

ly, we are more alike than different."

Stoltenberg understands that masculinity is an ethical construction. Male supremacy is insured by the masculine right to use and threaten violence. Stoltenberg writes, "the dirty little secret [of patriarchy's] sexual objectification is that it is an act that cannot be performed without any attention to its ethical meaning." In order to oppress the other, men shut down "their capacity for ethical empathy."

What does it mean to refuse to act like a man? It means learning a radically new ethic. Stoltenberg declares that "whatever sexual freedom might be, it must be after justice": connecting sexual politics with ethics and then living fairly. Living fairly will require a recognition that the "dominance-and-submission model of sex... is the domination-and-submission model in the world." Living a fair sexual ethic

will demand a rethinking of all sociopolitical relationships. This is hard intellectual work. Living that ethic will be difficult because living outside of the sex-class-gender system means living outside masculine supremacy.

This act of defiance will bring retaliatory anger, violence, and even death. But, then, why should defiance require anything less from men than it has from women? To those men like himself who know what it is like to "harbor a terror of other men," Stoltenberg declares that it is time to start talking about it together. It is time to "create a revolutionary new sense of selfhood, one this world urgently needs: a sense of self that has the courage to will someone else's freedom."

Stoltenberg writes to men about men. Some men get angry with him for what they call his too cold, curt, and critical

judgment of men. Other, profeminist, men reject him because they disagree with his assumptions and methodology. They want more room in his argument for nature and biology to lodge itself in gender identity. As a political strategy that might make sense, but we must remember that it is we people who create the notion of nature and then assign notions of mystery to it. Stoltenberg's bold project is to speak a story that owns itself.

I like Stoltenberg. I gather warmth and intellectual energy from him. And courage. Courage to live into a new paradigm: courage to reject definitions of ourselves that are not just. I close with the quote from James Baldwin that opens *Refusing to be A Man*: "One cannot...live according to the world's definitions: one must find a way, perpetually, to be stronger and better than that." □

Saul Alinsky and the democratic spirit

MIKE MILLER

SAUL ALINSKY was a major American social inventor. He either introduced or perfected two social forms: the broadly-based, multi-issue community organization that served as an expression of democratic values and the interests of a particular low- to moderate-income constituency; and the professional organizer, whose role was to assist people to develop these organizations, but whose principal affiliation was to an organization of organizers, not to the "peoples' organizations" in whose creation he played a central role.

The Alinsky legacy lives on today. In spite of the general political helplessness and hopelessness felt by most Americans, in communities across the country people are joining together to act powerfully on issues of deep concern to them, their families, and their neighbors.

In the richly textured biography, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, Sandy Horwitt describes Alinsky's development, formative influences, contributions, and inimitable character. In Chicago's infamous

slum "Back of the Yards," Alinsky developed an organization that allowed the Communist-led Packinghouse Workers Union and the Catholic church to work together to overcome industry union-

Alinsky wove together important, and apparently contradictory, concepts into a practical radicalism. His commitment to democracy (liberty, equality, and justice; confidence in the people; antagonism to elitism in all its forms) were at the core of what he did. He also understood power and self-interest, and taught them to those with whom he worked. And on the face of it contradictorily, Alinsky always stayed close to the values of the people with whom he worked. He deeply believed that you could get people to change only by creating opportunities in which they would have experiences that challenged previously held beliefs. Those were educable moments, when racism, for example, could be challenged. But if whites didn't get to know blacks in settings of mutual interests, the chances for change would be slight.

I asked Alinsky once why he hadn't joined the Communist party in the period when their relations were cordial and mutually supportive. "Because," he replied in his blunt fashion, "they don't think their shit's brown." Unfortunately, there were times when he acted similarly, and Horwitt describes the arrogance that sometimes caused him unnecessary prob-

Let Them Call Me Rebel

Saul Alinsky—His Life and Legacy

By SANFORD D. HORWITT

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989.
595 pp., \$29.95

Commonwealth

A Return to Citizen Politics

By HARRY C. BOYTE

New York: The Free Press, 1989.
221 pp., \$24.95

Cold Anger

A Story of Faith and Power Politics

By MARY BETH ROGERS

Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1990. 320 pp., \$14.95

busting activity and the miserable conditions of the meat packing industry, and to create a stable, working-class neighborhood.

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lems in his relationships.

Horwitt's details on Alinsky lose the essence. Horwitt misses what Alinsky's long-time friend and supporter Msgr. John Egan captured when he eulogized Alinsky with these words:

What stands out in my mind when I think of Saul is his integrity, his fidelity, and he never stopped caring about "the people who got pushed around." He was faithful to that belief in season and out of season. He always acted on that belief.

Weaknesses in Alinsky's work included the fact that the organizations never seemed to get beyond their local constituency into city, regional, state, and national federations, and, related to this, lost their early vitality and became more integrated into "business as usual" in their own cities. The book's epilogue tells us that Alinsky's legacy, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), has "addressed and overcome Alinsky's own conceptual shortcomings."

IAF work is among the best community organizing in the nation, and is described by Harry Boyte in *Commonwealth*, and by Mary Beth Rogers in *Cold Anger*.

IAF's projects have developed the farthest in Texas, under the direction of Ernesto Cortes. COPS in San Antonio was the first venture in new directions; its approaches were introduced elsewhere in IAF work. Boyte describes them analytically, and in Mary Beth Rogers they find an excellent story teller. These projects, Rogers tells us, are amassing "relational" not "brute" power; they "minimize their dependence on the IAF organizer for ideas and leadership"; they teach people competence and self-confidence; action is rooted in deeply held values; the "IAF leaders" and "IAF organizations" repre-

sent something new in politics. In Texas, IAF Executive Director Ed Chambers tells her, "We're just beginning to reach our critical mass.... We're the only alternative for people who want to participate in public life in a meaningful way. Otherwise you've got to play the electoral politics game, which takes a lot of money, a good pollster, and someone to craft you for television. It's a sham. You can't call that democracy."

Organizers and leaders

These books, wittingly or not, share in a rewriting of community organizing history. In them, Alinsky is a tactician, not a theoretician; narrowly pragmatic or utilitarian, not a visionary; interested in action on issues, not values, civic education, and development of people. All this despite ample contrary evidence in Alinsky's writings and teachings. The revisionism is widespread. *Something* is different, but what is it?

The central difference in IAF today is in organizational structure and in the relationship of the organizer to the commu-

nity organization. Asked at a recent interdenominational gathering to draw a picture of the structure of her local IAF organization, a volunteer leader placed the IAF organizer at the top. The distinction between the organization of the organizers and what Alinsky called the "people's organization" is becoming blurred. Thus there are "IAF leaders" and an "IAF network." An IAF organizer is the signator to a major agreement between the "power structure" and an "IAF organization"; IAF organizers are spokespersons in the news media—both things that would not have happened in earlier days; indeed, Cortes takes on elements of the charismatic leader that was once anathema to IAF. (One of his lead organizers tells Mary Beth Rogers, "We operate out of Ernie Cortes' vision.")

The problem of continuity has in part been solved by IAF's continuing to perform the organizing function with local organizations. If in the old days one thought of the organizer walking alongside an organization, today he (although now a few women play lead organizer roles) is in front of it. IAFers increasingly

Correction

The day before the May 11 issue was printed—which happened to be the day after the Pennsylvania primary—we called in an extra line of copy for Leon Howell's editorial that said: "Consider Carol Mosely Braun and Lynn H. Yeakel." But we were not able to proofread that line. Dangerous. As you may have noticed, it read: "Consider Carol Mosely Brown and Lynn H. Yeajel." Terribly embarrassing. Our apologies.

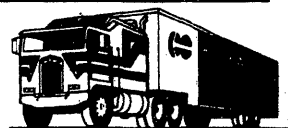
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look like leader-organizers. Because of these changes, they have been able to make dramatic gains over the days of dead-end localism and a five-year vital life span of organizations.

Major decisions in IAF are made by its top organizers, who constitute an IAF Cabinet. Rogers asks Cortes about accountability to community groups. "They can pull the plug on us anytime they want to. They can disassociate." Well, Martin Luther did. Is that really the method of accountability IAF wants? What about democratic as well as marketplace accountability?

Alinsky sometimes called himself an "anarchist"—in the historic rather than pejorative sense of the term. There was a lot of truth in that. His unwillingness to turn IAF into a complex, hierarchical, multileveled organization was a function

of historic accident, ideology, and temperament. IAF's new men of power are certainly not anarchists and temperamentally they have found a way to be organization men.

I repeat: Much can be said in favor of this. But this organizational change is a fundamental discontinuity with the Alinsky past. While it solves some major problems, it creates new ones that will have to be addressed if the success stories told in these books are to realize their full potential. These include tendencies toward: decision making moving away from the base toward the center, and from leaders to organizers; organizers dependent on the center for their careers; organizations dependent on the center for their professional staff; hierarchal rather than collegial decision making.

What about the radical promise in com-

munity organizing? By "radical" Alinsky meant going to the root. Horwitt tells us that Alinsky was uninterested in economics. For him powerlessness was the root cause of the problems of poor and, indeed, middle-class Americans. Alinsky's democratic impulses, continued in current community organizing, are an important element of radicalism. But you can't ignore economics for long. Indeed, Alinsky really didn't. Horwitt describes a key Packinghouse Workers Union strike in which Alinsky tried to convince the union not to accept a pay hike if the cost was passed on to the consumer. The union ignored his advice, as did the rest of the labor movement on the same question. Its current malaise can, in part, be attributed to this earlier narrowness.

As radical organizations become more powerful, they have to address more fun-

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damental questions, go to the root in policy if they are to solve the major problems confronting their members (and the broader constituency) when, unlike before, we are in a shrinking economy.

Boyte talks about collaboration replacing confrontation, of going from protest to responsibility. I prefer to think in terms of a struggle over prerogatives, with a continuing tension between privilege and elitism vs. equality and democracy. The organizations now negotiate with major corporate decision makers.

But what proposals are made? The danger of cooptation is not that you get to sit at the table—unless you think a dramatic, sudden revolution is coming, you want to be at the table—but that you become a junior partner, negotiating within a framework already defined by someone else. The question is what proposals you place there. Community organizations outside the IAF network are looking at worker and community cooperatives. What does IAF propose? It doesn't.

When COPS opposed former Mayor Henry Cisneros' plan for a downtown sports arena in San Antonio, Rogers tells us, it lost. Cortes says that the IAF groups are at a point in their development where losses can be afforded. They don't have to win everything. In general, true enough—with a qualifier. If they won when they rode the Cisneros tide and lost when they challenged it, they will not sustain power for long because Cisneros' program was insufficient to solve the problems of the minorities and poor in San Antonio. Cisneros is essentially a downtown-development-oriented moderate Democrat. In opposing a sports arena, one would assume that COPS had a better vision for community economic development. A COPS leader recently said things are getting worse in her community. National trends are reflected in San Antonio. What can COPS do about this? Unfortunately, the book doesn't address this question. Community organizers should.

Current IAF practice engages community leaders in rigorous discussion of social values and political/economic analysis—another valuable elaboration of Alinsky's much more informal approach to citizenship education. But the directions in which they're headed are unclear, and the parameters seem limited. Examples: Liberation theology ("too analytical, not enough out of tradition and Scripture," says Cortes—echoing Cardinal

Ratzinger) and base Christian communities are out of bounds. He inaccurately says of the latter. "They claimed to be the church—thus they waged an unwinnable fight against an unbeatable foe." He ignores dioceses, such as in Brazil and El Salvador, where base communities and liberation theology were at the core of the church's work. And aren't some of the pope's writings analytical? If Boyte is accurate, so is redistributive economics if the government plays a major role. Economic democracy, as a necessary corollary to effective democratic citizenship, isn't discussed either. IAF sharply distinguishes between "public" and "private" relationships. The latter, including the self and family, are personal, closed, unquestioning, intimate, sacrificial, and limited. You are born into them. The former includes all other associations and is impersonal, open, associated with power, demanding accountability, diverse. You choose them. But aren't they interconnected? And where do solidarity, friendship, loyalty, sisterhood/brotherhood, and community fit?

There is a tension between vision building and political education and the contingencies of building power. In its most vigorous period, the labor movement handled the tension by having different people do different things—education centers and labor educators, and organizers and leaders. No such division of labor exists here: All power to the organizers?

At times we can't tell whether the IAF

is pluralist or populist. Some of its tough political statements seem to be right in the narrower interest-groups-fighting-it-out tradition that Boyte properly criticizes. "Enemies" are now "allies," according to IAF's Ed Chambers. Does that tell us about the power of the IAF organizations or that they stopped making the kinds of demands needed to solve the problems of powerlessness, inequality, and injustice that they must address if their constituencies are ultimately to remain in their organizations? IAF now almost makes a fetish of its commitment to "moderates." Will the next book be *Reveille for Moderates*?

Across the isms

Community organizations are breaking down the barriers of the isms of race, gender, region, and religion by developing relationships among people, taking faith seriously, and offering believable reasons for loving your neighbor.

I doubt that Americans will long tolerate the corruption of the democratic spirit that is now going on in our land. A movement will arise in the not too distant future offering the possibility to regain some of what has been lost and to avoid some of the mistakes of the past, to take steps toward liberty, equality, and justice for all. The organizers and organizations now toiling the vineyards will play a central role in providing leadership and direction to such a movement.

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