

# Saul D. Alinsky

## A role model for left-wing Satanists

by Diane Vera

*Copyright © 2005 by Diane Vera. All rights reserved.*

The 1972 Vintage Books paperback edition of *Rules for Radicals* by Saul D. Alinsky has a page of quotes just before the table of contents. In the last of the three quotes, Alinsky himself said the following:

Lest we forget at least an over-the-shoulder acknowledgment to the very first radical from all our legends, mythology, and history (and who is to know where mythology leaves off and history begins -- or which is which), 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.

On page 71, speaking of his training program for political organizers, Alinsky remarked:

The qualities we were trying to develop in organizers in the years of attempting to train them included some qualities that in all probability cannot be taught. They either had them, or could get them only through a miracle from above or below.

And, on the [last page](#) of a [1972 Playboy Interview with Saul D. Alinsky](#), he said:

ALINSKY: Sometimes it seems to me that the question people should ask is not "Is there life after death?" but "Is there life after birth?" I don't know whether there's anything after this or not. I haven't seen the evidence one way or the other and I don't think anybody else has either. But I do know that man's obsession with the question comes out of his stubborn refusal to face up to his own mortality. Let's say that if there is an afterlife, and I have anything to say about it, I will unreservedly choose to go to hell.

PLAYBOY: Why?

ALINSKY: Hell would be heaven for me. All my life I've been with the have-nots. Over here, if you're a have-not, you're short of dough. If you're a have-not in hell, you're short of virtue. Once I get into hell, I'll start organizing the have-nots over there.

PLAYBOY: Why them?

ALINSKY: They're my kind of people.

I'm not sure whether Alinsky really was a Satanist/Luciferian of some sort or whether he was just joking. He may well have been just joking. The man certainly did have a sense of humor.

When asked his religion, he would always say that he was Jewish. But, on many levels, he seemed to have distanced himself from his Orthodox Jewish background. For example, in *Rules for Radicals*, when praising Moses as a "good organizer," Alinsky did so in a manner rather irreverent toward the egotism of the Biblical God (pp. 89 to 91).

Be that as it may, he's an excellent role model for politically left-leaning Satanists, whether theistic or symbolic. (When I say "role model" I mean only in a *very* general sense, not one to be followed slavishly.) Certainly he can be said to have manifested his true will. And he espoused a lot of values that are familiar to today's Satanists, such as his emphasis on power, self-interest, creativity, and practicality.

*Rules for Radicals* is full of pragmatic realism. For example, on page 88:

In mass organization, you can't go outside people's actual experience. I've been asked, for example, why I never talk to a Catholic priest or a Protestant minister in terms of the Judaeo-Christian ethic or the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. I never talk in those terms. Instead I approach them on the basis of their own self-interest, the welfare of their Church, even its physical property.

Alinsky accomplished a lot. He built many organizations that gave lot of people the power to improve their lives.

In [Part 7](#) of the 1972 *Playboy* interview, Alinsky said:

The biggest obstacles we faced were the apathy and despair and hopelessness of most of the slum dwellers. You've got to remember that when injustice is complete and crushing, people very seldom rebel; they just give up. A small percentage crack and blow their brains out, but the other, 99 percent say, "Sure, it's bad, but what can we do? You can't fight city hall. It's a rotten world for everybody, and anyway, who knows, maybe I'll win at numbers or my lottery ticket will come through. And the guy down the block is probably worse off than me."

The first thing we have to do when we come into a community is to break down those justifications for inertia. We tell people, "**Look, you don't have to put up with all this shit. There's something concrete you can do about it. But to accomplish anything you've got to have power, and you'll only get it through organization. Now, power comes in two forms -- money and people. You haven't got any money, but you do have people, and here's what you can do with them.**" And we showed the workers in the packing houses how they could organize a union and get higher wages and benefits, and we showed the local merchants how their profits would go up with higher wages in the community, and we showed the exploited tenants how they could fight back against their landlords. Pretty soon we'd established a community-wide coalition of workers, local businessmen, labor leaders and housewives -- our power base -- and we were ready to do battle.

Unlike many leftists, Alinsky avoided dogma. In [Part 10](#) of the 1972 *Playboy* interview, he said:

I've never joined any organization -- not even the ones I've organized myself. I prize my own independence too much. And philosophically, I could never accept any rigid dogma or ideology, whether it's Christianity or Marxism. One of the most important things in life is what Judge Learned Hand described as "that ever-gnawing inner doubt as to whether you're right." If you don't have that, if you think you've got an inside track to absolute truth, you become doctrinaire, humorless and intellectually constipated. The greatest crimes in history have been perpetrated by such religious and political and racial fanatics, from the persecutions of the Inquisition on down to Communist purges and

Nazi genocide. The great atomic physicist Niels Bohr summed it up pretty well when he said, "Every sentence I utter must be understood not as an affirmation, but as a question." Nobody owns the truth, and dogma, whatever form it takes, is the ultimate enemy of human freedom.

Now, this doesn't mean that I'm rudderless; I think I have a much keener sense of direction and purpose than the true believer with his rigid ideology, because I'm free to be loose, resilient and independent, able to respond to any situation as it arises without getting trapped by articles of faith. **My only fixed truth is a belief in people, a conviction that if people have the opportunity to act freely and the power to control their own destinies, they'll generally reach the right decisions.** The only alternative to that belief is rule by an elite, whether it's a Communist bureaucracy or our own present-day corporate establishment. You should never have an ideology more specific than that of the founding fathers: "For the general welfare." That's where I parted company with the Communists in the Thirties, and that's where I stay parted from them today.

But his "belief in people" certainly did not translate into utopian idealism. Also in [Part 10](#) of the 1972 *Playboy* interview, Alinsky said:

People don't get opportunity or freedom or equality or dignity as an act of charity; they have to fight for it, force it out of the establishment. [...] Reconciliation means just one thing: When one side gets enough power, then the other side gets reconciled to it. That's where you need organization -- first to compel concessions and then to make sure the other side delivers. If you're too delicate to exert the necessary pressures on the power structure, then you might as well get out of the ball park. This was the fatal mistake the white liberals made, relying on altruism as an instrument of social change. That's just self-delusion. No issue can be negotiated unless you first have the clout to compel negotiation.

[...]

In fact, of course, conflict is the vital core of an open society; if you were going to express democracy in a musical score, your major theme would be the harmony of dissonance. All change means movement, movement means friction and friction means heat. You'll find consensus only in a totalitarian state, Communist or fascist.

My opposition to consensus politics, however, doesn't mean I'm opposed to compromise; just the opposite. In the world as it is, no victory is ever absolute; but in the world as it is, the right things also invariably get done for the wrong reasons. We didn't win in Woodlawn because the establishment suddenly experienced a moral revelation and threw open its arms to blacks; we won because we backed them into a corner and kept them there until they decided it would be less expensive and less dangerous to surrender to our demands than to continue the fight. I remember that during the height of our Woodlawn effort, I attended a luncheon with a number of presidents of major corporations who wanted to "know their enemy." One of them said to me, "Saul, you seem like a nice guy personally, but why do you see everything only in terms of power and conflict rather than from the point of view of good will and reason and cooperation?" I told him, "Look, when you and your corporation approach competing corporations in terms of good will, reason and cooperation instead of going for the jugular, then I'll follow your lead." There was a long silence at the table, and the subject was dropped.

Given Alinsky's overall approach to organizing, he has been called a "Machiavelli for the common man." In *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky's response to those who ask "Does the end justify the means?" was "The means-and-end moralists, or non-doers, always wind up on their ends without any means" (p. 25).

Some relevant web pages:

- [1972 Playboy Interview with Saul D. Alinsky](#), on the Progress Report website,

which also has an article [Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation](#) by Sanford D. Horwitt

- [Encyclopedia of Chicago](#) article on [Community Organizing](#)
- [Saul Alinsky: Homo Ludens for Urban Democracy](#) by Richard Luecke
- *The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky and His Legacy*: [The Story](#) and [The Life of Saul Alinsky](#)
- [Community Organizing and the Alinsky Tradition in Germany](#)
- [The Community Organizing Toolbox - Resources](#)
- Brief excerpts from *Rules for Radicals* on the websites of [Latter Rain](#) (a left-wing Christian site), [Thinking Peace](#) and [Maurice Institute Library](#).

As even the Latter Rain site acknowledges, in an introduction to its excerpt from *Rules for Radicals*:

Alinsky's field of action was the field of change and a constant stream of conflict. Alinsky knew that in today's world, people are not motivated by altruism, you need to somehow appeal to their self-interest. The right thing usually done for the wrong reasons. When he came into a community in order to organize it, he had to get the local churches involved. He said that he never appealed to the ministers or priests in terms of Christian principles because they did not really believe in Christianity. Therefore, Alinsky appealed to what really motivated them, their self-interests and talked more about membership and more money. It worked every time.

Some may ask: Is left-wing politics of any kind consistent with Satanism? LaVeyans have often equated Satanism with pure capitalism.

I do not see Satan as championing any particular social, economic, or political order. I see Satan as encouraging us to think for ourselves and to be in touch with our own personal nature. It is up to us to figure out what kind of social, economic, or political order would work best for us, given our own circumstances.

I personally feel that it's in *my* best interests to live in the kind of society that, on the whole, works best.

My opinion of pure capitalism and economic libertarianism is that they work fine in a society that is largely rural and where there are a lot of small farm owners, as was the case in much of the U.S.A. until the early 20th century or so. However, in a more urbanized society, neither pure socialism nor pure capitalism works well; some sort of mixed economy is needed and can indeed work well, as per the example of most (though admittedly not all) continental Western European countries.

In small towns, "big government" may seem utterly unnecessary. A lot of small towns even have volunteer fire departments. This would never work in a big city like New York. In a small town where everyone knows everyone, there are strong social incentives to do various kinds of volunteer work. The social rewards for volunteer work are much less in a large city.

In a highly urbanized society, the alternative to having at least a moderately limited "welfare state" is to have very high crime rates every time there's an economic downturn. This sort of thing happened quite a bit in the early 20th century, if I'm not mistaken.

Anyhow, as the financial troubles of the Church of Satan itself should more than adequately demonstrate, we Satanists need to drop the fantasy that we're a bunch of supermen. Yes, we should aim to empower ourselves through our own individual efforts, *but* it *also* helps to have organizations that empower entire communities.

Back to:

- [Social, legal, and political matters](#)
- [Diane Vera's Theistic Satanism page](#)