

From: ALINSKY, SAUL.  
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## *About Words*

THE PASSIONS OF MANKIND have boiled over into all areas of political life, including its vocabulary. The words most common in politics have become stained with human hurts, hopes, and frustrations. All of them are loaded with popular opprobrium, and their use results in a conditioned, negative, emotional response. Even the word *politics* itself, which Webster says is "the science and art of government," is generally viewed in a context of corruption. Ironically, the dictionary synonyms are "discreet; provident, diplomatic, wise."

The same discolorations attach to other words prevalent in the language of politics, words like *power*, *self-interest*, *compromise*, and *conflict*. They become twisted and warped, viewed as evil. Nowhere is the prevailing political illiteracy more clearly revealed than in these typical interpretations of words. This is why we pause here for a word about words.

## POWER

The question may legitimately be raised, why not use other words—words that mean the same but are peaceful, and do not result in such negative emotional reactions? There are a number of fundamental reasons for rejecting such substitution. First, by using combinations of words such as "harnessing the energy" instead of the single word "power," we begin to dilute the meaning; and as we use purifying synonyms, we dissolve the bitterness, the anguish, the hate and love, the agony and the triumph attached to these words, leaving an aseptic imitation of life. In the politics of life we are concerned with the slaves and the Caesars, not the vestal virgins. It is not just that, in communication as in thought, we must ever strive toward simplicity. (The masterpieces of philosophic or scientific statement are frequently no longer than a few words, for example, " $E=mc^2$ .") It is more than that: it is a determination not to detour around reality.

To use any other word but power is to change the meaning of everything we are talking about. As Mark Twain once put it, "The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug."

Power is the right word just as self-interest, compromise, and the other simple political words are, for they were conceived in and have become part of politics from the beginning of time. To pander to those who have no stomach for straight language, and insist upon bland, non-controversial sauces, is a waste of time. They cannot or

deliberately will not understand what we are discussing here. I agree with Nietzsche's statement in *The Genealogy of Morals* on this point:

Why stroke the hypersensitive ears of our modern weaklings? Why yield even a single step . . . to the Tartuffery of words? For us psychologists that would involve a Tartuffery of *action* . . . For a psychologist today shows his good taste (others may say his integrity) in this, if in anything, that he resists the shamefully *moralized* manner of speaking which makes all modern judgments about men and things slimy.

We approach a critical point when our tongues trap our minds. I do not propose to be trapped by tact at the expense of truth. Striving to avoid the force, vigor, and simplicity of the word "power," we soon become averse to thinking in vigorous, simple, honest terms. We strive to invent sterilized synonyms, cleansed of the opprobrium of the word *power*—but the new words mean something different, so that they tranquilize us, begin to shepherd our mental processes off the main, conflict-ridden, grimy, and realistic power-paved highway of life. To travel down the sweeter-smelling, peaceful, more socially acceptable, more respectable, indefinite byways, ends in a failure to achieve an honest understanding of the issues that we must come to grips with if we are to do the job.

Let us look at the word *power*. Power, meaning "ability, whether physical, mental, or moral, to act," has become an evil word, with overtones and undertones that suggest the sinister, the unhealthy, the Machiavellian. It suggests a phantasmagoria of the nether regions. The me-

ment the word *power* is mentioned it is as though hell had been opened, exuding the stench of the devil's cesspool of corruption. It evokes images of cruelty, dishonesty, selfishness, arrogance, dictatorship, and abject suffering. The word *power* is associated with conflict; it is unacceptable in our present Madison Avenue deodorized hygiene, where controversy is blasphemous and the value is being liked and not offending others. Power, in our minds, has become almost synonymous with corruption and immorality.

Whenever the word *power* is mentioned, somebody sooner or later will refer to the classical statement of Lord Acton and cite it as follows: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." In fact the correct quotation is: "Power *tends* to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We can't even read Acton's statement accurately, our minds are so confused by our conditioning.

The corruption of power is not in power, but in ourselves. And yet, what is this power which men live by and to a significant degree live for? Power is the very essence, the dynamo of life. It is the power of the heart pumping blood and sustaining life in the body. It is the power of active citizen participation pulsing upward, providing a unified strength for a common purpose. Power is an essential life force always in operation, either changing the world or opposing change. Power, or organized energy, may be a man-killing explosive or a life-saving drug. The power of a gun may be used to enforce slavery, or to achieve freedom.

The power of the human brain can create man's most glorious achievements, and develop perspectives and insights into the nature of life-opening horizons previously

beyond the imagination. The power of the human mind can also devise philosophies and ways of life that are most destructive for the future of mankind. Either way, power is the dynamo of life.

Alexander Hamilton, in *The Federalist Papers*, put it this way: "What is a power, but the ability or faculty of doing a thing? What is the ability to do a thing, but the power of employing the *means* necessary to its execution?" Pascal, who was definitely not a cynic, observed that: "Justice without power is impotent; power without justice is tyranny." St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order, did not shrink from the recognition of power when he issued his dictum: "To do a thing well a man needs power and competence." We could call the roll of all who have played their parts in history and find the word *power*, not a substitute word, used in their speech and writings.

It is impossible to conceive of a world devoid of power; the only choice of concepts is between organized and unorganized power. Mankind has progressed only through learning how to develop and organize instruments of power in order to achieve order, security, morality, and civilized life itself, instead of a sheer struggle for physical survival. Every organization known to man, from government down, has had only one reason for being—that is, organization for power in order to put into practice or promote its common purpose.

When we talk about a person's "lifting himself by his own bootstraps" we are talking about power. Power must be understood for what it is, for the part it plays in every area of our life, if we are to understand it and thereby grasp the essentials of relationships and functions between groups and organizations, particularly in a pluralistic society. *To know power and not fear it is essential to its con-*

*structive use and control.* In short, life without power is death; a world without power would be a ghostly wasteland, a dead planet!

### SELF-INTEREST

*Self-interest*, like *power*, wears the black shroud of negativism and suspicion. To many the synonym for self-interest is selfishness. The word is associated with a repugnant conglomeration of vices such as narrowness, self-seeking, and self-centeredness, everything that is opposite to the virtues of altruism and selflessness. This common definition is contrary, of course, to our everyday experiences, as well as to the observations of all great students of politics and life. The myth of altruism as a motivating factor in our behavior could arise and survive only in a society bundled in the sterile gauze of New England puritanism and Protestant morality and tied together with the ribbons of Madison Avenue public relations. It is one of the classic American fairy tales.

From the great teachers of Judaeo-Christian morality and the philosophers, to the economists, and to the wise observers of the politics of man, there has always been universal agreement on the part that self-interest plays as a prime moving force in man's behavior. The importance of self-interest has never been challenged; it has been accepted as an inevitable fact of life. In the words of Christ, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Aristotle said, in *Politics*, "Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly ever of the

public interest." Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, noted that "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard of their own interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantage." In all the reasoning found in *The Federalist Papers*, no point is so central and agreed upon as "Rich and poor alike are prone to act upon impulse rather than pure reason and to narrow conceptions of self-interest . . ." To question the force of self-interest that pervades all areas of political life is to refuse to see man as he is, to see him only as we would like him to be.

And yet, next to this acceptance of self-interest, there are certain observations I would like to make. Machiavelli, with whom the idea of self-interest seems to have gained its greatest notoriety, at least among those who are unaware of the tradition, said:

This is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, fake, cowardly, covetous, as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you.

But Machiavelli makes a mortal mistake when he rules out the "moral" factors of politics and holds purely to self-interest as he defines it. This mistake can only be accounted for on the basis that Machiavelli's experience as an active politician was not too great, for otherwise he could not have overlooked the obvious fluidity of every man's self-interest. The overall case must be of larger dimensions than that of self-interest narrowly defined; it must be large

enough to include and provide for the shifting dimensions of self-interest. You may appeal to one self-interest to get me to the battlefield to fight; but once I am there, my prime self-interest becomes to stay alive, and if we are victorious my self-interest may, and usually does, dictate entirely unexpected goals rather than those I had before the war. For example, the United States in World War II fervently allied with Russia against Germany, Japan, and Italy, and shortly after victory fervently allied with its former enemies—Germany, Japan, and Italy—against its former ally, the U.S.S.R.

These drastic shifts of self-interest can be rationalized only under a huge, limitless umbrella of general "moral" principles such as liberty, justice, freedom, a law higher than man-made law, and so on. Morality, so-called, becomes the continuum as self-interests shift.

Within this morality there appears to be a tearing conflict, probably due to the layers of inhibition in our kind of moralistic civilization—it appears shameful to admit that we operate on the basis of naked self-interest, so we desperately try to reconcile every shift of circumstances that is to our self-interest in terms of a broad moral justification or rationalization. With one breath we point out that we are utterly opposed to communism, but that we love the Russian people (loving people is in keeping with the tenets of our civilization). What we hate is the atheism and the suppression of the individual that we attribute as characteristics substantiating the "immorality" of communism. On this we base our powerful opposition. We do not admit the actual fact: our own self-interest.

We proclaimed all of these negative, diabolical Russian characteristics just prior to the Nazi invasion of Russia. The Soviets were then the cynical despots who

connived in the non-aggression pact with Hitler, the ruthless invaders who brought disaster to the Poles and the Finns. They were a people in chains and in misery, held in slavery by a dictator's might; they were a people whose rulers so distrusted them that the Red Army was not permitted to have live ammunition because they might turn their guns against the Kremlin. All this was our image. But within minutes of the invasion of Russia by the Nazis, when self-interest dictated that the defeat of Russia would be disastrous to our interest, then—suddenly—they became the gallant, great, warm, loving Russian people; the dictator became the benevolent and loving Uncle Joe; the Red Army soon was filled with trust and devotion to its government, fighting with an unparalleled bravery and employing a scorched-earth policy against the enemy. The Russian allies certainly had God on their side—after all, He was on ours. Our June, 1941, shift was more dramatic and sudden than our shift against the Russians shortly after the defeat of our common enemy. In both cases our self-interest was disguised, as the banners of freedom, liberty, and decency were unveiled—first against the Nazis, and six years later against the Russians.

In our present relationship with Tito and the Yugoslavian communists, then, the issue is not that Tito represents communism, but that he is not part of the Russian power alignment. Here we take the position we took after the Nazi invasion, where suddenly communism became, "Well, after all, it's their way of life and we believe in the right of self-determination and it's up to the Russians to have the government they like," *as long as they are on our side and do not threaten our self-interest*. Too, there is no question that, with all our denunciation of the Red Chinese, if they announced that they were no longer a part of

the world communist conspiracy or alignment of forces, they would be overnight acceptable to us, acclaimed by us, and provided with all kinds of aid, just so long as they were on our side. In essence, what we are saying is that we do not care what kind of a communist you are so long as you do not threaten our self-interest.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by some of the differences between the world as it is and the world as we would like it to be. Recently, after lecturing at Stanford University, I met a Soviet professor of political economics from the University of Leningrad. The opening of our conversation was illustrative of the definitions and outlook of those who live in the world as it is. The Russian began by asking me, "Where do you stand on communism?" I replied, "That's a bad question since the real question is, assuming both of us are operating in and thinking of the world as it is, 'Whose Communists are they—yours or ours?' If they are ours, then we are all for them. If they are yours, obviously we are against them. Communism itself is irrelevant. The issue is whether they are on our side or yours. Now, if you Russians didn't have a first mortgage on Castro, we would be talking about Cuba's right to self-determination and the fact that you couldn't have a free election until after there had been a period of education following the repression of the dictatorship of Batista. As a matter of fact, if you should start trying to push for a free election in Yugoslavia, we might even send over our Marines to prevent this kind of sabotage. The same goes if you should try to do it in Formosa." The Russian came back with, "What is your definition of a free election outside of your country?" I said, "Well, our definition of a free election in, say, Vietnam is pretty much what your definition

is in your satellites—if we've got everything so set that we are going to win, then it's a free election. Otherwise, it's bloody terrorism! Isn't that your definition?" The Russian's reaction was, "Well, yes, more or less!"

—Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, Random House, Vintage Books, New York, rev. 1969, p. 227.

We repeatedly get caught in this conflict between our professed moral principles and the real reasons why we do things—to wit, our self-interest. We are always able to mask those real reasons in words of beneficent goodness—freedom, justice, and so on. Such tears as appear in the fabric of this moral masquerade sometimes embarrass us.

It is interesting that the communists do not seem to concern themselves with these moral justifications for their naked acts of self-interest. In a way, this becomes embarrassing too; it makes us feel that they may be laughing at us, knowing well that we are motivated by self-interest too, but are determined to disguise it. We feel that they may be laughing at us as they struggle in the sea of world politics, stripped to their shorts, while we flop around, fully dressed in our white tie and tails.

And yet with all this there is that wondrous quality of man that from time to time floods over the natural dams of survival and self-interest. We witnessed it in the summer of 1964 when white college students risked their lives to carry the torch of human freedom into darkest Mississippi. An earlier instance: George Orwell describes his self-interest in entering the trenches during the Spanish Civil War as a matter of trying to stop the spreading horror of fascism. Yet once he was in the trenches, his self-interest changed to the goal of getting out alive. Still, I

have no question that if Orwell had been given a military assignment from which he could easily have got lost, he would not have wandered to the rear at the price of jeopardizing the lives of some of his comrades; he would never have pursued his "self-interest." These are the exceptions to the rule, but there have been enough of them flashing through the murky past of history to suggest that these episodic transfigurations of the human spirit are more than the flash of fireflies.

### COMPROMISE

*Compromise* is another word that carries shades of weakness, vacillation, betrayal of ideals, surrender of moral principles. In the old culture, when virginity was a virtue, one referred to a woman's being "compromised." The word is generally regarded as ethically unsavory and ugly.

But to the organizer, compromise is a key and beautiful word. It is always present in the pragmatics of operation. It is making the deal, getting that vital breather, usually the victory. If you start with nothing, demand 100 per cent, then compromise for 30 per cent, you're 30 per cent ahead.

A free and open society is an on-going conflict, interrupted periodically by compromises—which then become the start for the continuation of conflict, compromise, and on ad infinitum. Control of power is based on compromise in our Congress and among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. A society devoid of compromise is totalitarian. If I had to define a free and open society in one word, the word would be "compromise."

**EGO**

All definitions of words, like everything else, are relative. Definition is to a major degree dependent upon your partisan position. Your leader is always flexible, he has pride in the dignity of his cause, he is unflinching, sincere, an ingenious tactician fighting the good fight. To the opposition he is unprincipled and will go whichever way the wind blows, his arrogance is masked by a fake humility, he is dogmatically stubborn, a hypocrite, unscrupulous and unethical, and he will do anything to win; he is leading the forces of evil. To one side he is a demigod, to the other a demagogue.

Nowhere is the relativity of a definition more germane in the arena of life than the word *ego*. Anyone who is working against the Haves is always facing odds, and in many cases heavy odds. If he or she does not have that complete self-confidence (or call it ego) that he can win, then the battle is lost before it is even begun. I have seen so-called trained organizers go out to another city with an assignment of organizing a community of approximately 100,000 people, take one look and promptly wire in a resignation. To be able to look at a community of people and say to yourself, "I will organize them in so many weeks," "I will take on the corporations, the press and anything else," is to be a real organizer.

"Ego," as we understand and use it here, cannot be even vaguely confused with, nor is it remotely related to, egotism. No would-be organizer afflicted with egotism can avoid hiding this from the people with whom he is working,

no contrived humility can conceal it. Nothing antagonizes people and alienates them from a would-be organizer more than the revealing flashes of arrogance, vanity, impatience, and contempt of a personal egotism.

The ego of the organizer is stronger and more monumental than the ego of the leader. The leader is driven by the desire for power, while the organizer is driven by the desire to create. The organizer is in a true sense reaching for the highest level for which man can reach—to create, to be a "great creator," to play God.

An infection of egotism would make it impossible to respect the dignity of individuals, to understand people, or to strive to develop the other elements that make up the ideal organizer. Egotism is mainly a defensive reaction of feelings of personal inadequacy—ego is a positive conviction and belief in one's ability, with no need for egotistical behavior.

Ego moves on every level. How can an organizer respect the dignity of an individual if he does not respect his own dignity? How can he believe in people if he does not really believe in himself? How can he convince people that they have it within themselves, that they have the power to stand up to win, if he does not believe it of himself? Ego must be so all-pervading that the personality of the organizer is contagious, that it converts the people from despair to defiance, creating a mass ego.

**CONFLICT**

*Conflict* is another bad word in the general opinion. This is a consequence of two influences in our society: one in-

fluence is organized religion, which has espoused a rhetoric of "turning the other cheek" and has quoted the Scriptures as the devil never would have dared because of their major previous function of supporting the Establishment. The second influence is probably the most subversive and insidious one, and it has permeated the American scene in the last generation: that is Madison Avenue public relations, middle-class moral hygiene, which has made of conflict or controversy something negative and undesirable. This has all been part of an Advertising Culture that emphasizes getting along with people and avoiding friction. If you look at our television commercials you get the picture that American society is largely devoted to ensuring that no odors come from our mouths or armpits. Consensus is a keynote—one must not offend one's fellow man; and so today we find that people in the mass media are fired for expressing their opinions or being "controversial"; in the churches they are fired for the same reason but the words used there are "lacking in prudence"; and on university campuses, faculty members are fired for the same reason, but the words used there are "personality difficulties."

Conflict is the essential core of a free and open society. If one were to project the democratic way of life in the form of a musical score, its major theme would be the harmony of dissonance.

## *The Education of an Organizer*

THE BUILDING of many mass power organizations to merge into a national popular power force cannot come without many organizers. Since organizations are created, in large part, by the organizer, we must find out what creates the organizer. This has been the major problem of my years of organizational experience: the finding of potential organizers and their training. For the past two years I have had a special training school for organizers with a full-time, fifteen-month program.

Its students have ranged from middle-class women activists to Catholic priests and Protestant ministers of all denominations, from militant Indians to Chicanos to Puerto Ricans to blacks from all parts of the black power spectrum, from Panthers to radical philosophers, from a variety of campus activists, S.D.S. and others, to a priest who was joining a revolutionary party in South America. Geographically they have come from campuses and Jesuit seminaries in Boston to Chicanos from tiny Texas towns, middle-class people from Chicago and Hartford and Seattle, and almost every place in between. An increasing num-