

# Rules for Radicals

By Saul Alinsky - 1971

Hillary Clinton's 1969 [Political Science Thesis](#) ("There is Only the Fight") refers to an earlier version of Alinsky's training manual. "In 1946," she wrote, "Alinsky's first book, *Reveille for Radicals*, was published."



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## Background information

"Obama learned his lesson well. I am proud to see that my father's model for organizing is being applied successfully beyond local community organizing to affect the Democratic campaign in 2008. It is a fine tribute to Saul Alinsky as we approach his 100th birthday." --Letter from L. DAVID ALINSKY, son of [Neo-Marxist Saul Alinsky](#)

[Obama helped fund 'Alinsky Academy'](#): "The Woods Fund, a nonprofit on which Obama served as paid director from 1999 to December 2002, provided startup funding and later capital to the Midwest Academy.... Obama sat on the Woods Fund board alongside [William Ayers](#), founder of the Weather Underground domestic terrorist organization.... 'Midwest describes itself as 'one of the nation's oldest and best-known schools for community organizations, citizen organizations and individuals **committed to progressive social change**.'... Midwest teaches Alinsky tactics of community organizing."

[Hillary, Obama and the Cult of Alinsky](#): "True revolutionaries do not flaunt their radicalism, Alinsky taught. They cut their hair, put on suits and **infiltrate the system from within**. Alinsky viewed revolution as a slow, patient process. The trick was to penetrate [existing institutions such as churches](#), unions and political parties.... Many leftists view Hillary as a sell-out because she claims to hold moderate views on some issues. However, Hillary is simply following Alinsky's counsel to do and say whatever it takes to gain power.

"**Obama** is also an Alinskyite.... Obama spent years teaching workshops on the Alinsky method. In 1985 he began a four-year stint as a community organizer in Chicago, working for an Alinskyite group called the Developing Communities Project.... Camouflage is key to Alinsky-style organizing. While trying to build coalitions of black churches in Chicago, Obama caught flak for not attending church himself. He became an instant churchgoer." (By Richard Poe, 11-27-07)

## Opening page - Dedication

"Lest we forget at least an over-the-shoulder acknowledgment to the very first radical: from all our legends, mythology, and history... the first radical known to man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom — **Lucifer.**"

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## Prologue

"The Revolutionary force today has two targets, moral as well as material. Its young protagonists are one moment reminiscent of the idealistic early Christians, yet they also urge violence and cry, **'Burn the system down!'** They have no illusions about the system, but plenty of illusions about the way to change our world. It is to this point that I have written this book."

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## 1. The Purpose

In this book 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.... "Better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.' This means revolution." p.3

"Radicals must be resilient, adaptable to shifting political circumstances, and sensitive enough to the **process of action and reaction** to avoid being trapped by their own tactics and forced to travel a road not of their choosing." p.6

"A Marxist begins with his prime truth that all evils are caused by the exploitation of the proletariat by the capitalists. From this he logically proceeds to the revolution to end capitalism, then into the third stage of reorganization into a new social order of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and finally the last stage -- the political paradise of communism." p.10

"An organizer working in and for an open society is in an ideological dilemma to begin with, he does **not have a fixed truth** -- truth to him is relative and changing; **everything to him is relative and changing**.... To the extent that he is **free from the shackles of dogma**, he can respond to the realities of the widely different situations...." pp.10-11

### Notes on Saul Alinsky and Neo-Marxism:

Alinsky's tactics were based, not on Stalin's revolutionary violence, but on the Neo-Marxist strategies of [Antonio Gramsci](#), an Italian Communist. Relying on [gradualism](#), infiltration and the [dialectic process](#) rather than a bloody revolution, Gramsci's transformational Marxism was so subtle that few even noticed the deliberate changes.

Like Alinsky, [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) followed Gramsci, not Lenin. In fact, Gramsci aroused Stalin's wrath by suggesting that Lenin's revolutionary plan wouldn't work in the West. Instead the primary **assault** would be on **Biblical absolutes** and Christian values, which must be crushed as a social force before the new face of Communism could rise and flourish. Malachi Martin gave us a progress report:

"By 1985, the influence of traditional Christian philosophy in the West was weak and negligible.... Gramsci's master strategy was now feasible. Humanly speaking, it was no longer too tall an order to **strip large majorities** of men and women in the West of those last vestiges that remained to them of Christianity's transcendent God."

## 2. Of Means and Ends *[Forget moral or ethical considerations]*

"The end is what you want, the means is how you get it. Whenever we think about **social change**, the question of means and ends arises. The man of action views the issue of means and ends in **pragmatic and strategic terms**. He has no other problem; he thinks only of his actual resources and the possibilities of various choices of action. He asks of *ends* only whether they are achievable and worth the cost; of *means*, only whether they will work. ... **The real arena is corrupt and bloody.**" p.24

"The **means-and-ends moralists**, constantly obsessed with the ethics of the means used by the Have-Nots against the Haves, should search themselves as to their real political position. In fact, they are passive — but real — allies of the Haves.... The most **unethical** of all means is the non-use of any means... The standards of judgment must be rooted in the whys and wherefores of life as it is lived, **the world as it is**, not our wished-for fantasy of **the world as it should be**...." pp.25-26

"The third rule of ethics of means and ends is that in war **the end justifies almost any means....**" p.29

"The seventh rule... is that generally success or failure is a mighty **determinant of ethics....**" p.34

"The tenth rule... is you do what you can with what you have and **clothe it with moral garments....** It involves sifting the multiple factors which combine in creating the circumstances at any given time... Who, and how many will support the action?... If weapons are needed, then are appropriate weapons available? Availability of means determines **whether you will be underground or above ground**; whether you will move quickly or slowly..." p.36

Notes: Apparently, [Michelle Obama](#) referred to these words during her Democratic National Convention speech:

"She said, 'Barack stood up that day,' talking about a visit to Chicago neighborhoods, 'and spoke words that have stayed with me ever since. He talked about **'The world as it is'** and **'The world as it should be...'** And, 'All of us driven by a simple belief that **the world as it is just won't do - that we have an obligation to, fight for the world as it should be.**'"

*Do you wonder who -- or whose values -- should determine what "the world... should be?"*

#### 4. The Education of the Organizer

"To the organizer, **imagination... is the dynamism that starts and sustains him in his whole life of action as an organizer.** It ignites and feeds the force that **drives him to organize for change....**

"The organizer knows that **the real action** is in the **reaction of the opposition.** To realistically appraise and anticipate the probable reactions of the enemy, he must be able to identify with them, too, in his imagination, and foresee their reactions to his actions....

"The organizers searching with a free and **open mind void of certainty, hating dogma,** finds laughter not just a way to maintain his sanity but also a key to understanding life." pp.74-75

"...the organizer must be able to split himself into two parts -- one part in the arena of action where he polarizes the issue to 100 to nothing, and helps to **lead his forces into conflict,** while the other part knows that when the time comes for negotiations that it really is only a 10 percent difference." p.78

"...the organizer is constantly creating new out of the old. **He knows that all new ideas arise from conflict;** [See [Dialectic Process](#)] that every time man has had a new idea it has been a challenge to the sacred ideas of the past and the present and inevitably a conflict has raged." p.79

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#### 5. Communication [Notice the emphasis on **conflict, dialogue, relationships, etc.** Team "service" is essential to building strong relationships through "common involvements"]

"And so the **guided questioning** goes on without anyone losing face or being left out of the decision-making. Every weakness of every proposed tactic is probed by questions.... **Is this manipulation? Certainly....**" p.88

"One of the factors that changes what you can and can't communicate is **relationships.** There are sensitive areas that one does not touch **until there is a strong personal relationship** based on **common involvements.** Otherwise the other party turns off and literally does not hear....

"Conversely, if you have a good relationship, he is very receptive.... For example, **I have always believed that birth control and abortion are personal rights** to be exercised by the individual. If, in my

early days when I organized... neighborhood in Chicago, which was 95 per cent Roman Catholic, I had tried to communicate this, even through the experience of the residents, whose economic plight was aggravated by large families, that would have been the end of my relationship with the community. That instant I would have been stamped as an enemy of the church and all communication would have ceased.

"Some years later, **after establishing solid relationships, I was free to talk about anything....** By then the argument was no longer limited to such questions as, 'How much longer do you think the Catholic Church can hang on to this archaic notion and still survive?' ...the subject and nature of the discussion would have been unthinkable without that solid relationship." pp.93-94

**6. In the Beginning: The Process of Power** [Notice the **compromise** needed to build the power base. Yet, since pragmatism has eroded all values, it's simply a matter of **ends justifying means**. It's not unlike churches that attract members through the world's entertainment -- then continue to soften or hide Truth in order to keep them happy and lure more.]

"From the moment the organizer enters a community he lives, dreams... only one thing and that is to build the **mass power base of what he calls the army**. Until he has developed that mass power base, he confronts no major issues.... Until he has those means and power instruments, his 'tactics' are very different from power tactics. Therefore, every move revolves around one central point: how many recruits will this bring into the organization, whether by means of local organizations, churches, **service** groups, labor Unions, corner gangs, or as individuals."

"**Change comes from power**, and power comes from organization." p.113

"**The first step** in community organization is **community disorganization**. The disruption of the present organization is the first step toward community organization. Present arrangements must be disorganized if they are to be displaced by new patterns.... **All change means disorganization of the old** and organization of the new." p.116

Compare with this excerpt from "[Group Decision and Social Change](#)" by Kurt Lewin:

"A change toward a higher level of group performance is frequently short lived: after a "shot in the arm", group life soon returns to the previous level. This indicates that it does not suffice to define the objective of a planned change in group performance as the reaching of a different level. Permanency of the new level, or permanency for a desired period, should be included in the objective. **A successful change includes therefore three aspects:**

- **UNFREEZING** (if necessary) the present level...
- **MOVING** to the new level . . . and
- **FREEZING** group life on the new level."

"**An organizer must stir up dissatisfaction** and discontent... He must create a mechanism that can drain off the underlying guilt for having accepted the previous situation for so long a time. Out of this mechanism, a new community organization arises....

"The job then is getting the people to move, to act, to participate; in short, to develop and harness the necessary **power to effectively conflict with the prevailing patterns and change them**. When those prominent in the status quo turn and label you an 'agitator' they are completely correct, for that is, in one word, **your function—to agitate to the point of conflict**." p.117

"*Process* tells us how. *Purpose* tells us why. But in reality, it is academic to draw a line between them, they are part of a continuum.... **Process is really purpose**." p.122

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## 7. Tactics

"Tactics are those conscious deliberate acts by which human beings live with each other and deal with the world around them. ... Here our concern is with the tactic of taking; how the Have-Nots can take power away from the Haves." p.126

Always remember the first rule of power tactics (pps.127-134):

1. **"Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have."**
2. **"Never go outside the expertise of your people.** When an action or tactic is outside the experience of the people, the result is confusion, fear and retreat.... [and] the collapse of communication.
3. **"Whenever possible, go outside the expertise of the enemy.** Look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty. (This happens all the time. Watch how many organizations under attack are blind-sided by seemingly irrelevant arguments that they are then forced to address.)
4. **"Make the enemy live up to its own book of rules.** You can kill them with this, for they can no more obey their own rules than the Christian church can live up to Christianity."
5. **"Ridicule is man's most potent weapon.** It is almost impossible to counteract ridicule. Also it infuriates the opposition, which then reacts to your advantage."
6. **"A good tactic is one your people enjoy."**
7. **"A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.** Man can sustain militant interest in any issue for only a limited time...."
8. **"Keep the pressure on,** with different tactics and actions, and utilize all events of the period for your purpose."
9. **"The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself."**
10. **"The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition.** It is this unceasing pressure that results in the reactions from the opposition that are essential for the success of the campaign."
11. **"If you push a negative hard and deep enough, it will break through into its counterside... every positive has its negative."**
12. **"The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative."**
13. **Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.** In conflict tactics there are certain rules that [should be regarded] as universalities. One is that the opposition must be singled out as the target and 'frozen.'...  
"...any target can always say, 'Why do you center on me when there are others to blame as well?' When your 'freeze the target,' you disregard these [rational but distracting] arguments.... Then, as you zero in and freeze your target and carry out your attack, all the 'others' come out of the woodwork very soon. They become visible by their support of the target..."  
"One acts decisively only in the **conviction that all the angels are on one side and all the devils on the other.**" (pps.127-134)

## Additional Notes:

[Alinsky's Rules for Radicals](#): "Known as the 'father of modern American radicalism,' Saul D. Alinsky (1909-1972) developed strategies and tactics that take the enormous, unfocused emotional energy of grassroots groups and transform it into effective anti-government and anti-corporate activism. ... Some of these rules are ruthless, but they work."

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Article by Phyllis Schafly titled "[Alinski's Rules: Must Reading In Obama Era](#)," posted at [www.ibdeditorials.com/IBDArticles.aspx?id=318470857908277](http://www.ibdeditorials.com/IBDArticles.aspx?id=318470857908277) (2-2-09)

"Alinsky's second chapter, called Of Means and Ends, craftily poses many difficult moral dilemmas, and his 'tenth rule of the ethics of means and ends' is: '**you do what you can with what you have and clothe it with moral arguments.**' He doesn't ignore traditional moral standards or dismiss them as unnecessary. He is much more devious; he teaches his followers that '**Moral rationalization is indispensable at all times of action whether to justify the selection or the use of ends or means.**'...

"The qualities Alinsky looked for in a good organizer were:

- **ego** ("reaching for the highest level for which man can reach — to create, to be a 'great creator,' to play God"),
- **curiosity** (raising "**questions that agitate**, that break through the accepted pattern"),
- **irreverence** ("nothing is sacred"; the organizer "detests dogma, defies any finite definition of morality"),
- **imagination** ("the fuel for the force that keeps an organizer organizing"),
- a sense of **humor** ("the most potent weapons known to mankind are **satire and ridicule**"), and an
- organized personality with **confidence** in presenting the right reason for his actions only "as a moral rationalization after the right end has been achieved.'...

"The organizer's first job is to **create the issues or problems**,' and 'organizations must be based on many issues.' The organizer 'must first **rub raw the resentments of the people** of the community; **fan the latent hostilities** of many of the people to the point of overt expression. He must **search out controversy** and issues, rather than avoid them, for unless there is controversy people are not concerned enough to act. . . . An organizer must [stir up dissatisfaction](#) and discontent."

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See also [Obama: Training an army of world servers](#)  
[Collectivism in churches](#) and [Trading Truth for a "Social Gospel"](#)