**Book Review by Paul Buckwalter. *Anglican Theological Review*. February, 2016.**

*People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky:* **Aaron Schutz and Mike Miller, editors. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015 - XV + 352 pp $31.00 (paper)**

**Editors Mike Miller and Aaron Schutz with** *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky* **have made an important contribution to the recent writings on community organizing in the United States, in particular the tradition of the Industrial Area Foundation (IAF) founded by Alinsky in Chicago in the late 1930’s. The editors summarize the purpose of the book in the Introduction; “This book provides an introduction to Alinsky’s ideas and practices. It ranges from an analytic look at his core concepts to detailed stories about their implementation in a variety of contexts, and includes an introduction to some of the organizers who in one way or another implemented their understanding of what he had to teach.” (pp XV). Thus, the audience for this book is church leaders, lay and clergy, everywhere.**

**Church leaders will find this work helpful for at least two reasons; Alinsky type organizations are church based and church funded. Secondly, there are over 80 such organizations located in urban areas including IAF, and its step sister organizations PICO, DART, and Gamaliel throughout this country, England, and Australia.**

**Miller and Schutz quote President Obama to pinpoint why a treatise like** *People Power* **is important today as it was in the 1960’s, perhaps more so. Obama writes in 1988, “The only way for communities to build long term power is by organizing people and money around a common vision” (pp XIV). The uniqueness of this book is that for the first time manuscripts, mimeographs, articles, tapes, and interviews of community organizers down through the years, 1950’s and on, have been assembled in one place. Threaded through these documents are the comments and reflections by the editors on both the players’ work and written words. Miller and Schutz have done impeccable research with their own contemporary interviews, document recovery, and bringing together important essays on community organizing from those who did the work over the years.**

**Miller and Schutz are well equipped, both as editors and historians. Miller is a life time community organizer, now based in [San Francisco], who was Alinsky’s first organizer in Kansas City back in the day, knew Alinsky quite well, and subsequently became a lead organizer in the Bay Area, and a trainer/consultant to multiple community organizations throughout the country. Schutz is Professor of Educational Policy and Community Studies at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, [and] an active leader in an IAF organization in Milwaukee.**

**“Community organizing brings powerless and relatively powerless people together in solidarity to defend and advance their interest and values”. (pg 2) From this definition the editors present a historical summary of Alinsky’s origins and work, an analysis and description of his ideas which subsequently were put in place throughout the United States by Alinsky’s primary disciples and colleagues - Ed Chambers, Tom Gaudette, Dick Harmon, Fred Ross and Nicholas von Hoffman. However, the editors, thankfully, provide documents, stories, and information on lesser known organizers Shel Trapp, Gale Cincotta, Stan Holt, Heather Booth, and Wade Rathke. Bringing all of these people under “one roof” has provided an irreplaceable document in the field of community organizing. The reprint of Nicholas von Hoffman’s well-grounded monograph, “Finding and Making Leaders” (1963), is well worth the price of admission to the whole book.**

**Schutz and Miller also provide in their tracing of community organizing from the 1950’s to the present, a view of the diversity in organizing methods and styles, all essentially spun off from Alinsky’s original visions. Thus, Trapp, Holt, and Cincotta did block club and neighborhood organizing in Chicago. Rathke did personal membership organizing through his national organization, ACORN, as did Cesar Chavez and Fred Ross on the West Coast with the farm workers. IAF spun off PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing), mostly church based institutional organizing led by John Baumann, and Jerry Helfridge, and finally the core of IAF organizations were built around institutions, churches, unions and educational systems.**

**The editors also explore successfully the difficulties of women working as organizers in IAF’s early macho culture, especially looking carefully at Heather Booth’s experience and writings. Although somewhat uneven the authors also trace the growth and change in community organizing down through the years. Community organizing moved from neighborhood locations and short-term 5 year projects to county wide and long term organizations - 25-30 years and still going. This was a direct result of the cadre of organizers who emerged in the late 1970’s especially Ed Chambers, Alinsky’s direct successor after Nicholas von Hoffman moved on, and Ernesto Cortez, chief organizer in Texas and the Southwest. Community organizers also established that the work was a professional calling and made, like Miller, lifetime commitments to the work.**

**The editors close out the book with a critique of Alinsky organizing, “what could of/might of have been done”, and an assessment of 21st century community organizing and its future. The primary critique of this book is that the editors did not “stretch” further into the 1980’s and 1990’s to raise up the regional organizing in Louisiana, Nebraska, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern Arizona led by Ernesto Cortez, Sr. Christine Stevens, and their bevy of organizer-nuns who made a huge…regional impact on the Southwest. In conclusion, the strength of this book is the quite successful outline of the core values, purpose and methodology of community organizing, and bringing real people with “down to earth’ experiences, stories, and analysis to the “theory” of community organizing. Above all Schutz and Miller tell what it is like to be deeply embedded in and committed to Saul Alinsky’s work and legacy.**

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