our purposes we can join the debate during the 1950's, presupposing all that went before. During the 1950's the conflict theorists such as Lewis Coser followed up the work of men such as Georg Simmel in order to challenge the prevailing consensus orientation. Exemplifying this consensus orientation was Seymour Martin Lipset who writes in *Political Man*:

Inherent in all democratic systems is the constant threat that the group conflicts which are democracy's life-blood may solidify to the point where they threaten to disintegrate the society. Hence conditions which serve to moderate the intensity of partisan battle are among the key requisites of democratic government.

13

Lipset's statement, more functionally prescriptive than societally descriptive, is indicative of other consensus thinkers such as Dewey or Parsons. For them, conflict is incompatible with structure, and organization is dependent on a consensus essential to social equilibrium. Irving Louis Horowitz in his article "Consensus, Conflict, and Co-operation" suggests that the consensus thinkers during the 1950's perceived an increasing democratization of American society that precipitated their search for a consensual basis underlying the affluent society.

14

Consensus was considered fundamental to the managerial state in which mass persuasion is more effective than mass terror.

15

Coser's challenge to the consensual judgment that conflict is dysfunctional is particularly effective because of distinctions he makes among conflicts. The most obvious distinction is internal and external conflict. Because Alinsky's concern centers on intergroup conflicts rather than intra-group ones, these remarks will be limited to the former types.

The discriminating manner in which Coser handles inter-group conflicts can be seen in the following excerpts from the conclusion of *The Functions of Social Conflict*:

In loosely structured groups and open societies, conflict, which aims at a resolution of tension between antagonists, is likely to have stabilizing and integrative functions for the relationship. By permitting immediate and direct expression of rival claims, such social systems are able to readjust their structures by eliminating the sources of dissatisfaction...

A flexible society benefits from conflict because such behavior, by helping to create and modify norms, assures its continuance under changed conditions...

Since the outbreak of the conflict indicates a rejection of a previous accommodation between parties, once the respective power of the contenders has been ascertained through conflict, a new equilibrium can be established and the relationship can proceed on this new basis...

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Assuming that American society is "open" the implication of the above analysis applied to conflict in this country is that such conflict is stabilizing. There is, however, a necessary qualification to be made regarding "realistic and "nonrealistic" conflict:

Social conflicts that arise from frustrations of specific demands within a relationship and from estimates of gains of the participants, and that are directed at the presumed frustrating object, can be called realistic conflicts. Insofar as they are means toward specific results, they can be replaced by alternative modes of interaction with the contending party if such alternatives seem to be more adequate for realizing the end in view.

Nonrealistic conflicts, on the other hand, are not occasioned by the rival ends of the antagonists, but by the need for tension release of one or both of them. In this case the conflict is not oriented toward the attainment of specific results. Insofar as unrealistic conflict is an end in itself, insofar as it affords only tension release, the chosen antagonist can be substituted for by any other suitable target.

17

There is, then, no direct relation between stabilization and conflict per-se but between stabilization and certain types of conflict. This conclusion is essential for our understanding of Alinsky's use of conflict.

Although the People's Organizations once established engage more often in realistic than nonrealistic conflicts,

18

their formation is largely a process of exploiting nonrealistic conflict. It is during this process that Alinsky's critics accuse him of "rubbing raw the sores of discontent" without any specific goal in mind.

Alinsky views the process as having several ends among which is the public airing of grievances:

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 of 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.

19

Alinsky's conclusion that the "ventilation" of hostilities is healthy in certain situations is valid, but across-the-board "social catharsis" cannot be prescribed. Catharsis has a way of perpetuating itself so that it becomes an end in itself. Alinsky's psychodramatics have brought him attention and catalyzed organizational activity, but many sociologists, such as Professor Annemarie Shimony of Wellesley College, regard Alinsky as a showman rather than an activist.

20

Professor Shimony considers both Back of the Yards and Woodlawn failures; the former because of its segregationist tendencies, which are particular hostilities publicly expressed, and the latter because of its takeover by gangs who epitomize a blatant hostility approach.

Another criticism of Alinsky's catharsis approach is the difficulty in applying it. Alinsky, the master showman, is able to orchestrate it, but other less-skilled organizers, such as the Reverend Mr. Fry, cannot maintain control. Many of the Alinsky-inspired poverty warriors could not (discounting political reasons) move beyond the cathartic first step of organizing groups "to oppose, complain, demonstrate, and boycott" to developing and running a program.

21

Coupled to the problem of conflict is the question of what are the results of realistic conflict? The answer in Coser's words is "the maintenance or continual readjustment of the balance of power."

22

And power, from white to black, is Alinsky's language. Recently the language of power has become more familiar among social analysts who have finally arrived at Alinsky's 1939 conclusion that the problems of the poor are more directly related to their lack of power than to their lack of money.

The book, *Poverty: Power and Politics*, neatly colonizes the "new" power approach to the problem of self-help. More accurately the problem is not one of "power" but of "powerlessness."

Warren C. Haggstrom in his essay on "the Power of the Poor" summarizes the approach to the problem of poverty based on the psychology of powerlessness;

If the problem were only one of a lack of money, it could be solved through provision of more and better paying jobs for the poor, increased minimum wage levels, higher levels of welfare payments, and so on. There would be, in that case, no real need for the poor to undertake any social action on their own behalf. This view is consistent with the idea that the poor are unable to participate in and initiate the solution of their own problems.

However, since it is more likely that the problem is one of powerlessness, joint initiative by the poor on their own behalf should precede and accompany responses from the remainder of society. In practice this initiative is likely to be most effectively exercised by powerful conflict organizations based in neighborhoods of poverty.

23

These paragraphs, originally written in 1964, are included in a 1968 collection with other prescriptive treatises urging similar solutions to social problems—which are now out-of-date. One of the people who now recognizes the anachronistic nature of small autonomous conflict organizations is Alinsky himself.

A critique of the power/conflict model for community organization in 1969 can no longer be a critique of the Alinsky-method because that method has undergone a significant evolution since its coalescence in 1939. Those who build models frequently leave their obsolescent ruins behind them for others to play with while they begin building anew.

Alinsky's evolution within the context of the last thirty years places in relief America's great challenge: the search for a viable community. Before discussing this search and Alinsky's role in it, the obsolescence of the power/conflict model will be explored. A primary reason for

the obsolescence of the power/conflict model is that the unit to which it applies, the territorially defined community, is no longer a workable societal unit.

The decline of the neighborhood has been occurring since the turn of the century, slowing somewhat during the Depression then accelerating after the war.

Accompanying the decline of the traditional neighborhood as a living unit were the massive centralization of power on the federal level and the growth of the suburbs. Federal centralization reduced local and state power, while mushrooming suburbs resulted in a form of power schizophrenia in which the urban areas remained the centers of business and culture only at the mercy of commuters.

Thus, we find ourselves in the middle of an urban crisis which is really a crisis of community power. Kenneth Boulding views the problem in the perspective of the international system and sees:

The crux of the problem is that we cannot have community unless we have an aggregate of people with some decisions making power.

The impotence of the city, perhaps its very inappropriateness as a unit is leading to its decay. Its impotence arises, as I have suggested earlier, because it is becoming a mere pawn in economic, political, and military decision-making. The outlying suburb is actually in better shape. It is easier for a relatively small unit to have some sense of community, and the suburb at least has a little more control over its own destiny...Its local government, its school board, and other community agencies often are able to gather a considerable amount of support and interest from the people they serve.

24

Boulding's observations might be used by a modern conflict theorist arguing in favor of Haggstrom's advocacy of conflict organizations in poverty areas. If, he might argue, an aggregate is impotent then there is need for arousing the individuals in that aggregate to exercise their citizenry power.

The next question then becomes, against whom would the conflict be directed? Traditionally the power/conflict model was applied in urban communities in order to organize against something: meat packers, the University of Chicago, Kodak.

The complicated overlapping layers comprising our interdependent urban areas today makes it difficult to single out an "enemy." One of the factors contributing to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school controversy in New York during the Fall of 1968 was the marked absence of an identifiable enemy. The target shifted from the teacher's union to the School Board to the state to the Ford Foundation and around again. The lack of a clear-cut enemy against whom to mobilize underscored the lack of a community capable of mobilization. Yet, perhaps, the conflict theorist might continue his argument by suggesting that the problem is not in the model but in those applying it. With the "right" organizers, such as Alinsky, would it not be possible to organize a community utilizing conflict and participation?

A possible reply recalls the FIGHT effort in Rochester. Many critics of Alinsky's work there believe that the end result is merely a "better ghetto." 25 Alinsky himself is unhappy about the mostly symbolic function which FIGHT has assumed in the community.

26

Given the components of FIGHT, however, is there anything more to be expected? The conditions of slum-bound blacks in our Northern cities is enmeshed in what the Kerner Commission referred to as “institutional racism.” One does not practice the fine art of gadfly conflict against the overwhelming odds suggested by the Commission and Boulding. Interestingly, this society seems to be in a transition period, caught between conflict and consensus. The closest parallel might be the 1930’s when a changing, but still coherent consensus withstood the assaults of outcast groups. The position of labor is the analogy frequently cited to justify the power/conflict model.

Although labor fomented conflict, its goal was always a share of the American Dream. The lack of radicalism in the American labor movement should not surprise anyone who studies the effect that this country’s phenomenal growth had on forming the ethos and expectations of the people. In Coser’s terms, the labor conflicts were realistic and eventually accommodated because institutions were flexible.

During the years since World War II, our institutions have become less flexible under their managerial weight, and the conflicts less realistic. Men still want jobs, but they now demand “meaning” in the jobs they receive. Just because such a demand would have been ludicrous in the jobless thirties the analogy with that era cannot be drawn too closely. Being in the middle of a transition obscures one’s ability to assess it. Elements taken for granted in the power/conflict model of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s must be newly considered. One such element is the role of participation. The power/conflict model assumed that participation, as the root of the democratic process, was a necessary and good thing. Today, nothing is so certain as we wonder just what it is we are participating in. With convincing eloquence John Gardner has argued that the United States has evolved into a society operating on the “beehive model” that locks individuals into tasks that seem isolated and meaningless.

27

The danger of this, Gardner warns, is that “men and women taught to cherish a set of values and then trapped in a system that negates those values may react with anger and even violence.” 28 It is doubtful whether the tired cry for participation offers a solution for, as Gardner says, it is not so obvious that “the urge to participate actively in the shaping of one’s social institutions is a powerful human motive.”

29

In addition to the uncertainty of its two fundamental assumptions, community, and participation, the power/conflict model is rendered inapplicable by existing societal conflicts. The primary visible conflict today is racial with most of our urban problems having racial aspects. Any attempt to specify a conflict cannot help but touch on the larger issues of racism and segregation.

Once those issues are raised settlement becomes increasingly difficult, as illustrated in Roger Fisher’s work on “fractionating conflict.” 30 Fisher’s salami-slicing tactics for dealing with conflict along with Amitai Etzioni’s suggestion that appropriate bribes be offered are two theoretical modifications of the power/conflict model that warrant practical testing. Yet, as our “two societies” move further apart contrived conflict serves to exacerbate the polarization.

Horowitz labels the element needed during this transition “cooperation” and Alinsky would agree.

31

The search for community and the feeling of powerlessness characterize the entire society, not just the poor at whom the power/conflict model was originally aimed. Alinsky’s realizations that the fight against reaction continues in Back of the Yards; that TWO’s conflict orientation backfired; and that FIGHT needed its proxy-voting friends signaled his rethinking the idea of community and devising new strategies to achieve democratic equality.

CHAPTER IV FOOTNOTES:

1 “Plato on the Barricades,” p. 14.

2 John Haffner, Reporter on the Back of the Yards Journal, private interview in Chicago, Illinois, January, 1969.

3 Bruckner, p. G1.

4 Anderson, p. 102.

5 Ibid.

6 Frank Reissman, “The Myth of Saul Alinsky,” Dissent (July-August, 1967), p. 46.

7 Ibid., p. 474.

8 Ibid., p. 475.

9 Ibid., p. 473.

10 Ibid., p. 474.

11 Ibid.

12 Anderson, p. 102.

13 Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1959), pp. 70-71.

14 Irving Louis Horowitz, “Consensus, Conflict, and Co-operation,” System, Change, and Conflict, ed. N.J. Demerath III and Richard A. Peterson (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 265.

15 Ibid., pp. 276-277.

16 Coser, pp. 154-156.

17 Ibid.

18 For a conflicting opinion see: Thomas D. Sherrard and Richard C. Murray, “The Church and Neighborhood Community Organization,” Social Work, (July, 1965), pp. 3-14.

19 Alinsky, “Citizen Participation and Community Organization in Planning and Urban Renewal,” p. 13.

20 Annemarie Shimony, Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College, private interview in Wellesley, Massachusetts, March, 1969.

21 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report of the Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 297.

22 Coser, p. 156.

23 Warren C. Haggstrom, “The Power of the Poor,” Poverty: Power and Politics,

ed. Chaim I. Waxman (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), p. 134.

24 Kenneth Boulding, "The City as an Element in the International System," *Daedalus*, (Fall, 1968), p. 1118.

25 Anderson, p. 102.

26 Alinsky interview, Wellesley.

27 Richard E. Edmonds, "Gardner Urges U.S.: Revive Participation," *The Harvard Crimson*, March 27, 1969, p. 1.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

30 Roger Fisher, "Fractionating Conflict," *International Conflict and Behavioral Science*, ed. Roger Fisher (New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1964), pp. 91-110.

31 Horowitz.

CHAPTER V

REALIZING LIFE AFTER BIRTH

The previous chapter was a "perspective" rather than a "critique" because both Alinsky and his model are continuing to evolve. Although his basic premises, such as the primacy of power and the unavailability of a relative morality are unchanged, his approach to the problem of redistributing power has shifted since his days as a labor organizer.

These shifts are not easily categorized, but they fall into two broad areas; his rethinking the meaning of community and the role of centralized national planning in social change. Central to Alinsky's evolving socio/political philosophy is his rethinking the idea of community:

I do not think the idea of geographical areas, especially of neighborhoods, is any longer applicable. A long time ago, probably with the advent of the car, we came to the end of the definable area.

People no longer really live their lives in neighborhoods. We have political subdivisions which are things out of the past, lines on the maps; we are still involved with this idea. But the life of the people is something else. We are going to have to find out where it really is and how to organize it."

1

When Alinsky talks about finding "it" he is talking about the content of life in mass civilization. The inquiry is really a two-part one: Why, since industrial man found the "good life" does he seem to have lost himself, and where do we go from here?

For Alinsky, the two are connected with the modern search for community. In his speech, "Is There Life After Birth?", presented before the Episcopal Theological Seminary in 1967, Alinsky deals with both parts of the question.

2

Echoing the dire predictions of Ortega y Gasset about the stifling effects resulting from a climate of conformity and consensus, Alinsky concludes that what is at stake is our individual and collective sanity.

3

Unlike the philosopher or artist, he looks for salvation in the political system.

The central problem in the late twentieth century according to Alinsky is the **maintenance and development of that political mechanism which carries the best promise for a way of life that would enable individuals to secure their identity, have the opportunity to grow and achieve being as free men in fact, men willing to make decisions and bear their consequences.**

4

Here, in a very world-oriented way, is the modern man attempting to live in the world-as-it-is. Alinsky continues:

Most people have been and are fearful to pay this price for freedom, and so freedom has largely been freedom to avoid these responsibilities. The free man is one who would break loose from the terrestrial, chronological existence of security and status and take off into the adventure which is life with its passions, drama, risks, dangers, creative joys, and the ability to change with change.

5

In response to a question about his personal philosophy, Alinsky, cringing at the use of labels, ruefully admitted that he might be called an “existentialist.”

6

Yet, as Alinsky has warned before, words can get in the way, especially when discussing the route to such a political mechanism as he outlines. Alinsky simplifies the matter by concentrating on the actualization of traditional democratic ideals. He advocates belief in man’s ability to govern himself and the importance of voluntarism in a free society. These are old ideas, old for Western man and old for Alinsky, but he injects them into a revised model emphasizing middle-class organizing and coalition building. Alinsky’s prescription for the poor helping themselves was to motivate the powerless to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to control their own affairs. His belief that the poor can translate apathy into power and then use that power responsibly has, in some cases, proven true. In others, the transition has been dysfunctional either for the community or for the cause of radical change.

Often the application of the Alinsky model in geographically-bound lower class areas assumes an almost bootstrap formula which is too conservative for our present situation. A People’s Organization of local organizations can at best create new levels of harmony among its members and secure a few material gains. It is not oriented toward harmonizing competing metropolitan interests in a concert of governmental restructuring.

Part of the reason why it is so ill-equipped is the lack of vision Reissman mentioned. Attempts at articulating vision led Alinsky away from the jungles and ghettos to the suburbs, because it is futile to discuss “vision” with a man not yet materially sated or frightened of losing the property he possesses. As Alinsky learned during the FIGHT-Kodak controversy there are great numbers of middle-class Americans suffering from feelings of powerlessness. They, who control the consumer market and the voting box, are bewildered by their children and the wars fought on television screens. The middle class is fertile ground for organizing and, Alinsky thinks, radicalizing.

The frustration in the suburban ghettos, frequently directed at those even less powerful, could be channeled into achieving radical goals. The Secret, as in any organizing, is that such goals must be perceived as paralleling self-interest. A good organizer could direct the process of perception as Alinsky did in convincing stockholders to use their proxies to influence corporate policy.

Or he could organize around an issue such as tax reform where inequities affect the middle class as well as poorer citizens. There is no lack of issues; what is missing are politically sophisticated organizers.

Alinsky plans on erasing that lack with organizers trained in his new school. The Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute is based in Chicago where the IAF has received financial support from the Midas Corporation. (Appendix II).

The Institute's purpose is described on the fact sheet as eventually developing mass power based organizations, which sounds much the same as what Alinsky has been doing.

However, during discussions with Alinsky, he explained the Institute's orientation differently.

7

He hypothesized that his trainees might be "transmitters" digesting, communicating, and acting on information they receive. 8 Logistically, there might be a cadre of organizers in a given area working on a cluster of issues maintaining close touch with another cadre whose cluster need not be similar. What is similar throughout the network is the goal of radicalization.

A network setup would be particularly suited for the political organizing of an entire city. On the city level the obvious first step is cooperation between already existing community organizations in order to pursue certain short-range goals. Generally the structure and vision of the organizations will have to be radically altered to permit such joint efforts.

One of Alinsky's plans for the Institute is to send trainees back into Back of the Yards to organize against the organization he set up. If such reorganization proved successful and if organizers could revitalize TWO's openness to the white community, the groups might cooperate in some mutually beneficial venture. One possibility recommended by a Council worker a campaign for improved recreational facilities.

9

The prospect of their working together is not unrealistic, although, once again, it depends primarily on the skill of the organizers. When one moves beyond the city and local issues, the idea of independent national organizing seems impossible. The Depression demonstrated the feasibility of federally controlled planning and a massive war effort convinced us of its necessity. Now we are no longer so convinced.

Cries for "decentralization" are attacking the roots of the managerial garrison state. They are not easily ignored nor easily interpreted. Is it "decentralization" in Ocean Hill-Brownsville but "unconstitutionalism" in Little Rock? Decentralization and democracy are not synonymous as those who use the words interchangeably would have us believe. There are still too many inequalities in our system for political scientists or demonstrating students to adopt the "doing one's own thing" theory of participation.

Alinsky, ever consistent in his inconsistency, recently expanded his radical commitment to the eradication of powerless poverty and the injection of meaning into affluence. His new aspect, national planning, derives from the necessity of entrusting social change to institutions, specifically the United States Government.

Alinsky's trust in the "people" must be distinguished from his distrust of the status quo and the people who make up that mysterious condition. There are certain structures, institutions, the Post Office for one, that must be used. Alinsky recognizes the impossibility of achieving social change at this time through the incremental means of power/conflict organizing. His supplementary plans call for federally-financed work projects on the order of the TVA.

Alinsky, when asked by Daniel P. Moynihan to work with the new Nixon administration, grandiosely offered Moynihan his plans for solving the urban-crisis, the destruction of the environment, and the dissatisfaction of the citizenry.

He urged the establishment of work projects in the Southwest to bring water to that area, in the Middle West to save the Great Lakes, in the Mississippi Valley to prevent flooding and in any other part of the country where men and money are needed to counteract modernity's assault on the land. He never heard from the White House again.

10

Alinsky's proposals carry obvious spin-off effects. The need for workers could be filled from among the un- and under-employed in the cities. The model integrated communities constructed to house the workers would be self-governing. The projects, administered by bureaucrats and staffed by credentialed experts, would provide attractive recompense and job satisfaction to lure people away from the megalopoli.

The TVA-like proposals, reminiscent of Senator Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential campaign, stand about moving people out of the ghettos, have little chance of ever being legislated. Although they would not be considered too radical in many more centralized welfare states, they are "revolutionary" within a mass production/consumption state, particularly the United States. Must definitions perhaps be as fluid as the actions they purport to describe?

Alinsky would answer affirmatively. In spite of his being featured in the Sunday New York Times and living a comfortable, expenses-paid life, he considers himself a revolutionary. In a very important way he is. If the ideals Alinsky espouses were actualized, the result would be social revolution. Ironically, this is not a disjunctive projection if considered in the tradition of Western democratic theory. In the first chapter it was pointed out that Alinsky is regarded by many as the proponent of a dangerous socio/political philosophy. As such, he has been feared – just as Eugene Debs or Walt Whitman or Martin Luther King has been feared, because each embraced the most radical of political faiths — democracy.

CHAPTER V FOOTNOTES:

1 Bruckner, p.G1.

2 Saul D. Alinsky, "Is There Life After Birth?" Speech presented before the Centennial Meeting of the Episcopal Theological School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 7, 1967, Anglican Theological

- Review, (January, 1968).
3 Ibid., p. 2.
4 Ibid., p. 4.
5 Ibid., p. 5.
6 Alinsky interview, Boston.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ryan, interview, Chicago.
10 Alinsky interview, Wellesley.

Appendices:

- I. VISTA cartoon
II. IAF Training Institute fact sheet and application.

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Personal Interviews

Alinsky, Saul D. Mr. Alinsky and I met twice during October in Boston and during January at Wellesley. Both times he was generous with ideas and interest. His offer of a place in the new Institute was tempting but after spending a year trying to make sense out of his inconsistency, I need three years of legal rigor. Haffner, John. Reporter on the Back of the Yards Journal who represents the views of his neighbors regarding the community's future in conservatively chauvinistic terms. January, 1969, in Chicago. Hoffman, Nicholas von. One of the best of Alinsky's organizers and now a superb writer for the Washington Post. Talked with him by telephone in Washington in October. He was both helpful and provocative. Ryan, Phyllis. Social Worker on the staff of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council who left soon after I interviewed her in January, 1969. Her honesty about conditions in the area as well as her obvious distress over them contributed greatly to my understanding of the situation. Shimony, Annemarie. Professor in the Department of Sociology at Wellesley College. Mrs. Shimony criticized Alinsky's method during our conversation in March, 1969, helping me to focus my own opinions.

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