**NEW LABOR FOR *CounterPunch***

**New Labor’s Debt To Saul Alinsky?**

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**A review and critique of Jane McAlevey’s “The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky’s Legacy: Revisiting the Role of Organic Grassroots Leaders in Building Powerful Organizations and Movements.” Published in *Politics & Society 1-27*, 2015; SAGE Publications.**

**Summary**

**Jane McAlevey is a union organizer and a critic of what is generally thought of as the U.S. “labor reform” movement. In a recent article, she outlines her critique of “New Labor” and attributes its weaknesses to the ideas and practice of Saul Alinsky, the best known community organizer of his time and a continuing influence in American community and labor organizing. In this review of her article, I separate her criticism of labor—which I think has merit—from its attribution to Saul Alinsky—which I find without merit. The argument is important because radicals interested in social transformation need to pay attention to Alinsky. His dismissal as an incremental pragmatist results in failure to learn important lessons he has to teach.**

**Introduction**

This review and critique is particularly aimed at people “on the left” who are, or want to be, organizers or leaders of small “d” democratic people power organizations—whether at the workplace or in “communities”. I am not here arguing for the necessity of such organizations; I assume it.

In “The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky’s Legacy…”,(1) Jane McAlevey brings criticism to bear on “New Labor” (the grouping who consider themselves labor reformers, who took leadership of the AFL-CIO at its 1995 Convention, some of whom left the AFL-CIO not long thereafter to form Change To Win) based on her experience and thinking. I find her criticisms often persuasive.

She also claims that New Labor’s problems largely originate in Saul Alinsky’s thinking and practice, and to what she calls “the Alinsky diaspora”. I do not agree with her view of Alinsky.

Jane McAlevey is a respected organizer, and a thoughtful observer of U.S. unions. By both her own and the accounts of others, she knows how to build participatory, democratic union locals. But her case against Alinsky does not bear close scrutiny. She elaborates her article in a soon-to-be published book.

This is not merely a matter of historic accuracy or interest. There is a long-standing left Alinsky criticism that leads to his dismissal as anything more than—take your pick of one or more of the following: an imaginative tactician and nothing more; a pragmatic reformist with no broader vision than traditional American pluralism; an anti-communist red-baiter; owned by the Catholic Church; a CIA agent (in Italy), and more.

Having worked for Alinsky, and knowing some of his close associates, I use my own experience and that of others, Alinsky’s writings, speeches, interviews and other materials, and writing by organizers I believe to be in “the Alinsky tradition” to specifically dispute McAlevey’s claims and analysis, and more generally to challenge other claims about his views.

I hope to convince people who are interested in building and leading people power organizations to confront and transform the current state of affairs in the world that they can learn a good deal from Saul Alinsky. Which isn’t to say that there aren’t also things to criticize; I have done that elsewhere.

Let me here deal quickly with the “diaspora.” Anyone can call himself or herself an “Alinskyite”, “Alinskyist”, “Alinskian” or some permutation of the same. They could do that for any of a number of reasons: they imagine themselves to be carrying on in a tradition they respect and value; they want to borrow Alinsky’s legitimacy; it helps with some foundation or church funding sources; they want to provide a window dressing for ideas or behavior that would be open to criticism without some more respected person’s name identified with it. There are no doubt other reasons as well.

Making Alinsky responsible for those who claim his mantle is like blaming Freud for whatever may be the faults of Jung and Adler; blaming Marx for Pol Pot and Kim Jong-un; and, for that matter, blaming Jesus for the Inquisition. To do any of these, you have to start with what Alinsky, Freud, Marx or Jesus said, and then see if the diaspora is true to it. McAlevey’s textual analysis doesn’t accomplish this. The Alinsky diaspora is an interesting subject, but I leave its discussion for another time. My focus is on Alinsky himself.

**McAlevey’s Methodology**

McAlevey says:

I have used Alinsky’s own texts, what he himself said and wrote, as the foundation for this discussion.(2)

I conducted a line-by-line content analysis comparing his first book, *Reveille for Radicals*, with *Rules for Radicals,* which I consider the defining Alinsky text… (3)

I put a premium on his very last public words, an extensive interview conducted by *Playboy* magazine three months before he died…”(4)

[I conducted] “semistructured interviews…with longtime Alinsky organizers.”(5)

If by the last she means someone who worked with Alinsky, or for the Industrial Areas Foundation when he was still alive, there is not one such organizer identified. Nor, for that matter, is anyone identified who worked closely with any of Alinsky’s direct associates—who were few in number, and known in the field. No interviews, articles or anything else by any of these people are cited. I carefully checked the 66 “Notes” (footnotes) that accompany the article to find out who these sources were.

No systematic index identifications demonstrate a “line-by-line content analysis”. While *Reveille for Radicals*(6) is cited, there are no page numbers indexed. And for *Rules for Radicals*,(7) the only pages cited are 63-66. A “line-by-line content analysis” deserves more representation in an index or the text so that a reader can go to the source and check for her/himself—as I wanted to do.

She says Alinsky “key postulates” are represented in New Labor. If “key postulates” means core concepts or fundamental principles, there’s no way to make this connection because the evidentiary linkages that would be required to demonstrate it simply aren’t part of either her text or “Notes.”

**McAlevey’s Case**

Leaving aside methodological problems, I want to look at the substance of McAlevey’s case. She says important things about the state of organized labor, organizing and related matters. She fails to connect them to Saul Alinsky’s ideas or practices.

Her central claim, is stated in the article’s *“Abstract”*:

This article examines the strategic choices made by New Labor’s leadership after their victory at the AFL-CIO Convention in 1995, and the choices made by the breakaway unions that formed Change to Win. I identify the influence of Saul Alinsky…and attribute the strengths and weaknesses of New Labor’s organizing approach to Alinsky’s strengths and weaknesses…[A] crucial factor in labor’s decline rests with decisions within its control to embrace corporate campaigns and narrowly defined interest-based politics—decisions that led unions away from workers and the workplace and put them at odds with unorganized workers and the community.(8)

A key piece of McAlevey’s argument is summed up in this paragraph:

“A key aspect of the CIO organizer’s craft was identifying organic worker leaders in the shop and anchoring campaigns in the ‘whole worker’, who was understood to be a person embedded in a range of social relationships in the workplace and in the community. By contrast, Alinsky’s ‘people’s organizations’—what he called “O of O’ or Organizations of Organizations—were top-down rather than bottom-up formations, staff driven and focused more on tactical warfare than on keeping people organized to control their own destiny.”(9)

Here are more of her statements (I will subsequently analyze them):

I identify the influence of Saul Alinsky in the background of many of the current New Labor leaders and attribute the strengths and weaknesses of New Labor’s organizing approach to Alinsky’s strengths and weaknesses.(10)

[This article]…identifies the influence of several strands of Alinsky doctrine in the organizational background of many current New Labor leaders…(11)

**Corporate Campaigns**

[New Labor leadership’s Alinskyist origins] prioritization of corporate campaigns reproduced and privileged Alinsky-like ‘jujitsu tactics’ in a ‘war’ conducted between labor and business elites.(12)

I will argue that Alinsky’s extreme pragmatism and his embrace of ‘ends justify the means’ tactics enabled New Labor’s leaders to rationalize accords with big business that stripped workers and their communities of the ability to defend themselves against their employers.(13)

Moreover, New Labor’s adoption of Alinskyist methods stands in contrast to the organizing style at the root of many of organized labor’s great victories…the successful organizing of the union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) during the 1930s.(14)

Alinsky’s worldview is virtually indistinguishable from New Labor’s…(15)

Alinsky is frequently credited with helping to develop the concept of the corporate campaign…Corporate campaigns reproduced and privileged Alinsky-like ‘jujitsu tactics’ in a ‘war’ conducted between labor and business elites.(16)

**Means and Ends**

Alinsky’s extreme pragmatism and his embrace of ‘ends justify the means’ tactics enabled New Labor’s leaders to rationalize accords with big business that stripped workers and their communities of the ability to defend themselves against their employers”.(17)

**Tactical Warfare**

I contrast Alinsky’s well-known core principles for organizers, as laid out in *Rules for Radicals* [she identifies 13 aphorisms about power tactics] with the core principles of an 1199 organizer.(18)

[Alinsky’s organizer is] “focused more on tactical warfare than on keeping people organized to control their own destiny.”(19)

**Leaders and Organizers**

The role of the CIO-1199 organizer [the approach she contrasts favorably to Alinsky’s] is to correctly identify the organic leaders…then teach and apprentice them through the employer fight.(20)

[Alinsky’s] professional staff chose and anoint worker leaders based on their own observation and preference.(21)

[I]n *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky obscured the issue of organizer strategy. He declared that there are *leaders* and there are *organizers*, and that they are different...The role of the CIO-1199 organizer is to correctly identify the organic leaders…then teach and apprentice them through the employer fight.(22)

Alinskyist methods stand in contrast to the organizing style at the root of many of organized labor’s great victories…the successful organizing of the unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) during the 1930s.(23)

**Top Down vs. Bottom Up**

…Alinsky’s ‘people’s organizations’ were top-down rather than bottom-up formations…(24)

**Ideology/Fair Share of the Pie**

Fundamentally, Alinsky was not proposing class struggle or threatening the structure of the economy or of society. He wanted a fairer share of the pie for ‘freedom loving’ people. Alinsky’s worldview is virtually indistinguishable from New Labor’s…” (In her book *Raising Expectations* McAlevey approvingly cites *Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy,* by Rinku Sen who, “argues that Alinsky’s obsession with pragmatism and nondivisive issues resulted in generations of otherwise good organizing that often undermined the very people who need good organizing the most, the poor, the working class, and people of color, none of whom have issues that could be easily characterized as nondivisive.”)(25)

*Reveille for Radicals* was the first book that discussed organizing as a craft devoid of ideology…(26)

On the question of ideology, Alinsky was caustic…and had…an obsession with [Alexis de Toqueville’s idea of] the primacy of the individual versus the omnipotence of the state. He often preached Tocqueville’s embrace of the middle class as the anchor of a ‘free’ society…(27)

New Labor, she says, is about “narrowly defined interest-based politics”, which can be attributed to “the influence of Saul Alinsky…[and] to Alinsky’s strengths and weaknesses”.(28)

[In the CIO-1199 model, a workplace organizing committee is] “made up of the organic leaders, not activists as in the Alinsky-New Labor model”.(29)

These, and other not-cited, statements by McAlevey add up to an Alinsky indictment. They do not stand up when put under the microscope of deeper examination. In what follows, I offer a detailed examination of some of them.

**Corporate Campaigns, “Proxies for People,” and Alinsky’s “jujitsu tactics”.**

Alinsky’s idea of “jujitsu tactics” is to find the weaknesses in your opponent’s strengths and use them against him. Thus in the Rochester, NY FIGHT organization’s battle with KODAK over racially discriminatory hiring, proxies were collected so that FIGHT could gain access to a KODAK stockholder meeting and put the issue in the national media, with the threat to the corporation that if it did not negotiate it would find itself subpoenaed by a Senate sub-committee then staffed by Robert F. Kennedy, and called to a meeting with Governor Nelson Rockefeller.(30)

Here’s the important point: there was a community organization deeply rooted in Rochester’s black community that engaged in this struggle. At a FIGHT rally, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) then-Chairman Stokely Carmichael “predicted that when FIGHT was through with the conflict they will be able to say ’jump’ and Kodak will ask ‘how high?’”(31) Carmichael called FIGHT an example of black power. FIGHT’s President, Minister Franklin Florence, said, “In Rochester, ‘black power’ is spelled FIGHT.”(32)

That which is supposed to have come “from Saul Alinsky” has little to do with what New Labor thinks labor should do. The epitome of New Labor’s corporate campaign is “the union”—viewed by most members as a third party—doing for its members, not with them, nor by them.

To demonstrate her point about corporate campaigns, McAlevey writes, “[In an interview]… Ray Rogers [a key figure in the development of corporate campaigns] also references Alinsky.”(33) But Rogers doesn’t connect Alinsky with corporate campaigns; he only makes a point about Alinsky’s tactical thinking. Here’s what he actually says:

…Whenever you’re dealing with these big business people…, they’ve always got a scale of profits and losses in front of their eyes. Basically, you have to force them to do the right thing, what Saul Alinsky called “forcing someone to take the low road to morality.(34)

Shortly before he died, Alinsky imagined a national “Proxies for People” campaign that would be used to organize the alienated middle-class, both directly in chapters and through such organizations as their mosques, synagogues and churches, as well as other voluntary associations, colleges and universities, and elsewhere. It was to be a vehicle to tap middle-class despair, alienation and feelings of powerlessness. This is quite a contrast from the typical labor corporate campaign that involves little or no mass participation at all, however effective it may be in getting a corporation to the negotiating table. McAlevey conflates “Proxies for People” with “corporate campaigns”; she shouldn’t.

In his McAlevey-cited *Playboy* interview, Alinsky was clear that collecting proxies was an organizing tool to be used to serve a larger purpose:

[D]espite all the crap about "people's capitalism," the dominant controlling stock in all major corporations is vested in the hands of a few people we could never get to…We want to use the proxies as a means of social and political pressure against the mega-corporations, and as a vehicle for exposing their hypocrisy and deceit…The proxy tactic is also an invaluable means of gaining middle-class participation in radical causes…

Proxies can become a springboard to other issues in organizing the middle class. Proxy participation on a large scale could ultimately mean the democratization of corporate America, and could result in the changing of these corporations' overseas operations, which would precipitate important shifts in our foreign policy…It will mean revolution, peaceful revolution, and we will get away with it in the years to come.(35)

Alinsky relished the opportunity to say something like, “the shares of millions of Americans were voted down by a handful of the corporate elite.”(36) Not a bad tool to use in the relational, one-to-one, face-to-face, organizing work that was, and remains, central to those who organize in his tradition. When McAlevey talks about her own organizing work, this is the kind of organizing she does. So did Alinsky.

**Means and Ends**

Alinsky was deeply committed to the core values of the democratic tradition, and those found in the social and economic justice teachings of the world’s great religions. Alinsky’s pragmatism, or realism, was based on the understanding that to change the world you need to start with it as it is. And you need to begin “within the experience” of the people you are organizing. His continuing focus throughout his life was on organizing people into “people’s organizations” that had the power to further core social and economic justice values. (Indeed, this combination of realism/pragmatism in the service of fundamental values is what characterizes McAlevey’s organizing work.)

Here’s how Msgr John Egan, a legendary figure in Roman Catholic social justice circles, eulogized Alinsky. Imagining him facing the Lord, he has God saying,

"You saw me despised and you treated me with dignity. You saw me powerless to secure a job and decent housing, and you helped me organize with my brothers and sisters to secure my rights as a human being and as a citizen; you saw me still enslaved, and you lifted my eyes to freedom and self-determination. You saw me being pushed around, and you cared constantly."(37)

Egan told a story that is indicative of where Alinsky’s commitments lay. “Make up your mind, Jack,” Alinsky said to Egan, “whether you want to be a priest or a bishop. All other decisions will flow from that one.”(38)

McAlevey makes the point that Alinsky “embrace[d] ‘ends justify the means’.” More precisely, he gave a talk at Union Theological Seminary titled, “Of Means and Ends.” Here’s what Alinsky said there:

THAT PERENNIAL QUESTION, “Does the end justify the means?” is meaningless as it stands; the real and only question regarding the ethics of means and ends is, and always has been, “Does this *particular* end justify this *particular* means?” If the Gestapo comes to your door and asks if you are hiding Jews in your attic (and you are), you lie and hope it works…To say that corrupt means corrupt the ends is to believe in the immaculate conception of ends and principles. The real arena is corrupt and bloody.(39)

When nurses strike—as McAlevey organized them to do—they may harm patients. They use this means because the end for which they are fighting—better conditions so that more patients can be better served as well as improvements in their own lives—justifies it. What justifies means other than ends, which, in turn, become means to other ends.

**“Tactical Warfare”**

It is precisely CIO drives that taught Alinsky about organizing. And he didn’t abandon the lessons. In Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC), the site of his first organizing effort, he worked closely with the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), and its key organizer Herb March (to whom I will later return). Before that, as a student at the University of Chicago, he was active in raising food, money and other support for striking miners in Southern Illinois. Beyond that, he supported Republican Spain when Franco sought to overthrow its government, and was otherwise—as he described himself—“a professional anti-fascist”. It was during this period that he met and came under the wing of John L. Lewis, the CIO’s leader as well as President of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).(40)

Alinsky called the groups he or his associates built “mass organizations”. The major strategies and tactics of these organizations owe their origins to the CIO and the ferment of the 1930s: nonviolent, disruptive, direct action (or the threat of it), consumer boycotts, rent strikes, mass lobbying, mass voter registration and others. These tactics, however, are in the service of organizing people to control their own destiny—which McAlevey denies.

Alinsky’s 13 aphorisms appear in the *Rules* book chapter, “Tactics,” which begins, “Tactics means doing what you can with what you have…Here our concern is with…how the Have-Nots take from the Haves.” The chapter then lists and elaborates each of the rules. A footnote to the first rule says: “Power is always derived from two main sources: money and people. Lacking money, the Have-Nots must build power from their own flesh and blood. A mass movement expresses itself with mass tactics.”(41)

Doesn’t this sound like a discussion of how a mass organization’s tactical warfare *serves* “core principles”? Isn’t that a good deal different from calling the tactics “core principles”, which is what McAlevey says.

Permanent, mass-based, people power organizations were the vehicles to win and enforce social and economic justice victories and, more broadly, to realize a democratic society. The education of members in democracy’s values and methods was central to them. Alinsky is explicit about this throughout *Reveille, Rules* and in numerous of his articles.

In “Making An Offer We Can’t Refuse,” Richard Harmon, one of Alinsky’s core staff members at the time IAF’s Training Institute was launched, wrote:

Organizing is teaching,…not academic-type teaching, which is confined for the most part to stuffing data into people's ears. Organizing is teaching which rests on people's life experiences, drawing them out, developing trust, going into action, disrupting old perceptions of reality, developing group solidarity, watching the growth of confidence to continue to act, then sharing in the emotional foundation for continual questioning of the then current status quo...This means that education is primarily in the action, but becomes really liberating education only if the person develops the discipline to rigorously reflect on that action... We have to own the questions in this educational process. It must be our curiosity that is the engine ...pulling us into action, then reflection, then more action, more reflection.(42)

Does McAlevey disagree with this as a key aspect to understanding education in the context of organizing? I doubt it. Alinsky’s fundamental purpose was creating people power organizations that were schools for democratic citizenship. That was his passion.

**Leaders**

“[O]rganic leaders” are the very people central to an Alinsky organization’s success. Alinsky had a simple definition of a leader, “a [person] with a following”. He repeated it widely.(43)

Alinsky:

It is apparent that the primary and most difficult job confronting an organizer is the actual identification of the local leadership. With few exceptions, the real local leaders are completely unknown outside of the community…The job of locating the individual native leaders…can be done only through a search that requires infinite patience. It means participating in countless informal situations and being constantly alert…It means the closest of observation and constant testing of each clue…It means intimate association with particular interest groups within the community…[and] working through these interest groups to discover the real leaders…Just as people have a variety of interests, so they have a variety of leaders. The problem of identifying native leadership is as baffling and complicated as the problem of understanding the forces, interests, and myriads of elements that make up the life of a community…These natural leaders run into considerable numbers…These are the common people and in them are to be found the small natural leaders of the natural groups which are present among all people. .. [O]nly the people and their own leaders can build a People’s Organization.(44)

*Reveille* has an entire chapter devoted to “Native Leadership”. Ironically, its points are well illustrated by McAlevey in her *Raising Expectations* memoir, in part an account of her Las Vegas years as a union organizer.(45)

**Primacy of Staff “as Above All Others”**

Since McAlevey herself talks about leaders and organizers, I think it fair to conclude she thinks they are different—so how this difference “obscured the issue of organizer strategy” is unclear. By her account, and that of others, she exemplifies that difference. She was, when in the field, a talented organizer.

Not only that, she was an “outside organizer”. She is critical of Alinsky’s “outside organizer.” As she presents this organizer, “The organizer is a behind-the-scenes individual who is not a leader, who does not have anything to do with decisions and decision making, and who must come from *outside* the community.” (46)

McAlevey came “from *outside*” the workplaces where she organized. According to *Raising Expectations* she was largely “a behind-the-scenes individual” interested in working with the “organic leaders” she and her organizing staff identified in workplaces. But she, as is also the case with Alinsky’s outside organizer, was deeply involved in “decisions and decision-making.” If the outside organizer isn’t involved in those, what is the need for her or him in the first place?

The decisions Alinsky organizers were involved in had to do with the character of the organization being built, its breadth and depth, its strategies and tactics, the development of democratic structures, understanding and practices, maximizing the participation of members, and other key aspects of organizational development. The “program” or “issues” were not of particular interest to the organizer unless their formulation violated core values—thus, for example, Alinsky’s staff in Woodlawn and in Rochester clearly spoke against black separatism, and he wouldn’t support segregation by whites either—as he demonstrated in his criticism of Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (his first Chicago organizing effort) when it later discriminated against blacks seeking to buy homes in the neighborhood.

Alinsky’s organizers, he says in *Rules,* “start and build an organization” and are “essential to keep it going. Maintaining interest and activity, keeping the group’s goals strong and flexible at once, is a different operation but still organization.”(47)

Whether an Alinsky-organization worked on housing, jobs, education, health care, public transportation, child care or some other area of concern, or whether in a rent strike the tenants wanted ‘x’ versus ‘y’ as their rent was not an organizer matter, though the organizer may have challenged people to think bigger than they were initially prepared to think—i.e. to raise the bar of their horizons as to what could be won by an effective campaign, and, on the other hand, to ask whether the fight required to win a big gain was one they could successfully wage. Neither unions nor community organizations are built on unsuccessful campaigns. McAlevey is deeply aware of this.

**Why Outside Organizers?**

If a strong union local already existed in a workplace, there would be no need for an outside organizer. Ditto if a strong community organization already existed in a place. There are several reasons why neither is often, indeed typically, the case:

First, factional rivalries that can’t be overcome by local leaders keep a community divided. An outside organizer, neutral in these internal community conflicts, can help overcome them.

Secondly, insiders who may have the talent to build such a strong organizational unit don’t have the time to do so because they are already occupied in a job to earn a living. Nor do they have the training.

Further, particularly in lower income groups, there aren’t people with leadership experience in larger-scale organizations. Such organizations are necessary to do more than protest the status quo—that is, to actually negotiate changes with it. Outside organizers are the people who build these organizations—whether in communities or workplaces.

In Alinsky’s early practice, after an initial three-years (the time frame was later expanded), the “outside organizer” would be followed by someone locally recruited to take over the job. With few exceptions—Cesar Chavez being the most dramatic of them—these locally recruited people didn’t go on to become “have gun/will travel” outside organizers. And Chavez didn’t go much beyond his own Mexican-American roots in his organizing work.

When, in 1968/69, Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute, he got more deeply involved in the question of how organizers are found, developed, trained and sustained. McAlevey begins her criticism of what she thinks is Alinsky elitism about the outside organizer with this quote from his *Rules for Radicals:*

Those out of their local communities who were trained on the job achieved certain levels and were at the end of their line. If one thinks of an organizer as a highly imaginative and creative architect and engineer then the best we have been able to train on the job were skilled plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, all essential to the building and maintenance of their community structure but incapable of going elsewhere to design and execute a new structure in a new community(48).

“By ‘on the job’”, she continues, “he means grassroots leaders…[His] distinction between organizers and leaders diminishes the value of the very people being mobilized.” (Note her use of “mobilized” rather than “organized”. Elsewhere she is clear about the distinction. Here she isn’t. I don’t know why.)

To whom is Alinsky referring? Not simply “grassroots leaders”, indeed not them at all. Here’s how he describes the people he’s talking about: “…middle-class women activists to Catholic priests and Protestant ministers…from militant Indians to Chicanos to Puerto Ricans to blacks from all parts of the black power spectrum, from Panthers to radical philosophers, from a variety of campus activists, SDS and others…”(49) Their presence demonstrates that Alinsky isn’t making the point McAlevey wants to make. Rather, he’s telling his reader how difficult he thinks it is to find people from ANY background who might become organizers who can successfully go into a new area and form a mass-based organization.

Alinsky continues by describing the various kinds of organizers they did train, with “[t]hose out of their local communities” being among them. The qualities he and his associates were looking for include “curiosity, irreverence [combined] with deep reverence for the enigma of life, and an incessant search for its meaning…for others…[and] their freedom from injustice, poverty, ignorance, exploitation, discrimination, disease, war, hate, and fear,) imagination, anger at injustice and a capacity to imagine alternatives, capacity to put her/himself in the shoes of others (including adversaries), a sense of humor, a free and open mind, distrust of dogma, ability to live with contradictions and an uncertain world, a ‘blurred vision of a better world,’ an organized personality [which, Alinsky called an “integrated schizophrenic”], a strong ego, the ability to communicate within the experience of others,”--all elaborated upon in *Rules.*(50)

How do these add up to “This inviolable Alinskyist principle relates directly to a core strategy of the New Labor era, the distinction between organizer and leader.” (51)? The merit of McAlevey’s critique of New Labor is lost in her attempt to find its origins in Alinsky.

McAlevey says, “Today, the community organizing sector is weak and labor is weak, and weak plus weak does not add up to the strength that can stem the anti-labor tide. Forty years of Alinsky-inspired community organizing has not done it, seventy years of business unionism has not done it, and the past twenty years of business unionism veneered as a ‘robust organizing plan to revitalize unions,’ centered on relegating workers to [limited roles in their unions] has not done it either.”(52) The point is well taken; she is right.

She should have added another group as well: “ideological organizers” haven’t done it either. Indeed in my view they have done less of it.

**Training Organizers**

From the very pages McAlevey cites in *Rules*, Alinsky elaborates what he meant by training: “frequent long [individual] conferences on organizational problems, analysis of power patterns, communication, conflict tactics, the education and development of community leaders, and the methods of introduction of new issues.”(53) The training is in the context of that specific organizer’s work in the field. “Always the potential organizer’s personal experience was used as the basis for teaching. Always after the problem was solved there would be long sessions in which a post mortem would dissect the specifics and then stitch them into a synthesis, a body of concepts.”(54) Organizers in the field were expected to file detailed reports on their work three times a week, and they received feed-back on them from their IAF supervisor: that was my experience in Kansas City, MO where I directed an IAF project for one-and-a-half years.

Alinsky in *Rules* (after his Training Institute started):

The BUILDING of many mass power organizations to merge into a national popular power force cannot come without many organizers. Since organizations are created, in large part, by the organizer, we must find out what creates the organizer. This has been a major problem of my years of organizational experience: the finding of potential organizers and their training. For the past two years I have had a special training school for organizers with a full-time, fifteen-month program (emphasis added).(55)

Some groups say they “train” organizers in two-weeks. Their “training manuals” are the curriculum for their workshops (usually a week-to-ten days) on organizing. Apprenticeships with skilled organizers where Alinsky’s idea of “training” actually takes place may or may not follow these workshops. We would have to know which manuals from which organizations in order to know; they aren’t identified.

Of course there is no monopoly on the use of “training”. But I wouldn’t want a plumber working in my house whose claim to the skill was a two-week workshop; nor would I want a doctor caring for my health if she’s completed a few weeks of medical school.

Since there is no commonly acknowledged credentialing process for organizers, nor any commonly acknowledged apprenticeship program, it is possible for anyone to call her/himself an “organizer” or an “Alinskyist/ite organizer”. Such self-identification isn’t sufficient to demonstrate the case McAlevey seeks to make.

**Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up: Alinsky’s (and his associates’) organizing process.**

Before his Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) even sent an outside organizer into a city for an organizing project, Alinsky insisted on a “broad-based” invitation from a “sponsor committee” that would both raise the funds for an organizing project and provide legitimacy for the organizer. In the 1964-66 period, I was directly involved in such a process in the San Francisco Bay Area, so know it well.

In Rochester, New York, before the FIGHT organization was formed in the African-American community, a group of Mainline Protestant denominations, later joined by the Catholic Archdiocese, raised the money for Alinsky to organize there after a major riot broke out in a black neighborhood in 1964. But when asked to assign an organizer in the post-riot period, Alinsky made clear that he would not do so without a “broadly-based invitation” from the community targeted for organizing. The same process took place in Kansas City, MO.

Alinsky got those invitations. In Rochester, 13,000 African-American residents of the area signed a petition asking IAF to work with them, and resolutions inviting Alinsky to Rochester were passed by churches, civic associations, and other black community groups. Ed Chambers, one of Alinsky’s key organizers, was assigned to Rochester. Shortly thereafter, in a community convention with about 1,000 delegates and alternates representing congregations, block clubs, youth groups, tenant associations and others, the FIGHT organization was officially born: a constitution was adopted; resolutions on issues affecting the community were passed; leaders were elected. The professional staff of organizers was two in number: Chambers and a locally-recruited African-American who Chambers thought could be his successor when he left.(56)

A strange understanding of “top down” is required to characterize this process with that term. Now fast forward to current practice. (I elaborated on the mis-uses of this “top-down” versus “bottom-up” distinction in “Top Down vs. Bottom Up…” that was published in the pages of *CounterPunch*(57).

Many community organizers working in the Alinsky tradition now focus on religious congregations as the base for “broadly-based organizations”. (For reasons that are well known, they think most unions and union locals are now too coopted, or too in a “do-for-members” rather than “do-with” mode of operation to be significant agents of social change, though there are exceptions—and some of these organizers try to identify and engage them in their work. Indeed, in *Raising Expectations*, McAlevey says more or less the same thing about unions—and proposes her organizing as an alternative to labor’s status quo.)

**Pastors**

Pastors offer these organizers access to their laity both because they are interested in strengthening aspects of the “body life” of their congregation, mosque, synagogue or parish, and because they want the “body” to engage in action for justice in the world. These two aspects of congregational renewal, so-called “internal” and “external”, are interrelated because action informs faith, giving it a deeper and more specific meaning, and because faith informs action, connecting deeply held beliefs to day-to-day life thus giving deep meaning to the action. Members and their neighbors deal with the real-world social, environmental and economic pressures the people face.

Having gained access, organizers then conduct one-to-one meetings with lay leaders, both those who lead formal groups and those who are the informal but equally, if not more, real leaders (i.e. people with a following).

What about the pastors? Is starting with them “top down”? To belabor the point because the “top-down versus bottom-up” distinction is so abused in contemporary talk about organizing, let me tell this Pastor Aurelius Walker story (from my above cited *CounterPunch* article):

Rev. Aurelius Walker, pastor of the True Hope Church of God in Christ (COGIC), began his ministry by talking with prostitutes, pimps, alcoholics, drug abusers and other marginal African Americans on the streets of San Francisco’s Bayview neighborhood. He started holding small Bible study and revival meetings with them, helping them get straight jobs and kick their habits. After a period, he, they and others rented a storefront as a church. The congregation soon contributed enough for him to become a full-time pastor. The church grew, bought some land, constructed a new building, and, when I was last in regular touch with it, had a worshipping community of 1,000+ people, almost all African-Americans, most low-to-moderate income.

Internally, members were organized in small support-and-study groups called “auxiliaries.” The budget came from the Sunday collection plate, pledges and fundraisers. When Organize Training Center was exploring a religion-labor alliance in San Francisco, organizer Larry Gordon talked with Rev. Walker about his church joining this alliance.

In the COGIC denomination, mostly black, Pentecostal in its theology, and mostly poor and working class, the way you become a bishop is by 20 congregations deciding they want to follow your leadership. So, if I were going to a new city hoping to involve the black community, including black Pentecostals, in an organizing effort, among the people to whom I’d want an introduction would be any COGIC bishops in town. And if I couldn’t get someone to introduce me, I’d sure find a way to meet him or them because they’d be a good starting point – not the only one to be sure – to the rest of the COGIC believers in town. (58)

Now, I suppose you could call that “top-down” organizing, but I hope you’ll agree that calling it that obscures much more than it illuminates.

When the distinction “top down versus bottom up” is used with care, it is a useful way to summarize important points. But it also can be used pejoratively to say, “What I do or like is good, and what you do or like is bad.” McAlevey’s use is the latter.

**Staff Driven**

In the initial stages of organizational development, a lead organizer and an organizing staff are indispensible to building an organization. McAlevey’s union role in Las Vegas is illustrative. The critical questions that follow are essentially two: first, does the organizing staff develop and train people from the community (or workplace) to themselves become full-time organizers, and, second, do the volunteer leaders gain an increasing sophistication about how to successfully lead such an organization—both in its internal governance and in its effectiveness as a people power vehicle to bring about change in the world.

In his day, Alinsky had some fairly strict ground-rules on these questions: his outside organizer was to remain in the background and not be a media spokesperson for the organization; he (and in those days they were all men) rarely spoke in formal internal decision-making meetings, and often didn’t attend them; he recruited and trained local people to become organizers; after three years, he left and moved on to another organizing job—one of his trainees took over as lead organizer.

These guidelines were designed to prevent organizations from becoming “staff driven” without denying the central role of the organizer.

Alinsky (after an illustrative exchange between an organizer and leaders on the choice of a tactic):

… As time goes on and education proceeds, the leadership becomes increasingly sophisticated. The organizer recedes from the local circle of decision-makers. His response to questions about what he thinks becomes a non-directive counter-question, "What do you think?" His job becomes one of weaning the group away from any dependency upon him. Then his job is done.(59)

Nicholas Von Hoffman, Alinsky’s principal organizer in Chicago’s Woodlawn neighborhood described the role:

The good organizer is the self-effacing mentor who judges his work a success when he can leave the organization without even being missed. He is rare, rarer than first-rate leadership, but he exists…and he can work in almost any situation.”(60)

Hardly a prescription for a “staff driven” organization! (Nor do I in any way want to diminish what I think is the influence full-time organizers have—and I’m talking about those who would meet with both McAlevey’s and Alinsky’s approval.)

Doesn’t this make clear that the role of organizers is to develop leaders?:

This is the basic difference between the leader and the organizer. The leader goes on to build power to fulfill his desires, to hold and wield the power for purposes both social and personal. He wants power himself. The organizer finds his goal in creation of power for others to use.(61)

**Ideology**

In his 1968/69 introduction to *Reveille for Radicals*, Alinsky says this about the radical:

His is a quest for a future: where everyone would have a job, a real job—more than just a paycheck—a job that would be meaningful to society as well as to the worker; a future where everyone would have full opportunities to achieve his potentiality; where education, good housing, health, and full equality for all would be universal; a promised land of peace and plenty; a world where all the revolutionary slogans of the past would come to life: ‘Love your neighbor as you would love yourself’; ‘You are your brother’s keeper’; ‘Liberty, Fraternity, Equality’; ‘All men are created equal’; Peace and bread’; ‘For the general welfare’; a world where the Judeo-Christian values and the promise of the American Constitution would be made real.” (62)

These are hardly the words of one writing about “a craft devoid of ideology,” or “narrowly defined interest-group politics.”

A common critique from the political left characterizes Alinsky’s views as “anti-ideological pragmatism,” or, and here McAlevey favorably quotes Steve Williams:

Alinsky’s attempt to strip the organizing model of ideology manifests in various concrete practices, like insisting that groups should only wage winnable fights and that the organizer should refrain from bringing her political views into the organizations discourse. The ramifications render the Alinsky model impotent relative to many contemporary challenges because ideology is a central front of the rightwing, and, therefore the left must contest in this arena. (63)

Of course Alinsky wanted to contest the right ideologically. And he did. But he didn’t do it in the way Williams and others wanted him to. Rather he did it in the framework of the small “d” democratic tradition and the moral, and social and economic justice teachings of the world’s great religions.

Many who call themselves “organizers” never really built anything that deserves to be called a “mass organization”. Others, however, did. It is these successful organizers, McAlevey included, and those who would like to follow in their footsteps, that I think have things to learn from Alinsky—as Alinsky organizers can learn from them.

As to waging “winnable fights,” would Williams have us wage losing fights? And does he think that everyday people will remain active in an organization that persists in losing? As Alinsky puts it in *Rules*, “…we organize to get rid of four-legged rats so we can get on to removing two-legged rats.”(64) The initial “small” issues that Alinsky organizers address are used to build the people power to address the larger ones. That Williams misses this is not the point; that McAlevey approvingly quotes him is. In her Las Vegas organizing, she defined issues that could be won, and went about winning them. That’s how she was able to organize workers to vote 80% and higher to bring SEIU into their hospitals and elsewhere.

**Fair Share of the Pie**

When you want to destroy someone’s credibility, go on the attack with the worst characterizations of his/her view. Alinsky’s presumed “obsession with pragmatism” had little to do with pragmatism as a philosophy or with a narrow agenda and lots to do with realism in the pursuit of goals and use of tactics.

The criteria “nondivisive” was applied within a constituency. If you’re a union and half your members are smokers, you don’t propose a non-smoking work environment. Rather, you try to come up with a proposal that works for both smokers and non-smokers—like creating a separate smoking room. But, as noted elsewhere, when core values are at stake, you don’t compromise.

What McAlevey repeats here about “fairer share of the pie” has to do with the people Alinsky was organizing, and an argument in which he was engaged with the New Left. Nowhere, he said, were the people he organized interested in revolution. Rather, they wanted their fair share of the pie. In *Reveille’s* 1969 “Afterword,” Alinsky addressed himself to student radicals:

At various universities members of the Students for Democratic Society have asked me, “Mr. Alinsky, do you know that what you are doing is organizing the poor for the acceptance of these bourgeois, decadent, degenerate, bankrupt, materialistic, imperialistic, hawkish middle-class values of today’s society?” There has been a long silence when I have responded with, “Do you know what the poor of America or, I might add, the poor of the world want? They want a bigger and fatter piece of these decadent, degenerate, bankrupt, materialistic, bourgeois values and what goes with it!”(65)

In the same “Afterward”, Alinsky goes on to say, “It is after he achieves enough food for today and all of the tomorrows that he moves to the next stage, realizing that this has not brought him happiness. Then he is ready for, and starts demanding, other things.” He goes on to note, “If Lenin were writing about our present far-out left, his work would be titled *“Left Wing” Communism, a Womblike Disorder.*”(66)

It was action for a fair share of the pie that Alinsky used to build organizations he thought would lead to much more—namely the renewal of American democracy. But self-interest was the tool that initially engaged people in the organizing.

But using self-interest isn’t something McAlevey criticizes. She abundantly illustrates her use of it in her account of Las Vegas organizing. No labor organizer I know who would earn McAlevey’s respect fails to use worker self-interest to organize workers.

Was Alinsky simply about getting the constituencies he worked with a “fairer share of the pie”? Here’s what he said in *Reveille*,

The Radical believes that all peoples should have a high standard of food, housing, and health…places human rights far above property rights…is for universal, free public education…is antagonistic to any idea of [social planning] which works from the top down. Democracy to him is working from the bottom up…believes completely in *real* equality of opportunity for all peoples…insists on full employment for economic security but is just as insistent that man’s work should not only provide economic security but also be such as to satisfy the creative desires within all men…will fight privilege and power whether it be inherited or acquired by any small group…recognizes that constant dissension and conflict is and has been the fire under the boiler of democracy…(67)

And in his second organizing book, *Rules for Radicals*:

…we are concerned with how to create mass organizations to seize power and give it to the people; to realize the democratic dream of equality, justice, peace, cooperation, equal and full opportunities for education, full and useful employment, health, and the creation of those circumstances in which man can have the chance to live by values that give meaning to life. We are talking about a mass power organization which will change the world into a place where all men and women walk erect, in the spirit of that credo of the Spanish Civil War, ‘Better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.’ This means revolution.(68)

**Alinsky Wasn’t a Socialist (He Wasn’t a Capitalist Either)**

Alinsky was not a socialist, nor a communist, though he worked with people who were. On the other hand, he wasn’t a capitalist either, and he worked with people who were. While he didn’t spend time on this question, I think it is fair to make this extrapolation from both his views and practices. His interests were in building powerful, values-based (values consistent with the democratic socialist tradition, by the way) people power organizations that could themselves consider proposals having to do with the role of government in the economy, and training the professional organizers who could build such organizations.

He wrote favorably about the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and was a firm supporter of public housing in the immediate post-World War 2 period. For him, however, policy *followed* power and talk of what might be in the absence of a capacity to meaningfully struggle for it wasn’t of interest to him.

Alinsky gave credit where he thought credit was due: he acknowledged the importance of communists and socialists to building the industrial union movement. Here’s how Alinsky talked about them in *Rules*:

Those "labor organizers" — Powers Hapgood, Henry Johnson, and Lee Pressman, for instance — were primarily middle-class revolutionary activists to whom the C.I.O. labor organizing drive was just one of many activities. The agendas of those labor union mass meetings were 10 per cent on the specific problems of that union and 90 per cent speakers on the conditions and needs of the southern Okies, the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade, raising funds for blacks who were on trial in some southern state, demanding higher relief for the unemployed, denouncing police brutality, raising funds for anti-Nazi organizations, demanding an end to American sales of scrap iron to the Japanese military complex, and on and on. They were radicals, and they were good at their job: they organized vast sectors of middle-class America in support of their programs.(69)

**Organizing the Middle Class**

McAlevey indicates that Alinsky was only interested in organizing the middle class who, she says, Alinsky thought of as the “got a little, want some more”. Alinsky said he was interested in organizing the have-nots, the have-a-little/want more, and the middle class. His late-1950s to the mid-1960s focus was minority communities: Puerto Ricans in New York, Mexican-Americans in California, Native-Americans in Arizona, African-Americans in numerous cities. In the mid-1960s, all the fully-staffed organizing projects (Chicago, Rochester, Buffalo, Kansas City) he was working with were in African-American communities. Earlier, his work was with largely white-ethnic working class communities —like Back of the Yards.

By 1969, Alinsky concluded a white person no longer could organize in the black community. He sought to develop training or consulting relationships with various black organizations. That didn’t happen though numbers of their leaders and organizers later attended workshops held by his Institute.

He also concluded, that the middle-class had to be organized as well. And he was deeply concerned about the white working class drift toward the political right. At that time, a substantial majority of Americans considered themselves “middle-class,” and, materially speaking, most of them either were or thought they were heading there. He discussed all this at some length in his *Playboy* interview, which McAlevey cites so I think it fair to assume she read it.

**Herb March, “The Communist Model” and “The Alinsky Model”.**

McAlevey:

Alinsky’s pragmatic anticommunism…had separated him from the [Communist organizers who Alinsky later praised]—like Herb March, the leader of the Chicago Communist Party at the time and in many ways Alinsky’s first teacher of the methods of organizing.(70)

In Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC), the site of his first organizing effort, Alinsky worked closely with the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), and its key organizer Herb March. (March was not “the leader of the Chicago Communist Party”; he was an open member. I asked his son, who should know.)(71)

March is an admired figure in McAlevey’s article. A focus on him is deserved because he was a talented union organizer, and the epitome of McAlevey’s model organizer. March was also a major participant in Alinsky’s organization of BYNC. (During the Depression, March joined the CP youth affiliate, dropped out of college, and went to work in Chicago’s packinghouses with the intent of helping build a union there.)

I met with March after he’d retired to talk about his organizing in the packinghouses, the relationship between the Communists and Alinsky, and his own relationship with “The Party”. Two things became clear: on matters having to do with the neighborhood and the packinghouses, March told me “I had no strategic differences with Saul on organizing Back of the Yards.” He repeats that quote in *Democratic Promise,* the PBS documentary on Alinsky.(72)

Also, March had his struggles with Communist Party higher-ups. He told me he sometimes won them, and sometimes lost. Over one of them, in which the Party called him a “white chauvinist,” (i.e. “white racist”) he resigned.

The same kind of struggles with Party higher-ups characterized other Communists in the labor movement of the 1930s. “When the party’s head in St. Louis chastised [the talented William Senter, head of United Electrical Worker District 8] for his ‘deviations’, Sentner retorted, ‘You run your organization and I’ll run mine.’” Ditto on such conflicts for Ernie DeMaio, a major figure in UE and also a member of the Communist Party.(73)

More broadly, such struggles were experienced by many of the CIO labor leaders who were also Communist Party members. To go into the details would take us too far afield, but to sketch them here is useful. “[T]he Communist-influenced CIO in the 1930s and 1940s,” was not only about, as McAlevey puts it, “building high-participation organizations capable of waging a strike.”(74) It was also about who would control those unions.

There was a tension between the unions and the Party itself, which understood itself as the vanguard of the working class. A tension exists between all organizers and the people with whom they work to build organizations because good organizers necessarily are about building powerful organizations while everyday people are initially (though they increasingly come to see the connection) more about the day-to-day problems facing them in their lives. There is also often a tension between on-the-ground organizers and people for whom they work in a larger organization—be it a union, religious group, organizing network or political party. The tension was heightened in the CP because it had an internal governance system in which higher-level leaders could tell lower level leaders what to do, and sanction or even expel them if they didn’t. It is called “democratic centralism”.

Alinsky vigorously opposed the Communists in regard to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and distanced himself from them during the McCarthy era. He didn’t support the Henry Wallace for President campaign in 1948, nor the Independent Progressive Party that was organized around it. But in her effort to paint Alinsky with a traditional “anti-Communist” brush, she omits an important historic fact: Alinsky fought for Herb March inside the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) when March was threatened with expulsion from union staff or leadership positions because he refused to sign the Taft-Hartley “non-Communist affidavit”. Alinsky had a close relationship with UPWA President Ralph Helstein, and used it to support March. He also had a close, and continuing, relationship with Herb March.

**The Communists, “Chilling Effects” and Alinsky**

In 1946, an article by Howard Fast in the Communist publication *New Masses* praised BYNC.(75) Soon praise for Alinsky vanished, and condemnation followed. The “popular front” period gave way to a more sectarian approach. Alinsky was now an “anti-communist,” a bourgeois reformist and other epithets of the sectarian period led by William Z. Foster.

If you want to impose a chilling effect on discussion in the left, call someone an “anti \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (gay, feminist, Black Panther, immigrant, communist, whatever). McAlevey succumbs to this unfortunate way of stifling debate. Alinsky’s complicated relationship with communists can only be skeletally summed up here. He distinguished among communists. Some were real small “d” democrats; he worked with them professionally, though on terms that included the creation of a small “d” democratic organization in which they and others, in the case of BYNC it was principally Catholics, could work together on a level playing field. March welcomed the opportunity.

Alinsky, by the way, at the invitation of the archbishop of Milan, proposed a mechanism for Catholic-Communist cooperation on worker interests in post World War 2 Italy—presumably based on his Back of the Yards experience. Nothing came of it. He concluded the Catholic Church was too enmeshed with the Christian Democrats. This has turned into a left story of Alinsky on the payroll of the CIA.(76)

The CIO-1199 tradition McAlevey admires was a Communist-led tradition. The union built by those communists is in many ways an admirable one. It also has its faults, some of which are noted above, which are omitted from her story.

**Alinsky/Alinskyite Criteria**

Where “most strands of the Alinskyite tradition” use “criteria” of “…likability, commitment to the organization’s agenda, attendance at meetings, and the ability to follow organizational conversation, speak to the media, chair a meeting, exercise charisma, and so forth”(77) comes from is unclear. McAlevey cites no source for these criteria, and I know of none. Some of them simply don’t exist in Alinsky. Those she considers positive are shared by Alinsky.

Further, surely 1199 organizers train leaders to follow organizational conversations, speak to the media and chair meetings. And if they aren’t committed to the organization’s agenda—which is democratically constructed by the membership—then surely there is an attempt to convince them, and if the effort fails, and the matter is important enough, they are likely to be challenged in a forthcoming election.

Alinsky, by the way, specifically and explicitly favored “collective leadership” over “charismatic leadership”. He was specifically concerned about this in relation to Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement.

**Activists**

If you want to agitate an Alinsky-tradition organizer, tell her that she is only or primarily working with “activists”. The term, as I believe McAlevey uses it, and as it is commonly used by organizers, applies to people whose heart, mind and energy are usually in the right place but who lack any following in a recognizable constituency that is required to build people power, and who are typically unwilling to try to develop such a following so that they might become a “leader” rather than an “activist”.

It is precisely NOT “activists” who are sought in Alinsky’s understanding of community organizing. That’s why it is important to separate Alinsky from the farm worker boycott—which McAlevey cites to demonstrate her view. It IS activists who were the core of the farm worker boycott staff, and they played a positive role there. The union’s problems came not from the activists but from the fact that it had abandoned its workplace leaders, or removed them from their farm worker constituency by making them boycott mobilizers. What happened to the union is well described in Frank Bardacke’s *Trampling Out The Vintage*.(78) But he, like McAlevey, puts the blame on Alinsky’s shoulders. He and I are friends; we’ve had an on-going disagreement on the subject.

**Conclusion**

The great irony for me in writing this critical review is that I find myself in agreement with much of McAlevey’s critique of organized labor. There are exceptions to be sure, but too many “reform” unions fit her *Raising Expectations…* description of them.

Those of us who seek to build or support small “d” democratic people power that is capable of slowing, halting and reversing the ever-growing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of an ever-smaller number of people ignore Alinsky at their peril.

Those of us who are interested in alternatives to corporate capitalism or command socialism, and who want more than the universal benefits and greater economic equality of the social democratic state have things to learn from Alinsky as well.

Finally, none of us are winning. Nor can we win if we don’t find ways to work together and learn from the best of the small “d” democratic organizing tradition. Alinsky is among those from whom to learn. In the mix of those who should find ways to work together are the heirs to his tradition in some of its current expressions.

**Notes.**

**(1) “The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky’s Legacy: Revisiting the Role of Organic Grassroots Leaders in Building Powerful Organizations and Movements.” Published in *Politics & Society 1-27*, 2015; SAGE Publications. (Herein after “Crisis”.)**

**(2) Ibid. p 5.**

**(3) Ibid.**

**(4) Ibid.**

**(5) Ibid. p. 3**

**(6) Reveille for Radicals. University of Chicago Press, 1946. Vintage Books. October, 1989.**

**(7) Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals. Saul D. Alinsky. Vintage Books. October, 1989.**

**(8) Crisis. Op. Cit. p. 1.**

**(9) Ibid. p. 3**

**(10) Ibid. p. 1**

**(11) Ibid. p. 2**

**(12) Ibid.**

**(13) Ibid.**

**(14) Ibid. p. 3.**

**(15) Ibid. p. 7.**

**(16) Ibid.**

**(17) Ibid. p. 2.**

**(18) Ibid. p. 12.**

**(19) Ibid. p. 3.**

**(20) Ibid. p. 12.**

**(21) Ibid. p. 11.**

**(22) Ibid. p. 21.**

**(23) Ibid. p. 3.**

**(24) Ibid.**

**(25) Ibid. p. 7.**

**(26) Ibid. p. 5.**

**(27) Ibid. p. 7.**

**(28) Ibid. p. 1.**

**(29) Ibid. p. 12.**

**(30) Film “The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky and His Legacy”. Independent Television Service (ITVS). Premiered on PBS, November 1, 1999.**

**(31) “Holding Corporate America’s Feet to the Fire:  The Industrial Areas Foundation’s Collision Course with Kodak.” Quilen Diedre Blackwell. COMM-ORG Papers. Vol. 15, 2009.**

**(32) “The Democratic Promise…” op. cit.**

**(33) “Crisis”. Op. cit. p. 7 & 9**

**(34) “An Interview with Ray Rogers.” Dedra Hauser and Robert Howard. Working Papers Magazine. January-February, 1982 (unpaginated).**

**(35) “Playboy Interview: A Candid Conversation with Saul Alinsky.” Playboy Magazine. March, 1972 ; Vol. 19, No. 3.**

**(36) Ibid.**

**(37) Egan, Msgr. John (“Jack”) J.; “SAUL DAVID ALINSKY, 1909-1972: A Memorial;” Chicago, 1972.** **Possession of Author.**

**(38) “Msgr. Jack Egan: activist, reformer, a ‘city’s conscience’;” Tim Unsworth. *National Catholic Reporter*; June 1, 2001.**

**(39) “Of Means and Ends;” Saul D. Alinsky. *Auburn Lecture Series*; Union Theological Seminary; New York City, NY, 1966.**

**(40) “DRAFT: Working Title: A Paradoxical Politics: Community Organising, Christianity & the Future of Democratic Citizenship.” Luke Bretherton. King’s College London. Chapter 3. “The Origins of Organizing: A Political and Intellectual Sketch.” p. 17. (Possession of author.) And: The Professional Radical: Conversations with Saul Alinsky. Marion K. Sanders. New York, Harper & Row [1970]. Essays originally published in Harper’s magazine in June and July 1965, and Jan. 1970.**

**(41) Rules for Radicals. Op. Cit. “Tactics”. p. 125.**

**(42) “Making An Offer We Can't Refuse”; Richard K. Harmon; working paper, 1973; Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute. Possession of author.**

**(43) Saul Alinsky at Asilomar workshop on community organizing, 1965. Notes in possession of author.**

**(44) Reveille for Radicals. Op. Cit. p. 94**

**(45) Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell): My Decade Fighting for the Labor Movement. Jane McAlevey. Verso, November, 2012.**

**(46) Crisis. Op. cit. p. 21.**

**(47) Rules. Op. cit. p. 65.**

**(48) Ibid. p. 65.**

**(49) Ibid. p. 63.**

**(50) Ibid. p. 73.**

**(51) Crisis. Op. cit. p. 22.**

**(52) Ibid. p. 23.**

**(53) Rules. Op. cit. p. 63.**

**(54) Ibid. p. 65.**

**(55) Ibid. p. 63.**

**(56) Author’s conversations with Alinsky (1960-1972) and Chambers (1966-1968).**

**(57) “Top Down vs. Bottom Up: What Do Grassroots Organizers Actually Do When They Organize?” *CounterPunch;* Weekend Edition February 5 – 7, 2010.**

**(58) Ibid.**

**(59) Rules. Op. cit. p. 92.**

**(60) “Finding and Making Leaders.” Nicholas Von Hoffman. Students for a Democratic Society/Economic Research & Action Project. 1963.**

**(61) Rules. Op. cit. p. 80.**

**(62) Reveille. Op. cit. p. xvii.**

**(63) Crisis. Op. cit. p. 63.**

**(64) Rules. Op. cit. p. 68.**

**(65) Reveille. Op. cit. p. 229.**

**(66) Ibid. p. 230.**

**(67) Ibid. p. 24**

**(68) Rules. Op. cit. p. 3.**

**(69) Ibid. p. 77.**

**(70) “Crisis”. Op. cit. p. 5.**

**(71) Richard March. Personal E-mail exchange. 2015.**

**(72) “Democratic Promise”. Op. cit.**

**(73) The discussion on March, Sentner, DeMaio and the Communist Party is drawn from several sources, including an afternoon the author spent with Herb and Jane March. See: Left Out: Reds and America’s Industrial Unions;Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin; Cambridge University Press, 2003. P. 12.) Ditto on such conflicts for Ernie DeMaio, a major figure in UE and a member of the Communist Party. “Interview with Ernie De Maio: Ernie DeMaio, Narrator, Carl Ross, Interviewer”; Minnesota 20th Century Radicalism Project; May 25, 1988.**

**(74) “Crisis”. Op. cit. p. 19.**

**(75) “It’s Not the Jungle Anymore.” Howard Fast. New Masses 58:6 Feb 5, 1946.**

**(76) See various sources: “An Intriguing Scenario.” Prof. Remi Amelunxen.** [**www.traditioninaction.org/HotTopics/f062\_Scenario.htm**](http://www.traditioninaction.org/HotTopics/f062_Scenario.htm)**. And, Correspondence between Saul Alinsky and his wife Jean Alinsky. University of Illinois Archives.**

**(77) “Crisis.” Op. cit. p. 20.**

**(78) Trampling Out The Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers. Frank Bardacke. Verso, London/Brooklyn. 2012.**

**For further exploration of Alinsky’s thinking on the question of “revolution”, see: “Conversations On Revolutions.” National Catholic Reporter. Circa 1967.**

**Note: Sources with indication “possession of author” are available from the author at** [**mikeotcmiller@gmail.com**](mailto:mikeotcmiller@gmail.com)