

Rapid #: -7734715

Ariel
IP: 129.82.28.195

CALL #: [http://search.ebscohost.com/direct.asp?
db=rfh&jid=ATLA000002 ...](http://search.ebscohost.com/direct.asp?db=rfh&jid=ATLA000002...)
LOCATION: **EAS :: Main Library :: ATLA Religion Database
with ATLASerials (EBSCO Publishing)**

TYPE: Article CC:CCL
JOURNAL TITLE: Christianity and crisis
USER JOURNAL TITLE: Christianity and Crisis
EAS CATALOG TITLE: Christianity and Crisis
ARTICLE TITLE: Organizing: A Map For Explorers
ARTICLE AUTHOR: Mike Miller
VOLUME:
ISSUE:
MONTH: Feb 2
YEAR: 1987
PAGES:
ISSN: 0009-5745
OCLC #:
CROSS REFERENCE ID: [TN:2027692][ODYSSEY:216.54.119.75/GZN]
VERIFIED:

BORROWER: **GZN :: Main Library**
PATRON: **SCHUTZ, AARON**



This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)
3/19/2014 2:55:44 PM

do that kind of organizing. But ultimately that person has got to understand that you're not going to be successful in building these organizations unless they're owned by the people who put them together. A COPS organization is totally self-sufficient. The organization has been in existence now for 15 years. They're going to celebrate

their 15th anniversary next year. But the money comes totally from dues, from institutional dues and money-raising events. You can't get people dependent upon anybody's trough because it always can get cut off; there are always strings....

Books & the arts

Organizing: a map for explorers

MIKE MILLER

YOU CAN'T TELL the players without a program." That's what the hawkers shout at you at any major sports event. They're right, and not just about sports. Anyone trying to follow the action in the debate over community organizing also needs a little help.

Not that arriving at a community organizing "guide" is so easy. As this review seeks to make clear, organizers agree on some general values and principles but not on much else. Indeed, whoever defines the terms usually wins the debate. Nonetheless, an attempt must be made. Here are some central terms:

Community: a group of people who support and challenge each other to act, both individually and collectively, to affirm, defend, and advance their values and self-interests.

Organization: coordinated, disciplined, purposive activity.

Community organization: the purposeful, coordinated, disciplined activity of a group of people who seek to be a community.

Broadly based or mass organization: a community organization with the breadth of support to be able to act powerfully in its efforts to be a community. A broadly based organization may combine several "communities" under the umbrella of a unifying vision and purpose in order to increase its power.

The source of contemporary community organizing is Saul Alinsky, whose biography is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. His work, beginning in the '30s, along with that of Fred Ross, Sr. and Tom Gaudette in the '40s and '50s, can prob-

ably account for most of the community organizing going on in the country today. (The labor and civil rights movements account for the rest.) Both Ross and Gaudette were early pioneers in the field who worked directly with Alinsky and then took off on their own paths: Gaudette primarily in the Midwest, though people he trained spread across the country; Ross primarily in the West, particularly with the Community Services Organization, the early Mexican-American organization in California, and later with the Farm Workers Union. Ross-influenced organizing also goes on across the nation.

These organizers, and the people who write about organizing in the books reviewed here, are all within the small-"d" democratic tradition. They believe in the right, responsibility, and competence of the people to govern their own destinies. They reject sudden, discontinuous, violent revolution as the way to bring about change in the U.S., preferring to use the freedoms of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. They think the development of powerful and autonomous organizations of low- and middle-income people is a key to holding business and government accountable to a greater common good, though they have very different understandings of how these organizations are built and what sustains them.

Organizers today are generally associated with a number of "networks." The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) is the direct heir of Alinsky's work. The Farm Workers Union and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) identify with Fred Ross, Sr. The ORGANIZE Training Center has

used approaches identified with all three men. The National Training and Information Center (NTIC), in association with National People's Action (NPA), has developed its *own* approaches but has a debt to Gaudette. Citizen Action (CA) seeks to combine some of the Alinsky tradition with current movement approaches and is probably least within a narrowly defined organizing tradition. Gaudette is still active through the Mid-America Institute. Ross now works extensively with the peace movement, trying to interest it in developing a more stable, systematic approach to building power.

Standards

Even common standards to measure community organizations are difficult to agree upon. I have some simple ones and suggest that they are good measures for determining whether "people power" is actually being developed in something that presents itself as a "broadly based community organization": (1) The organization is leader- rather than staff-dominated. (2) Leaders have a real and ongoing base. (3) The base, constituency, or membership is involved in an ongoing way in the life of the organization—they are more than a relatively inert mass that is occasionally mobilized for a large demonstration. (4) The organization represents the people it claims to represent and can deliver to prove it. (5) The money for the organization comes from and is raised by its membership through dues and other broadly based fundraising activities.

The authors of the books reviewed here all are supporters of organizing. Their own definitions might vary from mine, though they would be in the same ballpark. Substantial differences exist among

them, however—on matters of principle and practice—as well as contradictions within their own work. All in all, clarifying the various issues presents a challenge all its own. What follows, therefore, is a classification scheme for reading and evaluating these books.

Ideology vs. Values; Reform vs. Revolution. This dimension of the debate over organizing is rooted in real and imagined differences about the nature of U.S. society and how fundamental social change comes about. Critics of the community organizing tradition claim it is superficial in its critique of the maldistribution of wealth and power in the U.S. and that it offers mild reforms that fail to address fundamental social problems and their sources. For some, the criticism includes an explicit alternative commitment to a socialist program and, in some cases, a Marxist analysis of society. For others, the alternative framework is not so clear. Critics of the critics argue that democratic values are a sufficient ideology, and that the building of power based on these values is the central task: Without power there won't be any major changes in the distribution of wealth or power. More fundamental changes will become possible when there is the people-power base to make them realistic.

Robert Fisher's *Let the People Decide* explores many dimensions of this debate. Now an academic (he teaches history and social work at the University of Houston), Fisher toiled earlier in the organizing vineyards, and has some of the bumps and bruises to show for it. His book is enriched by this experience.

Fisher traces the development of neighborhood organizing to the impact of industrialization on U.S. society. The settlement houses established by social workers in the 1880s sought to organize people in neighborhoods, not so much to change the distribution of power in society as "to promote social order by serving as class mediators between the rich and poor, between capitalists and workers." Fisher is no partisan of this kind of approach, and even though he is a little too hard on the early social workers—as he acknowledges, a few settlements did support organized labor—his analysis is correct.

Fisher criticizes civic and neighborhood improvement association organizing of the last 30 years for its narrow focus on parochial issues and its failure to challenge the status quo. Ultimately, he dis-

Activism That Makes Sense

By GREGORY F. PIERCE

Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984.
148 pp., \$6.95

Citizen Action and The New Populism

By HARRY BOYTE, HEATHER
BOOTH, and STEVE MAX

Philadelphia: Temple University Press,
1986. 232 pp., \$19.95

Education for Citizenship

By CARL TJERANDSEN

Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation, 1980.
Available from Organize Training Center,
1095 Market St., #419, San Francisco CA
94103. No charge.

Let The People Decide

By ROBERT FISHER

Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984.
197 pp., \$7.95

Organizing The Movement

The Roots and Growth of ACORN

By GARY DELGADO

Philadelphia: Temple University Press,
1986. 256 pp., \$24.95

The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement

By ALDON D. MORRIS

New York: Free Press, 1984.
354 pp., \$9.95

misses Alinsky and his heirs as simply integrating or coopting people into the system. He is interested in changing the system, in developing an effective U.S. left, and he wants the left of the 1980s to pay attention to ideology, to developing a new political analysis and transmitting it to those being organized. Not that he is crude about it. He understands—in part because of his self-described failure as a neighborhood organizer—that you don't arrive with the "correct line" and expect people to follow you. But even though the process of education may be subtle, ideology is central.

Fisher's critique of Alinsky is that Alinsky never incorporated political analysis and education into his work. That's why Back of the Yards—Alinsky's famous organizing effort in Chicago in the 1930s—turned into a racist organization. Perhaps; but Fisher overlooks other good reasons: McCarthyism debilitated the la-

bor movement and, therefore, dramatically diminished its influence as a force among blue collar workers for racial equality. Blacks and whites didn't have many chances to get to know one another and develop mutual respect. The massive influx of blacks into Chicago was exploited by panic peddlers and red-lining lending institutions. The Chicago machine decided not to tackle the race issue. Back of the Yards was not an ongoing part of a larger social movement built on black and white solidarity.

Fisher wrestles with a good question: How do organizers incorporate political analysis and education into their work? His answers, however, are not too different from the ones he criticizes. Like other critics of the Alinsky tradition, Fisher never really tells us what his ideology is. He is explicitly committed to socialism. He doesn't like communism. But that is about as specific as he gets.

The character of coalitions

Institutionally-based vs. Headquarters-based Coalitions. Organizing coalitions is one of the common approaches to building power. And there are many kinds of coalitions. A coalition that is deeply rooted in its participating groups reflects both the character of its members and takes on an independent character and life. Such rootedness is called "institutionally based" and is contrasted here with "headquarters coalitions," which bring together top leaders but fail to affect deeply the character of participant groups.

Gregory F. Pierce, former seminarian with 11 years of organizing experience with the IAF, describes institutionally based organizing in his *Activism That Makes Sense*. His work is generally descriptive of Alinsky's heirs in the IAF who are now doing some of the most creative work in community organizing. Pierce is primarily concerned with the collapse of mediating institutions: voluntary associations that nurture families and individuals, transmitting values and beliefs and protecting people from the effects of business and governmental decisions. Although Pierce focuses on religious congregations, his analysis and prescriptions can be applied to labor unions and other voluntary associations.

Pierce is most interested in the relationship between faith and action: How can justice-seeking renew the meaning of

faith? How can community organizations that effectively work for justice become the place to train new leaders for dying or "apathetic" congregations?

Pierce knows all the problems—not enough leaders, volunteers, time or money. But he believes that mediating institutions can solve these problems by seriously pursuing their values and self-interests in the world.

How are effective community organizations built? By a careful process based on listening to the majority of people in a congregation. This process, in turn, depends upon training lay leaders who visit people in their homes, convene small meetings of the people they've visited and, finally, convene a general meeting of a substantial number of the members of the congregation. At that meeting, members adopt a specific program of action on a limited number of issues that are important to a majority of the people in the congregation and its surrounding community. If all goes well, a broad-based organization develops as a federation of congregations each engaging in this process. Central to its life is action to hold business and government accountable to the needs and interests of the people the organization represents.

Where successful, these organizations spring from the concerns of average people and reach deeply into their lives. They transform the individuals involved with them, and they become agents for creating community within the member units and the organization as a whole. They function also as schools for citizenship—training new leaders, moving people from civic withdrawal to participation.

These kinds of organizations are not to be confused with headquarters-based coalitions: the kind with letterheads of officers who make policy, executive directors who run the organizations, paid and/or volunteer staff who implement program. These coalitions do on occasion seek to involve their constituents on some issue. But the constituents function less as creators than as supporters of the organization. They rally behind the pressing issue of the day. In a single congregation, the equivalent is that of a pastor working with a small group of dedicated volunteers. The church is occasionally mobilized, but its members are consumers not creators of their faith. In a union the headquarters people are frequently thought of by the membership as "the union"—as in

"What's the union going to do for me?"

Problems and power

Power vs. Issues; Movements vs. Organizations. The focus of community organizers is the building of ongoing power. Specific social problems are viewed as examples of the general imbalance of wealth and power in society. Ongoing organization is needed to change power relations. Specific issues are undertaken because of their importance to an organization's constituency, but more importantly to build the power of the organization. Organizations win and enforce victories because they have the permanence to do so. Movements, on the other hand, come and go. Even if they win a victory, they are unable to enforce it.

Greg Pierce tells us that "involvement will lay the groundwork for teaching the connections between local examples of injustice and national and international concerns." Elsewhere, he quotes with approval Fr. John Coleman's warning to community organizing. Coleman identifies a danger in community organizing: "that this splendid vehicle for empowerment at local levels is capable of its own version of 'tactical provincialism,' which fails to join the issues where people are hurting to a wider social analysis of national and international structures of injustice." If there is any critical weakness in Pierce's book and the IAF's work, it is here.

The problem stems from their appropriate focus on building power as distinct from winning one particular issue, raising consciousness, or making a moral protest. So far, so good: Injustice is generally the result of an imbalance in power, and appealing to reason or conscience is not likely to change that fact. Changes in power relationships will. Pierce and others build power on a multiconstituency, multi-issue basis, uniting low- to middle-income people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and including men and women at all levels of organizational leadership. Again, so far so good.

The problem is that these organizations tend to define as power building only those issues that are most immediate, specific, and winnable. As a corollary, given their interest in involving the broadest possible base of people, they tend to shy away from issues that might stir internal controversy. Both tendencies are de-

fensible. Taken too far, as is sometimes the case in current practice, they are not. A story will illustrate the point. One of Alinsky's famous organizing efforts was The Woodlawn Organization (TWO), in Chicago's black community in the early '60s. Alinsky reported on one of TWO's early meetings: Its leaders wanted to invite a freedom rider to address them—not exactly an immediate, specific, and winnable issue. Further, they wanted to publicize the event in the media and hold it in a large hall. The tough professionals saw all the signs of disaster. They were wrong: The hall was filled to capacity, with people spilling out into the streets.

In other words, organizers need to be careful not to underestimate or protect the people with whom they work. In fact, it is in times of great social movement, when great issues of justice are raised, that the most powerful organizations are built. That's what happened in the 1930s with the building of the industrial labor movement. That's what happened in Poland in the early 1980s with Solidarity. That's what happened in the 1950s and early- to mid-1960s with the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South.

Pierce's understanding of self-interest means he gets certain stories wrong. An example:

When Rosa Parks sat down in the "whites only" section of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, over 20 years ago, she was merely operating in her self-interest. She was tired, the seat was empty and her dignity would not allow her to stand. Mrs. Parks had no intention of starting a bus boycott or launching the modern civil rights movement.... The question about the level of Rosa Parks' consciousness at the time or whether she eventually became an enlightened advocate of international justice is not important. The important thing is that she acted in her own self-interest and in so doing acted in the interest of her entire society.

Not quite. Here's what Pierce has missed: Parks was a civil rights militant in Montgomery; she had completed workshops in community action at Myles Horton's Highlander Center, one of the places that nurtured and developed the Southern civil rights movement. That she was tired wasn't sufficient. Her consciousness was central: Indeed, Pierce tells us "her dignity would not allow her to

stand." She identified with a broader sense of justice and social movement.

The question, then, is not movement vs. organization or power vs. issues. A movement without an organization will surely fail to consolidate power and keep the victories it may win. But an organization that is not part of a movement with greater vision will equally surely fall prey to "tactical provincialism." An organization only concerned with power will ignore issues that raise fundamental questions about the division of wealth (and power) in our society. As a result, it will simply become one of a number of bargaining units bargaining for something already defined by the broader social system and those who are its centers of power.

Mobilizing vs. Organizing. Paralleling the discussion of movement vs. organization is that of mobilizing vs. organizing. Mobilizations, like those against the war in Viet Nam or Martin Luther King's 1963 March on Washington, are one-time things that "turn out" vast numbers of people for a protest action. Typically, most of the people who show up for the mobilization are uninvolved in organizing it and remain uninvolved afterward. They are not incorporated into an ongoing organization. On the other hand, organizations may occasionally use mobilizations to show their strength. When they do, it is their members who mobilize a constituency and, when successful, ongoing involvement in the organization results from the mobilization.

The myth of spontaneity

Aldon D. Morris teaches sociology and is an associate of the Center for Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Michigan. He is also an associate editor of the *American Sociological Review*. With fine attention to detail and story as well as to conceptual clarity, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* dispels many myths of "spontaneous movements" and no organization.

Morris describes the development of "movement centers" like the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and its counterparts in other Southern black communities. He understands both their role as local organizations institutionally rooted in the black church, and the role of the organizer in each of them.

At the MIA, for example, the organizer was E.D. Nixon—a formally untutored

leader of the local NAACP and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. When Rosa Parks got arrested, Nixon knew he had the perfect person to test Jim Crow: a woman of impeccable credentials in the black community. But he also thought about a bus boycott, something that had been discussed by an important black women's leadership group in Montgomery. And he determined it was feasible: "I went home that night," Morris quotes Nixon, "and took out a slide rule and a sheet of

paper and I put Montgomery in the center of that sheet and I discovered that there wasn't a single spot in Montgomery a man couldn't walk to work if he really wanted to. I said it ain't no reason in the world why we should lose the boycott because people couldn't get to work."

Ralph Abernathy wanted Nixon to lead the boycott. But he declined, preferring to have a clergyman, Martin Luther King, Jr., do it: "Ministers will follow one another, and then we wouldn't have to be

— 1836/37 • 1986/87 —

Union Theological Seminary

In The City of New York

celebrating 150 years
announces a

BIBLICAL JUBILEE

This two-day convocation honors a tradition of excellence in Bible study from Edward Robinson through James Muilenburg to a host of living interpreters of the word who have shared Union's history as teachers and students. They include:

Paul Achtemeier
James Ackerman
Bernhard W. Anderson
Lloyd R. Bailey
William A. Beardslee
Phyllis Bird
Thomas Boomershine
Johanna Bos
Madeleine Boucher
Raymond E. Brown
Walter Brueggemann
J. Christiaan Beker
Mary Callaway
Shaye J.D. Cohen
O. Lamar Cope
Richard Corney
Karl P. Donfried

J. Cheryl Exum
William R. Farmer
Cain Felder
Robert Fortna
Reginald H. Fuller
Beverly Gaventa
Deirdre Good
Edwin M. Good
Norman K. Gottwald
Edward L. Greenstein
John Hamlin
Walter J. Harrelson
Holland Hendrix
John T. Koenig
George M. Landes
Eugene March
Joel Marcus
J. Louis Martyn

Paul W. Meyer
Harry M. Orlinsky
Thomas L. Robinson
Sharon H. Ringe
James A. Sanders
Jane Schaberg
Robin Scroggs
Gerald T. Sheppard
Marion L. Soards
Naomi Steinberg
Richard Sturm
Burton H.
Throckmorton, Jr.
Phyllis Tribble
Burton L. Visotzky
James Ward
Robert R. Wilson
Walter Wink

These speakers and others will gather at the seminary to reflect on the theme

"WHAT WAS, IS AND SHALL BE"

APRIL 8-9, 1987

For brochure, contact:
BIBLICAL JUBILEE CONVOCATION
Union Theological Seminary

3041 Broadway at Reinhold Niebuhr Place
New York, New York 10027 (212) 662-7100 ext. 353

fighting the churches to get something done." Nixon had heard King speak, was impressed and, in effect, drafted him to give the organization the kind of vision and focus needed to carry people through the long haul. King was a charismatic leader, but at this point he functioned as part of a team of leaders.

Later, in Birmingham, King and the SCLC came to town and ran the whole operation. But this time, SCLC was a regional organization, King had a national reputation, the budget was no longer based on money from the bottom, and the charismatic leadership of King overshadowed the team approach of Montgomery. SCLC mobilized Birmingham's black community, but failed to leave behind a strong organization.

The Birmingham story illustrates an organizing truth: Mobilizations that are not connected to mass, broadly based organizations come and go. They end up being ignored by the powers that be, or they see their hard-won victories slip away. Mobilizations can be used by powerful organizations to enhance their power—but not as substitutes for such organizations. The focus of Birmingham was on national legislation, and in this it succeeded. What was left behind in Birmingham is another matter and story. Unlike Montgomery, no broad organization preceded the Birmingham actions, nor did one emerge as a result of them.

Though Morris does not intend this reading, his book actually tells us what happens when an organization gets too far away from its people: when a charismatic leader becomes its center, when mobilization replaces organization, and when national media, legislation, and money become the objects of action.

Populism vs. Pluralism. Harry Boyte, Heather Booth, and Steve Max are co-authors of *Citizen Action and the New American Populism*. All have long and rich histories stretching from the movements of the 1960s to the present. Among them, they have been in student, women's, civil rights, and peace movements as well as in community organizations. That two of the three people introducing the book are members of the U.S. Congress is not accidental. Among other things, the "new American populism" seeks to become a major electoral force, offering itself as a values and policy alternative to neoliberalism and moderation

Content not included due to copyright restrictions.

in the Democratic party. The result is mixed.

Populism, in its historic form, fought the concentration of power in the hands of bankers, railroads, and grain elevator operators. While they were sometimes overly conspiratorial in their thinking, the Populists accurately warned about the concentration of wealth and power in America in the late 1800s and its devastating effects on democracy. Pluralists, on the other hand, have generally understood power in America to be widely dispersed. They see various organized sectors competing for power, but no permanent concentration of power.

Pluralists show a deep understanding and appreciation of the diversity in culture and experience of the people of the United States. Populists tend to emphasize the common economic interests of the majority who are all exploited, oppressed, or abused by those who control the major economic institutions of the society. Historically, some populists became rabid racists. On the other hand, one can have a populist understanding of how power is organized in America and a pluralist commitment to religious, cultural, and social diversity.

"Progressive Populism" (PP) as described by Boyte et al, links the destruction of our neighborhoods to the practices of unaccountable corporations and government. It seeks ways to reweave the social fabric by linking together the divided and conquered majority of Americans. Progressive populists would restore power to local communities. They support a pluralist society, but unlike traditional liberals they don't think power today is organized the way pluralists would have us believe. They also steer away

from some of the "social issues" characteristic of today's liberalism because they are too divisive. Otherwise, their program is not all that different from tough, new-deal liberalism.

Progressive Populists use imaginative and bold rhetoric. They stake out broad themes, using images that may reclaim work, neighborhood, patriotism, family, and religion for those who also seek social and economic justice and oppose U.S. intervention abroad. (A caveat: To broaden the definition of "family" to include all households may never get to the heart of the religious right's appeal to those who are upset about the disappearance of the traditional family.) Progressive populists also have identified the Achilles heel of right-wing Populism: its inability to deliver on major economic issues. While the right may appeal to the values of millions of Americans, it is too allied with corporate America to do anything about the problems facing those same millions.

'Citizen Action'

But what do the PP's actually propose? We are told that "citizens can use government to train, empower, organize, and teach" so that communities and people "can solve problems for themselves with the assistance of responsive public agencies." Is this a call for government-paid citizen participation as in the days of the "war on poverty"? I hope not. The PP concept of citizenship, the respective roles of voluntary associations and government, and the role of political parties and politicians are all unclear. And what exactly is a Populist politician? At one point, the range includes San Antonio's Mayor Henry Cisneros. Cisneros is an

important Hispanic moderate in the Democratic party, but a populist? And how are we to understand Progressive Populists like Paul Simon, who voted for a balanced budget? All in all, the book has too much smoke, too many mirrors, and too much hype. At one point, with shades of Richard Viguerie, the PPs claim to be close to being ready to govern!

Boyte et al. support a form of political activity called "Citizen Action" (CA)—a national federation of statewide organizations in some 20 states. The local groups all emphasize action on major state and national issues, and direct participation in electoral politics. But are they, as the authors claim, deeply rooted community organizations able to mobilize large numbers of people on the big issues? I doubt it. To demonstrate CA's power, the authors quote a CA leader: "Now, whenever there is a major issue, the television reporters come to our office to ask what we think." But media visibility does not mean that an organization is deeply rooted in a community or that it is powerful.

CA's strength lies elsewhere: in the tools of political mobilization that it has developed. They know how to formulate issues to gain broad support; they bring together the right mix of labor, women, minorities, environmentalists, and seniors to head their coalitions. They make good use of direct mail, phone banks, voter education and registration, as well as the media and other modern political techniques. All in all, they have won some major policy victories, and they have helped elect some progressive politicians.

Most important, CA has developed an important new mobilizing technology: the canvass. If you live in almost any urban or suburban area, with a population of a million or more, within an hour's drive of a central point, you probably have been visited by a canvasser: a young activist who comes by your house in the evening to mobilize support and money for good causes. Canvassers, Boyte tells us, visit some 12 million middle-American households a year. They talk to people, listen to their views, tell them about CA's program. True enough. But canvassers do not have much input in determining what CA's program is. They are considered a fundraising arm or, at best, as the educational and mobilizing adjunct to a program that is decided somewhere else.

Canvassers should and could have a greater voice in the decision-making proc-

ess at Citizen Action affiliates. CA is aware of the problem and is trying to deal with it. Until it finds a way, however, it will continue to minimize the potential of a partnership between the canvassers and the headquarters-based coalition organization. In the meantime, it should stop insisting that it is a deeply rooted community (or other) organization. CA should play to its strength and eliminate its weakness.

Coalitions vs. Direct Membership. Coalitions, whether headquarters- or institutionally-based, are organizations of existing organizations. The National Council of Churches (NCC), the AFL-CIO, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights are all coalitions. Direct membership organizations, on the other hand, are made up of individual (or family) members. One joins directly, not through another affiliation. Your congregation, the PTA at your school, the NAACP, or a union are all direct membership organizations.

When Fred Ross, Sr. started organizing Mexican-Americans in California just after World War II, he had to decide whether he would work through the Catholic church or form a new "direct membership" organization. He decided to bypass the church because it was either uninterested in or hostile to the problems the constituency faced. In other words, Ross had a tactical problem and made a tactical choice. Out of that choice, a great debate ensued. Ross, we are told, did constituency and/or issue organizing. Alinsky, his mentor, did neighborhood or institutional organizing. These are supposed to be the two "models" in organizing. Nonsense.

Access and leaders

If you want to organize powerless people, you find out how to reach them and that is the route you choose. If the institutions they belong to won't provide access or if they don't belong to institutions, you go directly to the constituency. If the institutions will provide access, you work through the institutions. Since some powerless people are reachable through institutions and some aren't, both approaches are appropriate.

In fact, Ross relied on many an assistant pastor or sister to give him entree. And, as nearly every organizer knows, neighborhoods have their gatekeepers, the "Mayors of the Block" who hold peo-

ple's respect. Smart organizers solicit their support. The job then becomes a lot easier. Door-to-door canvassers know this too: "Oh, Clarissa Jones gave you money; well, if it's good enough for her, then it's good enough for me." That kind of response comes along with human relationships and trust. Where those relationships don't exist, community has been destroyed. Community organizing seeks to build and rebuild those relationships.

One of Ross's students in a subsequent organizing effort was Bill Pastereich, who then went to Massachusetts to organize the Welfare Rights Organization. One of the people to work with Pastereich was Wade Rathke, who later went to Arkansas to start his own organizing. Out of this work came ACORN—the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. It included low- to moderate-income people, whether welfare recipients or not. ACORN has not become a mighty oak, but it does some of the most interesting organizing in the country. And in places where the local organizer has been talented enough to sink some roots and do the necessary work, ACORN has made its mark.

MIRIAM THERESE WINTER

on

Contemporary Liturgical Life

at

**Mt. Saviour Monastery
Elmira, N.Y.**

March 20, 21, 22, 1987

THE COMPANY AT KIRKRIDGE

Are you looking for a way to be yourself and still be Church? Join a network of contemporary Christians to worship, support, and stimulate inward-outward journeys cutting across all boundaries.

For more information:
Anthony Ciccariello
520 W. Gray St.
Elmira, N.Y. 14905

Gary Delgado is the head of the Center for Third World Organizing, which specializes in minority constituencies and issues. In *Organizing the Movement: The Roots and Growth of ACORN*, he tells the story of a major effort to build a direct membership community organization. He elaborates ACORN's history, details its way of working, introduces some important ideas about organizing, and tries to develop ways to distinguish ACORN from other organizing ventures.

The beginning of the book is somewhat heavy-going and Delgado is at times obscure. He also tends to be a little moralistic, and to underappreciate those who don't work in the ACORN mode. But he is an avowed partisan who is also willing to criticize where criticism is appropriate. That is a great strength. His criticisms, moreover, ring true to experience.

The first problem a direct-membership organizer faces, Delgado tells us, is building an organizing committee (OC) of local residents. OC members learn about ACORN, talk about community problems, and find out how to select issues that will build the organization. They learn to plan and conduct effective meetings, and get people to attend them. They are the heart of the emerging new community organization, and they are likely to become its elected leaders.

In the beginning, the organizer of any organizing effort picks the leaders by deciding whom to talk to. But if they are not also picked by the people they are supposed to represent, a fruitful and democratic organizing effort is not likely to follow. Often, organizers choose the person most ready to get involved or the person who thinks like they do. The organization then ends up reflecting the thinking of the organizers. That's not the way to build organizations that won't disappear as soon as the organizers turn their heads.

A unifying organization will develop leaders who represent various opinions and backgrounds—even in what appears to be the most homogeneous of neighborhoods or organizations. Over time and in the course of common struggle and thought, a shared vision and analysis emerge. Moderates become more militant. Those militants who joined in the first place learn that the most important thing about tactics is that they bring others along and help people win. People who are used to blaming themselves or scapegoating others for their problems—

or, worse, who think that if only the power-holders knew our problems they would solve them—gain a different perspective. They learn about self-interest and power, about unity and strength, about multiracial cooperation and democracy.

Delgado takes issue with Fisher and others who think community organizing is system-affirming when it lacks an explicitly "radical ideology." Delgado believes that community organizations can be both left and practical. He argues, persuasively in my judgment, that they ought to create pressure on the system to meet the needs of low- to moderate-income people as well as to create and validate "oppositional behavior." The values and ethos of democratic action substitute for a combination of deference to those who know better with complaints about how bad things are. The "new person" emerges in this process—not as the product of a vanguard party or a full-blown ideology.

Delgado also tells us about some of the problems and pitfalls of direct membership organizing. He could tell us more. Without the anchor of a longstanding institution, like a religious congregation, new organizations are difficult to maintain. Delgado notes that a lot of what does sustain them is the friendships and solidarity they create. That point is well taken. He doesn't elaborate on the role of mutual aid, political education, and reflection on values in sustaining direct membership organizations. All were, for example, central to the CIO, civil rights movement, and Populists. He also underestimates how easily these new ventures disappear. Indeed, the evidence from ACORN's own failures suggests that it does not offer a simple "replicable model" for community organizing.

Activists vs. Leaders. Headquarters-based organizations are peopled by activists; they may be paid or unpaid. They may be members of congregations, labor unions, or civic associations. When you assemble them you have a coalition of activists. But if none of them has the kind of relationship with a constituency that is necessary for building power, the coalition will be "thin." Its constituency will have a consumer attitude toward the organization and be separate from it: What can it do for them? What is it going to do about *their* problem?

Activists complain about this. They say they want more participation. If they do,

they should read Pierce's book. His prescriptions are a good antidote to the maladies that often afflict activists: the tendency to remain isolated; to enjoy martyrdom; to want to do things their own way without give-and-take with more "backward" members; the creation of little subcultures of "correct thinking"—in short, a kind of cosmopolitan arrogance that looks down on the rest of America.

Delgado, Pierce, and Morris all understand that leadership depends on a give-and-take with an ongoing constituency: i.e., regular meetings and the involvement of members in the daily life of the organization. Activists can become leaders if they want to. Leaders, unless they are careful, can lose touch with their own bases and become activists.

Left and center

Strategy vs. Tactics. Strategy has to do with the overview, the grand design or plan, the big picture. Tactics have to do with the details, the methods, the steps that take us from here to there. Confusing the two is common and fatal to the development of an organizing effort.

Effective people's organizations maintain a balance between different tactics. They include direct, disruptive action when that is appropriate, and they know how to negotiate face-to-face with their counterparts in government and business. Mutual aid, formal education, boycotts, electoral participation, and reflection on deeply held values are all part of their arsenal. They develop as historically unique enterprises, thus no "model" is possible. What is central is the commitment to building something that is outside the major political parties but within the freedoms of the Bill of Rights.

My own view—implicit in the approach taken to these books—is that the times call for the development of an independent, mass movement—analogue to the industrial union movement of the 1930s. The CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) sought to organize all workers in an industry in one union; it preached and practiced (to a striking extent, given the times) racial equality. It involved itself in the smallest of problems facing its members as well as in the big issues of its day. CIO unions aided the organization of the unorganized with people power and money. No movement in this century more

embodied the hopes and aspirations of millions of Americans for social and economic justice. On the other hand, the AFL (American Federation of Labor) in the 1920s and '30s, against which the CIO unions rebelled, was organized by craft, not industry, generally included only skilled workers, was racially exclusive, defined its interests in the narrowest of terms, and stayed aloof from the problems of the vast majority of unorganized workers. It is no accident that Alinsky carefully studied the CIO or that it was the CIO Packinghouse Workers Union that was one of his early supporters.

The CIO, like Alinsky's first organizing effort in the Back of the Yards, was an alliance of the left and center. Indeed, its organizing impetus and energy would not have been possible without the left, including the Communists. Some people have looked back on the days of the CIO and said they made a mistake: The Communist left should not have been expelled from the CIO, and its opponents should have out-organized it. Fifty years later, we still need a center-left coalition if we are to move toward social and economic justice, rebuild community, and restore

the proper balance between economic growth and the environment. IAF/Pierce may be guilty of extremism of the middle. They are appropriately concerned with organizing the vast majority who are uninvolved. That doesn't require antagonism to movements, activists, mobilizations, or to progressive politicians.

How is a center-left movement built? Deeply rooted locals of unions, congregations, and civic associations (ethnic, neighborhood, ACORNs, etc.) are the beginning point. They should be eclectic in the tactics they use: direct disruption; economic action (boycotts, greenlining, etc.); political action (voter registration, etc.); mutual aid (co-ops, credit unions); and formal political education that links a broader analysis to what members are doing. (I do *not* mean sterile programs produced by "education departments" that don't even talk with people before they produce their materials. Look to Myles Horton's work at Highlander for examples of how to do it. On the other hand, don't look to him to understand how to organize.) Such organizations, moreover, will always need planning, training, and evaluation if they are to grow. When they

get together as organizations of organizations, they will be more than a meeting of central headquarters personnel.

All the books under review confuse tactics with strategy. Building a broad movement may or may not involve electoral participation. Whether it does should be a matter of tactics. Some of the best organizations in the country, for example, are coming out of the work of the IAF and others doing institutionally-based organizing. We should study them carefully. We should also learn from Citizen Action's emphasis on formal education. Boyte et al. describe an economics seminar conducted by Steve Max for local organizing leaders. It sounds terrific. Nor should we automatically dismiss disruptive action. NPA uses it quite creatively. In short, effective power organizing uses a strategic balance of different tactics to build a powerful organization. The issue is not so much the tactic, but how many people use it, whether they have a broad base of support, and whether they are using it to build power or to get media attention.

Profession vs. Craft vs. Calling. Full-time organizers play a critical role in the development of popular power in peo-

Each year over 150 new students enter one of Princeton's five degree programs to prepare themselves to follow God's call into the church and the world. If you have sensed God's call upon your life and seek a place where you can deepen your faith and widen your knowledge of the Christian tradition through serious scholarship, maybe you should become one of them.

For information about admission, please contact the Reverend Michael Livingston, Director of Admissions, Princeton Theological Seminary, CN821, Princeton, NJ 08542 (609) 921-8095.



PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*Where faith and
learning are facts of life*



ple's organizations. But are they professionals? Many of these writers would have us think so. I disagree. The hallmarks of the professions are a language that separates them from their "clients," a standard of ethics, a clearly agreed-upon body of knowledge and practice, a credentialing process, and a means by which the professionals are regulated—by themselves and by government. I don't think we want all of that.

Organizers should be decently paid. The old CIO unions said that paid officials wouldn't get more than the highest wage negotiated in a contract. A good idea. It has an element of calling, and organizing without a sense of calling can easily become self-serving. Who would regulate and credential organizers? Better to think of organizing as an apprenticeable craft, learned by selecting a mentor, and to use the general standards mentioned at the beginning of this review to measure effectiveness.

The issue of professionalism raises an important question. To whom are organizers accountable? Is there a democratic process among them? If, as in one of Alinsky's formulations, they are accountable to their local organizations, how will a common agenda be hammered out? If, as in the case of ACORN, they are accountable to some central organizer, how will the organizers remain responsive to local circumstances and needs? And if there are organizations of organizers seeking monopoly credentials, will they be any different from any other monopoly?

Their Money vs. Our Money. Whoever pays the piper calls the tune. For organizations to be independent, the people have to pay for them. If not 100 percent, a substantial portion of the budget should come from dues and member-run fundraisers. And if the membership can't pay all the way, they, not paid staff, have to get the rest. Otherwise, community organizations quickly become staff-run.

Delgado describes the ACORN commitment to dues, quoting Rathke: "If the membership stops paying dues, we're out of business." Whether practice realizes theory is a question, especially when organizers start canvassing for dues rather than having the members collect them. Delgado doesn't say much about this. Morris describes the early days of "bottom up" money in SCLC, but he also loses track of the money issue, failing to analyze the increasing dependence of

SCLC on national direct mail and other money and, related to that, national media visibility. Pierce mentions dues, but should have said more about how he and his IAF associates have developed organizations whose core budgets are paid by dues and member fundraisers. Boyte et al. talk a lot about the canvass, but staff-collected money is not the same as member-raised and -collected money—not if you want member-run organizations. Fisher most shows his lack of experience in the concrete tasks of building the kind of organizations he'd like by his failure to discuss money.

A small number of denominational sources and foundations now provide the start-up funding for community organizing efforts. It is unlikely that any such organizing will get off the ground without initial outside support. But that is far different from continued dependence on these sources.

Last but not Least. A wonderful book deserves mention here. Carl Tjerandsen spent the last money of the Schwartzhaupt Foundation and a good deal of his time writing, publishing, and distributing this book. Titled *Education for Citizenship*, it is an evaluation of how the Foundation spent its money. In the process Tjerandsen deals carefully with many of the issues raised in this review and makes a valuable contribution to the history of the organizing tradition in the U.S. The

book tells us about the origins of contemporary organizing, and it's free!

Saul Alinsky, resting in Hades or Heaven (depending on one's perspective), must be laughing uproariously at the controversies that have followed him. Perhaps he is puzzled at the "denominationalism" that has emerged, though he once predicted that organizing egos would get in the way of a universal community-organizing "church."

Another side of Alinsky must be disturbed as well: that part deeply committed to the dignity of the individual, as well as to the values of community, solidarity, justice, equality, and freedom. He knew that a national force would be needed to affect the increasing concentration of power in society. He had a faith in the capacity of people to organize democratically to build that force. Yet he feared the paralyzing effects of sectarianism.

That many of today's organizers argue with him and among themselves ultimately is a tribute to Alinsky and to his work. After all, among Alinsky's most famous texts is his instruction that we look at life as a question mark. He also said we should have a blurred vision of the good society, flexibility in methods and tactics, a well-developed sense of humor, and an unalterable commitment to democratic values and faith in people. That's enough ideology for me. □

Beginning with Alinsky

PAT SPEER

The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky

By P. DAVID FINKS

Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984.

305 pp., \$9.95

IN 1939, a criminologist named Saul David Alinsky was sent by his employer, a service agency for juveniles, into the benighted Chicago ghetto known as "Back of The Yards" to organize an antidelinquency program. While there, he encountered and became enamored of the

PAT SPEER works out of Bridgeport, Ct. for The Youth Project, a national foundation providing funding and technical assistance to community organizations.

CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) organizers John L. Lewis had sent to build a union among the neighborhood's destitute, ethnically diverse, stockyard and packinghouse workers.

Alinsky's experience moonlighting with the CIO gave rise to a momentous idea: The principles and methods the labor movement used to organize people where they worked, as producers, could also be used to organize people where they lived, as citizens. Acting on that insight, Alinsky founded the Back of The Yards Community Council, the first modern community organization. With the support of the area's Catholic priests, the council forced the packinghouse owners to recognize and bargain with the union.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.