

# William F. Buckley, Saul Alinsky, and the Ideology of Perpetual Destruction

by [Washington Free Beacon](#), 9.21.2014)

The question, then, is what does a person who is dedicated to radical change do when he/she becomes the president of the United States (Obama)? How far can he really go within the constraints of a constitutional republic built on laws and institutions—which themselves are the agents and means of change (though not as rapidly as he would prefer)? For issues of the present moment, what does the heir apparent of this ideology, and the profoundly disappointed expected holder of the passed torch of presidential leadership (Mrs. Clinton) do when the presidential torch goes instead to the opposition candidate, someone entirely opposed to these Alinsky-oriented concepts of perpetual radical change? To understand these questions and come to some conclusion about them we're obliged to turn to history for the answers, which are readily available but not necessarily easily understood.

Saul Alinsky is widely known as the rabble rouser defender-of-the-poor and radical change agent from the '60s and '70s whose unusual tactics of mass mobilization were often successful, occasionally grotesquely humorous, and sometimes revolting. His books are now considered quasi- "classic" in their genre of political radicalism. The rhetorical elements of the Alinsky approach (demonization of the opponent) have been used successfully by those on the left for decades with some on the opposing side now deploying them to equal profit against those on the left. Ironically, [interview](#) with William F. Buckley.

Alinsky's view of the world and of humanity is not one that most would consider positive or uplifting. It is not a view that empowers peace, cooperation, tolerance, compassion, or consideration of the challenges faced by all parties to any given disagreement. His thoughts about change and 'power' are inimical to fundamental ideas of American law, politics, and institutions.

The ideas of '60s anti-institution and anti-establishment radicalism are now at play once again, this time fostered not by a fringe radical activist author but rather by a former President of the United States and a former secretary of state and failed presidential candidate and their millions of blinkered followers.

The irony of the situation is only offset by the danger it presents to the open society of ideas and reverence for the constitution and institutions as well as societal cohesion that are the foundations of American political life and national existence. If the '60s and early '70s were significantly shaped by Mr. Alinsky and his followers, the present moment is the consequence of the ascendancy of his philosophical children.

It is difficult to know if Mrs. Clinton and former President Obama share Mr. Alinsky's view of human development as described below. The Alinsky method for all its claims of aiding the poor is really a cover for something else entirely—the destruction of institutions and the undermining of societal stability. In a [Episode 079](#), recorded on December 11, 1967) was posted to the internet. It is an hour length interview well worth watching as Alinsky illuminates his beliefs and approach quite clearly in reply to Mr. Buckley's

insightful queries, and presents a short period of a sort of entertainment that is intellectually, historically, and politically important while simultaneously enervating and profoundly disturbing.

Alinsky is accused by Mr. Buckley of having a cynical view of life, an accusation that Mr. Alinsky is hard pressed to evade. Mr. Alinsky appears to see the world in Hegelian terms (as identified by Mr. Buckley), in which advancement is made only through conflict and that motivations based on anything other than self-interest are denied. Alinsky explains that "all progress comes as a result of a threat and that the reaction to the threat is where you get progress" (36:35). Not only does progress result only as the consequence of threat, but the acquisition of power also fits the same mold, in his view. "You only get power as a reaction to a threat" (11:10). Perhaps Buckley's reference to Hegel is improved these long years on with a linkage to Hobbes and that philosopher's dark view of the perpetual conflict and ugliness of human life.

Saul Alinsky's concepts of progress and power and their direct relation to threat is contrary to American views of how progress within the constitutional democratic experiment occurs. We have parties, and debate, discourse, discussions, and an open society that is meant to provide the environment in which people operating within the constraints of the constitution and the institutions that support it, and often motivated by ethical and moral concepts that were formerly universally held, can improve the experiment, improve the lives of themselves and their fellow citizens, and solve problems and challenges.

Such an experiment, built upon stability and reverence for

institutions, is not as speedily reactive as those who agitate for rapid shifts and changes generally prefer. This seemingly ponderous nature of the institutions is seen by many today as a failure of the institutions. Thus, there is always a conflict, built in to the system itself, between desires for change and improvement all while sustaining the sometimes-slow moving institutions themselves that provide an environment of freedom and safety in which those changes can occur. This sort of American systemic change, essential to American democracy, too time consuming and complex for many, is rejected by Alinsky.

The denial of decent, charitable, ethical motivations is neatly summed up by Alinsky in this way: "people only do the right things for the wrong reasons" (at 22:38). This suggests that no change is motivated by care or charity or ethically/morally-driven concepts of right and wrong, and that the only changes that can occur are those that are forced upon people.

Alinsky believes that history and human development is a "relay race of revolutions" but the end point, the conclusion of all of these revolutionary races, is never quite identified. While Alinsky's hyperbolic language suggests that this cycle of nightmares is supposed to be both beneficial and perpetual, some have postulated about what an end might be to such a grotesque cycle. Some have suggested that some form of socialism or communism is the desired end result for Alinsky, although he denied being a Communist; but it is the difficulties and challenges of a free political life, a free and open society, and open markets and competition that are at the heart of his complaints. The implication is that some uber-entity, in this case "the government," would mandate solutions thus working swiftly and avoiding the delay and

ugliness of debate and compromise.

It is the inequities of existence, a universal truth, against which the pragmatic decent and the fallen utopian always rebel. The great difference of course is that the utopians will not wait, and justify whatever means are required to reach the end point, while the decent retain their moral and ethical core and are prevented from excess by those same moral and ethical codes. In this upside-down worldview of Alinsky, the end point is never to be reached apparently, and the goal is simply conflict, revolution, upheaval, and pressure *in perpetuity*. Such are the foundations of dystopia built with a façade of advancement and benefit by utopians of the left.

Socialism, communism, and all sorts of utopian schemes are so popular, then as now, because they purport to solve these seemingly impossible problems. It is in the idea of the perfectibility of humanity that the utopian operates most vigorously; humanity is perfectible, impossible problems of existence are solvable, systems of great power yet benevolent central control can be constructed to facilitate these things, too. All of these challenges can be met and all solutions are within our reach if we should but act and brook no delay!

Concomitantly, those who oppose resolving the central problems of humanity can only be seen as "evil." In this way, the opposition is properly demonized, all functional discourse and the flow of ideas are halted, and the utopian program, in this case perpetual conflict (at every level), is pressed forward by well-meaning followers who are deluded into believing that through the breaking of institutions and the fall of cities, states, and countries, the vexing problems of human existence can be resolved.

Open societies and open markets always mean that some will be more successful than others, that some will have more than others, and that some, unfortunately, will have to struggle harder than most to attain what they desire or need. Such things exist within every political system and every society that has ever existed as these are truths of humanity despite the fantasies of utopians—we are not all equal in ability, desire, capability, discipline, wisdom, wealth, etc. Any society constructed on such falsehoods will fall.

Relieving the inequities of life and of any political system are at the heart of most desires for positive change. That Americans would be motivated to reduce poverty as much as is possible, for example, is a laudable goal motivated entirely by concern for one's fellow citizen in addition to the health and welfare of the entire body politic. Such a combination of prudence and compassion is inherent in the American national character—entirely denied in the Alinsky worldview.

What is a person who believes that *any* establishment is inherently an obstruction to the advancement of humanity and must be eliminated and replaced by some new establishment (whatever it might be) so that humanity can advance? And that such creation and destruction of institutions should continue *ad infinitum*? This is a philosophy of endless revolution and change (for its own sake) and the embodiment of the opposition to stability and government of laws and institutions. Where in chaos then do the people find comfort, resolutions to problems, equity, equality, fairness, safety, and compassion? The answer is clear: they do not.

What other than institutions and laws are at the center of an “establishment?” There is a corollary foundational pillar to this American edifice now under constant pressure and assault from the confused left—that is the support and respect for these institutions in the hearts and minds of the people. Fellow leftist travelers in the government, entertainment, education, and the media carry on this assault against the hearts of the people every day and night. These are the soldiers of perpetual destruction thinking all the while that they are the true patriots. It is a world turned upside down, and compliant with Mr. Alinsky’s [walkaway movement](#) had over 100,000 members on their Facebook page. They tend to sustain a general classic form of American liberalism, uncorrupted by utopianism, globalism, and bizarre theories of human evolution. Such a massive shift is how old political parties die, and new ones are born.

In a [warning](#) is most appropriate here: a house divided against itself cannot stand. Only by exposing the origins and philosophical foundations of leftist agitation, bitterness, and intolerance, and understanding the current political environment as a philosophical conflict instead of a standard matter of Democrat and Republican can we then take steps to improve things. If we don’t understand our open society and what happens within it and also work to uphold it, then we cannot find solutions. Only with the study of history can the path to a resolution be found.

---

Daniel Mallock is a historian of the Founding generation and of the Civil War and is the author of The New York Times Bestseller,