



The Prince and the Pauper

By William A. Borst, Ph.D.

Talk of one's historical "legacy" has become increasingly more fashionable in American political life. It is interesting how the legacies of two disparate figures, such as Niccolo Machiavelli and Saul Alinsky have come to be intertwined in an intergenerational relationship that has had lasting consequences for American society.

Machiavelli was born in 1469 in Italy. According to historian Jacques Barzun, even his name evokes visions of "fiendish conduct." It has evolved to mean a cynical approach to government. This disdain revolves around his seminal work, *The Prince* written in 1513. The sixteenth century city of Florence was the cultural hub of the Italian peninsula, while Italy was a miasma of violence-ridden principalities where the people lived in constant fear and trembling. Assassinations, murders, and pillaging were daily occurrences. Machiavelli thought it was time for a "new prince," who would establish peace and order.

Machiavelli was disturbed because most people lived according to the immorality of the day, even though they espoused Christian principles. The precept of "Do unto others..." became "I must kill you before you kill me." He reasoned that since the Italians of his day were morally weak, cowards, or poor, traditional rules had to be altered. Machiavelli's prince was a realist who had to work with the existing situation. This being the case, it was futile for him to say, "just be good and things will be better." The new prince should be decent and principled but he must never let his principles get in the way of the evil he must do to preserve himself and his state. His cardinal rule had to be "the ends always justified whatever means he must employ." Machiavelli's prince strove to be feared, not loved because "for a man who wishes to make a vocation of being good at all times will come to ruin among so many who are not so good." According to Arthur Hippler, in the "Wanderer," Machiavelli was the first Western thinker to promote the idea that "moral evil is necessary for political good."

The Florentine establishment maintained that it was common

knowledge that the state's institutions were ridden with all kinds of immoralities that exposed the hypocrisy behind their Christian facade. To strip them of their protective covering would just encourage more dishonesty and immorality. To the contrary, Machiavelli argued that unless governmental critics exposed the basic contradictions in public life, the existing evil would continue undiminished and unabated.

It has been almost five centuries since Machiavelli's death in 1527. According to Barzun, Machiavelli's legacy has lived on in the minds and hearts of scholars and deep thinkers, such as John Adams, philosophers Charles Montesquieu and David Hume, as well as Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. They all believed that the state should be neutral on moral issues. It is obvious that his spirit has deeply influenced the minds of many current American leaders, who employ the same antinomian rationale that has led the Supreme Court to render its decisions on abortion and homosexual rights.

A MACHIAVELLIAN DESCENDENT

One such Machiavellian descendent was the radical social activist, Saul Alinsky. Born in Chicago, Illinois on January 30, 1909, Alinsky received his education in Chicago, both in the classroom and on its mean streets. He did graduate work in Criminology, which brought him in contact with the Capone Gang and later with the Joliet State Prison, where he studied prison life. Among the many books he wrote was a biography of John L. Lewis, the president of the United Mine Workers and *Reveille for Radicals*. Twice divorced, Alinsky died suddenly in Carmel, California on June 12, 1972, at the age of 63.

IDEOLOGICAL AGNOSTIC

Saul Alinsky adapted Machiavellian tactics to his own brand of social justice. Alinsky was a superb social organizer, who believed in the power of numbers. Grass roots organization was the open door through which he hoped to accumulate power for

his disciples. Like his Italian mentor, Alinsky was not a utopian visionary. He believed that the organizer should be a neutral agent, a kind of ideological agnostic, seeking no particular outcome and advancing no philosophy, other than gaining of power. Alinsky lost little sleep over doing “dark deeds” for the good of the have-nots. To him ethical standards had to be “elastic enough to stretch with the times.”

Alinsky was not a doctrinaire cultural Marxist. He was more concerned with strategy. His thinking included elements of Marxism, Socialism, Fascism, and Anarchism, along with a deep abiding contempt for religion, the business world, private property, and the traditional American political process. He felt that his popular organizations were to be dedicated to external warfare in the true spirit of the French Revolution. It is not surprising that Thomas Paine, “the voice of the revolution,” was one of his heroes. He had no tolerance for compromise. He discarded the traditional rules of fair play because he believed the playing field had been distorted against the poor and the disenfranchised. He stressed a liberal social gospel philosophy that played on people’s guilt-ridden consciences over the sins of the past, especially slavery. He promoted a People’s Revolution in the name of “social justice.” Alinsky was a self-proclaimed radical, who used sociology as a guise for his revolutionary activities. He was the ultimate class warrior who pitted the wealthy against the poor and in so doing he enlisted the support of clergy from many different religious denominations, especially Catholic priests with a strong urban social mission.

THE CATHOLICS AND THE POOR

Alinsky worked with the downtrodden everywhere, organizing blacks in Chicago, Rochester, and New York, and Mexicans in the barrios of Los Angeles. In a strange course of events, in 1958 he organized the poor in Milan, Italy, as an anti-Communist buffer at the behest of the then Archbishop Giovanni Montini, later Pope Paul VI. It was a surprising choice since Alinsky had dedicated his life to Marxist-inspired revolution.

When Auxiliary Bishop Bernard J. Sheil of the Chicago Archdiocese embraced labor leader John L. Lewis of the CIO at the organizational convention of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council in 1939, he began what became a long relationship with Alinsky and the Church. With the financial backing of leftist millionaire Marshall Field, Jr., Alinsky organized and helped set up the Council to revitalize the squalid slums around Chicago’s Union Stockyards. The “yards” was notorious for its corruption and poverty as related in *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair’s expose about the meatpacking industry. The Back of the Yards served as his power base for the rest of his life. Alinsky used the poor to undermine

the political process. His tactics were rent strikes, boycotts, sit-down strikes, and picketing, long before these Marxist tactics became popular with the left in America. Other “necessary” means included lies, deceit, and trickery.

Through the use of a liberal and social gospel-type clergy in the Catholic Church and several Protestant denominations, Alinsky organized the radical, as well as civic-minded groups in a cohesive force that had a decided impact upon urban life in the sixties and seventies. Alinsky envisioned a rainbow organization that encompassed youth committees, small businesses, labor unions, and most of all, the Catholic Church. One of his disciples was Cesar Chavez, the Marxist leader of the grape strikes, whom Alinsky personally trained. The Catholic Church, with its devotion to civil rights and its “preferential option” for the poor was especially vulnerable to Alinsky’s radical gospel.

In 1965 the Catholic Interracial Council in Rochester, New York urged him to come to their city to organize their black community. Alinsky began by organizing groups of militant blacks from gangs, such as the Assassins, Imperial Council, and the Upsetters. “Reverend” Frank Florence who had been a follower of the late Malcolm X led one of these organizations. “Black Power” more than true reform was at the top of their agenda.

That same year Alinsky served as an adviser to Msgr. Clement Kern’s West Central Organization in the Detroit area. A radical priest, Kern believed that it was more important to “join the NAACP than the Holy Name Society,” or “CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) than the Legion of Mary.”

PARISH BOOT CAMP

Alinsky was a regular lecturer at the Urban Training Center in Chicago, which served as a boot camp for the radical clergy. His focus had always been on the local pastors. One such pastor was Msgr. John J. Egan, who is credited with having enlisted the Chicago Archdiocese in support of Alinsky’s projects. After Alinsky’s death, Egan eulogized him at a memorial service, held at a Jewish synagogue. Egan recalled that on his first visit to the Industrial Areas Foundation office Alinsky gave him some stern advice: “Decide early whether you want to be a bishop or a pastor—everything follows from that.” For Egan it was an easy choice. He spent many years assigned to parishes associated with Alinsky’s work and did supportive work with his mentor’s staff.

At the Urban Training Center, Alinsky used the Bible as a training manual for organizers. Alinsky thought the Bible was “one of the greatest texts on political and social organization ever written.” He was especially fond of the organizational skills of Moses and St. Paul. He was working on a new book called “the Bible” at the time of his death.

THE RADICAL RULEBOOK

Alinsky's most significant book was *Rules for Radicals*. In this 1971 book, Alinsky inverted Machiavelli's teaching. The author of *The Prince* wrote for the wealthy princes of Medieval Europe. Machiavelli taught them how to hold and maintain their power. Alinsky adopted Machiavellian principles to be used by the poor for the subversion of the rich and powerful. He taught the have-nots how they could seize power away from their oppressors in business, politics, and religion.

With *Rules* as a handbook, Alinsky's classes and workshops became a breeding ground for professional activists and revolutionaries among the poor. He created training centers for agitators, rent strikers and street demonstrations. His handiwork was clearly visible in the Chicago riots that accompanied the Democratic National Convention in 1968. His legacy left deep bitterness and racial division in its wake.

Like so many radical liberals, Alinsky had no special love for the poor. They served only as the vehicle for his social activism. He condemned those who made a fetish of their love for the poor. To him they were as dangerous and as "guilty as other dogmatists." He became adept at disrupting the social and political activities of his enemies. His most important rule was to "make the enemy live up to its own rule book." Alinsky believed that this was the Achilles heel of any conservative organization because they "can no more live up to its own rule than the Christian church can live up to Christianity."

Alinsky utilized the potent fact of the unavoidable contradiction in most public human behavior, "Do what I say, not as I do." This is the albatross around the neck that has weighed down so many public figures that try to do the right thing but invariably succumb to the darker side of their human nature. One need only refer to the loss of power which accompanied the revelations of immoral conduct by Republican leaders, such as Newt Gingrich, Robert Livingston, and even Henry Hyde during the Clinton administration, to understand the importance of this tactic. Machiavelli recognized this undeniable fact in human behavior, as did Alinsky. Alinsky wielded it like a powerful weapon because if the average American hates one thing, it is hypocrisy.

THE MONEYED CLASS

After working with the poor, Alinsky took his principles of pragmatic power to the middle class, because like Machiavelli, Alinsky realized that he should work where the power and money were. In his Marxist mindset, Alinsky thought that the middle class, those earning \$14,000 or more, were the "most alienated" in the country. As a result, he chided activists, such as the Students for Democratic Action, who condemned the materialism and

decadence of their parents. Like Machiavelli, Alinsky was a realist who believed radicals "must begin from where we are if we are to build power for change." Practical radicals will often have to put aside their principles for the good of the revolution. If they had to stifle their overt hatred of their middle class roots, for the sake of revolutionary change, then that's what they had to do.

AN APT PUPIL

One of his early converts from the middle class was a former Goldwater Republican from Park Ridge, Illinois. Alinsky saw great promise in the bespectacled college student from Wellesley College, Hillary Rodham. The future Mrs. Clinton thought enough of Alinsky to write her senior thesis on his ideas and strategies, after working for him the previous summer. Unfortunately, the voting public will never know what she wrote. According to the book, *Hell to Pay*, by Barbara Olson, a passenger on American Flight #77 that was crashed into the Pentagon on 9/11, as soon as Bill Clinton became president, Hillary's thesis was "put under lock and key" at Wellesley.

In her 2003 best seller *Living History*, Senator Clinton briefly acknowledges her intellectual debt to Alinsky. She took great pains to point out that she disagreed with his idea that one had to work from outside the establishment. Clinton prides herself on working from within an organization to "reform it."

THE FIRST RADICAL

While Alinsky might have had all the best intentions in the world, it is a truism once power belongs to the Machiavellian, his good intentions become identical with his own personal views. Consequently, his ends justify whatever means he chooses to inflict on his subjects. All Machiavellian rules then become diabolical. According to philosopher Leo Strauss' classic, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, the Florentine was essentially "a teacher of evil." This epithet should also apply to Alinsky. All Americans should be aware of what these "teachers of evil" taught and to whom they taught it.

It is no surprise then that in his introduction to *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky praised the first known radical "who rebelled against the establishment and did so effectively that he won his own kingdom." Who was the first radical? Why Lucifer himself!

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20 copies	\$5.00	500 copies	\$85.00
50 copies	\$11.00	1000 copies	\$160.00

The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, 7800 Bonhomme Ave., P.O. Box 11321, St. Louis, MO 63105, 314-727-6279, Fax 314-727-5897.

Subscription rate: \$20.00/year, \$36.00/two years.
Outside the U.S.A. \$28.00

The Mindszenty Report is not copyrighted, and subscribers are invited to have it printed in their local newspapers.

Eleanor Schlafly, Publisher

web site: www.mindszenty.org / e-mail: info@mindszenty.org

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News & Notes

Pray the Rosary Daily



AS POPE JOHN PAUL II offered Mass on Sunday September 30, 2001 in Rome, he said that Catholics should be on the front lines in the fight against terrorism. He called September 11 a dark day in the history of humanity. He asked the world's Catholics to help rid the world of terrorism by working for justice and by saying the Rosary for peace.

OCTOBER IS THE MONTH OF THE ROSARY. A very nice leaflet, with reproductions in color, explains the Rosary and the Mysteries. Order for your children, grandchildren, friends, neighbors, from Marian Helpers, Stockbridge, MA 01263, 1-800-462-7426. Our Lady made many promises for those who recite the Rosary prayerfully!

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ST. JOHN 13:34

"This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you."