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Thesis

THE ISA MODEL OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

AND THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS OF

LA VECINDAD UNIDA/UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD-ISA

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a particular model of grassroots political action organization. The theoretical framework and strategy for implementation of the model are reviewed. A case study of the leadership crisis in an organization patterned on the model is presented through participant-observation. Particular attention is given to the role of a *cool alternator* and the need for building an effective organizing team. Recommendations are made for grassroots organizing in the future.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Brief Overview

This paper is about the type of organizations created by the Institute for Socio-Analysis (ISA), and the disaffiliation of ISA from one of those organizations—La Vecindad Unida/United Neighborhood-ISA (LVU/UN-ISA)—because of an unresolved but destructive leadership crisis. The Institute for Socio-Analysis is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to bringing about ". . . democratic reorganization of low income . . . populations . . ." (Institute 1970:1). ISA organizations are based on a theoretical model developed by Warren C. Haggstrom. The organizations are started and maintained by organizers working directly for the Institute, and ISA underwrites their salaries with dues paid by members of the organizations it sponsors.

2. Description of Method

The organizing drive for La Vecindad Unida/United Neighborhood-ISA began in February of 1973, and the first general meeting of the organization was held in May. My participation began in October and continued until ISA's disaffiliation at the end of January 1974. It's hardly justified to dignify as "method" the means used during this time to collect the information presented here—yet it seems important to let the reader know how the information was collected, the style of presentation, and what *my* role was in the action.

The discussion that follows deals primarily with the materials presented in Chapters III and IV, based on my personal experience, and related to the leadership crisis of LVU/UN-ISA. Chapter II, a general description of ISA-type organizations, is based on primary and secondary sources exclusive of my participation.

The writer's role.— My energy while associated with LVU/UN-ISA was invested almost entirely in organizing. But my interest also was to understand the people and social processes of the neighborhood and the organization. I was a participant-observer, or more accurately, "participant as observer" (Glaser and Backer 1973: 47). My purposes in this role weren't concealed from the other staff, but they were subordinate to my role as a participant in the organizing action (Glaser and Backer 1973:47). Becker and Geer (1960:269) describe the role of participant-observer as one who collects data by ". . . participation in the . . . life of the group or organization that he studies." They point out that observation provides ". . . firsthand reports of events and actions and much fuller coverage of an organization's activities, giving direct knowledge of matters that, from interviewing, we could know about only by hearsay" (Becker and Geer 1960:268).

My immediate objective was the success of the organization. Given the ISA model, this goal encompassed *remaking the social reality* of the neighborhood population. Thus there's no suggestion made here that my role as participant-observer was a neutral force in the neighborhood social system or the organization. On the contrary, the organizers were trying to change the system, and my actions played a part in the process.

My participation and my personal stakes in the organizing may have distorted my observations. The bias of participation was recognized and maybe minimized by sharing my observations with the other organizers. But the bias of having stakes in the outcome goes unreconstructed because, withal, we *were* there to create a new reality. The goal of my method, here, has been to present an accurate and honest description of my experience during the leadership crisis of a neighborhood organization.

With two other graduate students, my introduction to the members of LVU/UN-ISA was as an "ISA volunteer." We began working on our own, apart from the other organizers and the members, to develop a structure of benefits for the membership; we moved on to participating with members in a food buyers' club (cooperative) that was already established; and within a

month we were fully involved in the organization's activities. On several occasions during the leadership crisis, leaders were open and confided in me; and after the first few weeks, the organization's *insiders' information* was shared with me by other organizers and members.

Collecting data.— There was nothing complicated about collecting the data. My notes were taken on a daily basis and they covered all of my contacts with the members, and the events and processes that related to the organization. They were crosschecked *informally* with the observations of other organizers. Selecting and defining problem areas centered on leadership-related problems. In Bennett's words, ". . . the final product is the general monograph, which covers as much ground as the writer is able to cover with the data and the facilities available" (1960:431).

3. Introduction to ISA Organizations

The model.— The ISA model is a "human organization," its aim to help bring about personal self-realization by "enhancing the self-realization of actual persons" (Haggstrom 1970a:8). This involves changing the social situation of low-income people, rectifying their *powerlessness*. Haggstrom describes at length the social situation of the poor, and he points out that " . . . one . . . cannot [empirically] use [economic] poverty as an explanation for . . . psychological characteristics which are often associated with poverty . . . . and it is more likely that the problem is one of powerlessness . . . (1969: 462, 476). For Haggstrom, the problems of low-income people are the result of social arrangements that deny them responsibility for making decisions and participating in successful social actions—they're imbued with a "psychology of powerlessness" (1969:472). The ISA objective is to create *power-directed* organizations (Haggstrom 1972:2). This involves bringing together within the organization "all the legitimate motivations and skills" possessed by the community (Haggstrom 1972:6). The goal is maximum participation of the people, and this demands a broad organizational agenda to accommodate a wide range of per-

sonal styles and interests (Haggstrom 1972:7). People who initially become involved in the organization to take advantage of economic benefits may in time become the principal actors in power-related activities.

The ISA conception of democracy doesn't refer to free enterprise or civil rights, but to the right of participation in government affairs, in the decision-making and *exercise* of political and economic power. Arendt (1963:217-285) explores the history of this idea. In ISA organizations democratic practice has two implications: first, the organization itself is an instrument of power that low-income people can use to exert pressure on the public and private institutions of the larger society; and second, within the ISA-type organization, each member has continuing opportunities to be a part of an open process of decision-making where the *largest possible number of people govern* the use of the organization's power.

The importance of action.— *Action* is important to the health of an ISA organization. The object is to achieve the priority goals of the members. ". . . The sole point of meetings is to prepare for action, just as the sole point of organization is to provide a structure through which action takes place" (Haggstrom 1963:5). Successful confrontations and other types of actions have the benefit of demonstrating the power of organization, and they instill confidence born of experiencing unfolding capacities. And it's through *conflict*, a form of action, that people gain insight into their positions in the community (Haggstrom 1963:5, 6).

ISA organizations are founded on the philosophical conviction that actions and conflict are appropriate and necessary in a democratic society. Dahrendorf (1963:197) states, "there is . . . implicit in the institutions of . . . democracy an attitude to conflicts of interest . . . [that] involves (1) the acceptance of differences of opinion and interest as inevitable; (2) concentration on the modes rather than the causes of conflict; (3) the setting up of institutions that provide conflicting groups with binding channels of expression; [and] (4) the development of rules of the game by which conflicting parties abide." Writing in 1946, Alinsky opted for an "*orderly revolution . . . .*

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of participation, interest, and action on the part of masses of people" (1969:198). He believed

that "the only hope for democracy is that more people and more groups will become articulate

and exert pressure upon their government" (Alinsky 1969:196). Each People's Organization is to

take action locally and ". . . to utilize the organization as a springboard for the development of

other People's Organizations throughout the nation" (Alinsky 1969:62). Similarly, ISA-type

neighborhood organizations are to link together, sharing objectives, characteristics, and methods;

staff resources; and a structure of economic benefits (Institute 1970).

CHAPTER II

THEORY, BIRTH, AND LIFESTYLE

OF AN ISA ORGANIZATION

1. The Theoretical Framework

The social construction of reality.— The conceptual framework that gives rise to particular ISA organizations is considered here to clarify their character, especially LVU/UN-ISA. The conceptual thread in the organizing effort is what Berger and Luckman (1967) describe as "the social construction of reality." They say there's a transformation through which ". . . subjective meanings *become* objective facticities . . ." (Berger and Luckman 1967:18). For Berger and Luckman, people get together and construct their social reality by sharing subjective meanings; and then they confirm and "objectify" their reality by mutual consent. The heart of this transformation is the experience of everyday face-to-face encounters. Here's where subjectivity is shared—the face-to-face encounters are real, "massive and compelling" for the people involved (Berger and Luckman 1967:28-29).

The glue of the socially constructed reality is language. It provides semantic zones of shared experience and gives rise to a commonly held stock of knowledge about the social world (Berger and Luckman 1967:38-46). Face-to-face conversational confirmation is needed to maintain the social reality. This interaction occurs in the context of a "*plausibility structure*. . . . , the social base for the . . . suspension of doubt without which the definition of reality . . . cannot be maintained in consciousness" (Berger and Luckman 1967:154-155). (Emphasis added.)

The transformation of subjective social reality is called *alternation* and it requires resocialization. A newly created plausibility structure functions as a laboratory, a tentative social base. It safeguards the necessary emotional dependency on the agents of resocialization who act as guides into the new reality (Berger and Luckman 1967:156-158). "The plausibility structure

must become the individual's world . . . ," nihilating and replacing the world inhabited before alternation (Berger and Luckman 1967:158-159).

A sorcerer's reality.— In his introduction to *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972), Castaneda presents a cross-cultural parallel to Berger and Luckman's social construction of reality. Castaneda describes the world of Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian sorcerer: ". . . I must first explain the basic premise of sorcery as don Juan presented it to me. He said that for a sorcerer, the world of everyday life is not real, or out there, as we believe it is. For a sorcerer, reality, or the world we all know, is only a description. . . . He pointed out that everyone who comes into contact with a child is a teacher who incessantly describes the world to him, until the moment the child is capable of perceiving the world as it is described. . . . From that moment on . . . the child is a *member*" (1972:8-9). At one point, don Juan explained to Castaneda (1972:167): "The world is a mystery. There is much more to the world, so much more, in fact, that it is endless." And Castaneda (1972:299-300) writes of an extraordinary experience he had and his conversation about it with don Juan:

> "You have simply *stopped the world*," he commented after I had finished my account.
> "But it is inconceivable that a coyote could talk," I said.
> "It wasn't talk," don Juan replied.
> "What was it then?"
> "Your body understood for the first time. But you failed to recognize that it was not a coyote to begin with and that it certainly was not talking the way you and I talk."
> "But the coyote really talked, don Juan!"
> "Now look who is talking like an idiot. After all these years of learning you should know better. Yesterday you *stopped the world* and you might have even *seen*. A magical being told you something, and your body was capable of understanding it because the world had collapsed."
> "The world was like it is today, don Juan."
> "No, it wasn't. Today the coyotes do not tell you anything, and you cannot *see* the lines of the world. Yesterday you did all that simply because something had stopped in you."
> "What was the thing that stopped in me?"
> "What stopped in you was what people have been telling you the world is like. You see, people tell us from the time we are born that the world is such and such and so and so, and naturally we have no choice but to see the world the way people have been telling us it is."

We looked at each other.

"Yesterday the world became as sorcerers tell you it is," he went on. "In that world coyotes talk and so do deer, as I once told you, and so do rattlesnakes and trees and all other living beings."

<u>The symbolic fabric of reality</u>.— Haggstrom (1970b) describes some of the dynamics in the social construction of reality. He begins with the idea that enduring groups make the assumptions that are necessary to define and make predictable the environmental objects and events that they view as relevant (Haggstrom 1970b:85-86). This involves cognitive assumptions about situations, impulses to act, ethical rules, and procedural principles—they're all linked in a process that produces a symbolic social fabric. The manifestations of these elements are viewed as *tokens*, and taken together, they comprise the symbolic fabric (Haggstrom 1970b:85-87). Illustrations of tokens consist in statements about the social world—for example, how things are: "I think the Christmas party turned out to be a really great success" or "it's not safe to go to the meetings at night because of the shootings"; the feelings people have about taking action: "we've got to keep going downtown and pestering that councilman until he gives us what we want"; and how things ought to be: "the kids shouldn't have to cross Hoover to go to the park—we should have one here in the neighborhood."

<u>Building reality</u>.— People create their common world through consensual validation. ". . . They create a world which they inhabit together and in which they assign positions to objects" (Haggstrom 1968a:75). It's through *action* that people create a *shared* reality (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:1). The organizers help the development of new symbolic fabric by facilitating consensual validation. They define and project the alternative reality (Haggstrom 1970b:106), selecting from the experiences of the organization those which provide simple and readily acceptable causal explanations, thus building a consensus for ". . . action resulting in 'organizational mileage'" (Haggstrom 1971:1-5).

The organizers ". . . go beyond the creation of an account of neighborhood action to help-ing the people in the organization create an alternative and accurate view of their world and of their position in it" (Haggstrom 1963:27). Socialization is required to achieve the alternation among the organization's leaders and members. The organizers constantly reinforce the new re-ality, building up the emerging plausibility structure (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:13). To facilitate alternation, they also engage in legitimization, isolating and nihilating old realities, and reinterpreting past events (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74: 9).

The object is not only to create a new reality, but to disrupt and restructure the peoples' non-political lifestyle into one with an organizational center (Haggstrom 1963:3-4). The goal is to pull people ". . . into new lives, long-extended alternative lines of action" (Haggstrom 1963:4). People are brought together in successful social actions that involve the exercise of power in conflict situations (Haggstrom 1968a:79). Organizational actions aren't judged on immediate results, but on whether the organization gained or lost power in the conflict.

It's in the consolidation and exercise of power that people develop confidence in the new reality they're building for themselves. These experiences eventually congeal into a single, new reality; and this becomes an integral part of the collective stock of knowledge (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:3).

2. Preparation for Starting an ISA Organization

Targeting a neighborhood.—The first consideration in targeting an area for an ISA organ-izing drive is that the typical annual income levels are less than $10 thousand. This ensures that the target population can identify a number of problems that can be   collective action (Haggstrom 1972:2). Stewart (1973:1) outlines several important considerations when targeting an area: "Is the population base large enough to support a dues-paying organization?" "Are there readily identifiable boundaries that will be usable to logically define the area as 'community' (or

can we redefine it through organizing to make community)?" "Is the population base large enough to be able to control district elections through bloc voting, thereby giving political power to our non-partisan organization?" "Do the political boundaries for several different offices over-lay the area . . . ?"

Community analysis.— Demographic data can be a starting point for getting perspective on a neighborhood, how it compares in quality-of-life and socio-economic terms with the larger community. Income and employment levels, the value of residential dwellings, and average rents are part of the census. Voting returns from recent elections can also be useful.

Walking the streets is the way organizers get acquainted with a neighborhood. There are opportunities to talk with people, and to see the condition of housing, streets, commercial estab-lishments, and public facilities. The organizers look at the accessibility and quality of services for public transportation, health care, policing, recreation, welfare, and commercial trade. Their study produces a fund of information about the neighborhood. They meet people and begin to develop an understanding of the community's history, significant events, and widely shared ex-periences, and the unique social structure and cultural patterns that exist in the area.

3. The Organizing Drive

Legitimation.— Before an ISA organizing drive begins, the organizers get credentials from *legitimators* who are recognized by local residents. Credentials help answer the question, "who asked you to come in here?" (Alinsky 1972:101). Potential legitimators include leaders in churches, labor organizations, and neighborhood groups. The legitimators may write letters of introduction for the organizers to use during the organizing drive. Acting as *gatekeepers* to the area, the legitimators give the organizers the names of people who live in the neighborhood. The organizers contact these residents and through them begin to get a picture of the reality of the neighborhood for the people who live there.

Organizers as strangers.— When moving into the community and making direct contacts with residents, the organizers recognize and act with the knowledge that they're seen as strangers, not yet familiar with the collective realities of the neighborhood. The situation dictates a sensitive but not overly rigid or unnatural posture. Shuetz (1944: 499-507) suggests that although "the stranger" shares none of the culture's "recipe knowledge" and has not shared in the group's past experiences, engaging in *action* in the unknown culture is the vehicle to its discovery. Sensitivity demands discarding culturally biased thinking-as-usual and an ability to ask non-judgmental questions. It involves also an organizer's capacity to *listen* carefully, even to silences (Johnson 1965:13-23). And sensitivity presumes the organizers understand that "the physical structure and location of a low income area carry collectively held meanings that affect the relevance of the physical context to . . . [the] lives [of the people]" (Haggstrom 1963:2).

Ideology as a "cover story."— The organizers' vision of an alternative reality is communicated with the help of ideology. It serves as the intellectual and semantic currency of perception, a kind of "cover story" for what actually happens. Creating and maintaining ISA-type organizations involves refining and consolidating power among low-income people by organizational means. The accompanying ideology is symbolically represented by such words as democracy, self-help, unity, human dignity, economic justice, and neighborhood power. These units of ideological currency are used to provide modes for perceiving the world, creating a psychological environment, a process indirectly suggested by Ittelson (1960:24-30); and as with other ideologies, they justify, legitimize, rationalize, and reduce anxiety (Walzer 1969:118).

To be effectively communicated, ideology is translated into specific examples of how things ought or ought not to be, examples that are within the experience and sympathies of the people. The democratic ideology can be spread in a housemeeting by describing a community organization where everyone voted to act together, and did so successfully; or by recounting a county welfare commission meeting where neighborhood people weren't given a fair hearing or

any satisfaction on their complaints. Ideology helps people attribute beneficial changes to the actions of the organization. The goal is to have people acknowledge the organization as the source of change, ignoring complex "objective antecedents," using instead ideological rhetoric such as "the people talked together, voted together, and took action together to get the tunnel closed."

The non-political "Doc," a sympathizer of the farm-workers in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, gets to the heart of ideology (1972:104):

> "It might belike this, Mac: When group-man wants to move, he makes a standard. 'God wills that we recapture the Holy Land'; or he says, 'We fight to make the world safe for democracy'; or he says, 'We will wipe out social injustice with communism.' But the group doesn't care about the Holy Land, or Democracy, or Communism. Maybe the group simply wants to move, to fight, and uses these words simply to reassure the brains of individual men."

Agitation and resentment.— Agitation and other techniques are used in the course of the organizing drive to translate the negative conditions of the neighborhood's social reality into problems and then issues that will serve as the meat of the organization's agenda. (This can be facilitated by using photography and other media. At housemeetings LVU/UN-ISA organizers used slides showing neighborhood conditions that local residents had complained about.)

Agitation is potentiated by resentment that is common among low-income people. Scheler (1961:53) notes that ". . . *ressentiment* is . . . chiefly confined to those who *serve* and are *dominated* at the moment, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority." The ". . . origin of *ressentiment* is connected with a tendency to make comparisons between others and oneself" (Scheler 1961:53). Scheler (1961:50) shows how to transform this potential into an instrument of agitation: "there follows the important sociological law that . . . psychological dynamite will spread with the discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its *factual* power." Social discrepancies are pointed out in order to tap resentment. This means emphasizing the "injuries" that people see themselves as powerless to stop, and pointing out how

people in power do not *live up* to their own ideals (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:27). The organizers channel the resulting hostility onto the opponents of low-income people, and they become targets for future organizational actions (Haggstrom 1968a: 95-96).

Housemeetings.— The organizers agitate to generate energy for housemeetings as a means to begin building a structure for social action. Housemeetings are used to develop a new reality where neighborhood problems are within a political and organizational context. Problems are translated into issues that can successfully be resolved through an action organization. In the new reality, issues focus on government, large corporations, or other parts of the established power structure as the causes of neighborhood problems, or at least as the targets for their solution (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:10).

Uller's (1969:39-40) experience indicates organizers should consider carefully the way they present their credentials, particularly when people are openly distrustful or hostile. In "digging the issues," the organizers need to listen carefully to answers. (Uller 1969:53) ". . . It is virtually axiomatic that the greater the number of issues discerned, the closer the organizer is to understanding the subjective world the people live in . . ." (Uller 1969:56).

Agitation during housemeetings is enhanced by having advance information about the people who've been invited. It increases the chances for asking questions and introducing subjects that tap their experiences (Uller 1969:55). The organizer's pitch sets up incipient alternation (Uller 1969:49). ". . . The essence of the new reality . . . is how *community organization* can resolve and erase the problems, indignities, and injustices shared by the residents of [the] . . . community. Implicit within this approach . . . is the goal of the attempted nihilation of those thought patterns . . . which produced a pervasive sense of powerlessness, apathy, alienation" (Uller 1969:49). The organizers need to be sensitive to the fine line between calling attention to bad conditions and putting down the neighborhood.

The organizers aim to get the local people to do most of the talking. They reiterate the need for organization, a vision of organization, and how other communities have succeeded. At the end of the housemeeting the organizers pitch people to sign membership applications and pay dues for one week in anticipation of the "organizing meeting" (first general membership meeting). They explain that an organizing meeting will be held at the end of the organizing drive when enough people have been signed up (Stewart 1973:2).

During housemeetings people attribute their problems to convenient scapegoats, especially other racial and ethnic groups. This practice is a functional parallel to Heider's (1958:1-19) simplification of the social field. It's countered by the organizers' anecdotes, which show that people of various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups are concerned about the same issues and problems as the people who scapegoat them. Negative predictions about the potential for building a power-directed organization are countered with anecdotes about other successful community organizations.

Much of what's expected during the housemeeting drive is the *unexpected*. Organizers need to be psychologically prepared during housemeetings for interruptions, "phone calls, a squabble between children, the disciplining of a child, a salesman's knock on the door, people who arrive late and leave early, and the like" (Uller 1969:62). The recurring parts of an organizer's role during housemeetings—credentialing, digging issues, making a pitch, etc.—are never played in the same way (Uller 1969:63).

Opponents.— The capacity to control consensual validation, defining the views of the organization as socially pathological or subversive in some way, in one of the most powerful weapons available to opponents of the organization (Haggstrom 1968a:86-87). These attacks may begin during the organizing drive and may focus on the organizers. They're countered by constantly reiterating the organization's and the organizers' identification with the legitimators,

constant repetition of the legitimating ideology, and getting people involved in successful social *actions*.

Using a newsletter.— The organizing drive is publicized in the neighborhood through a newsletter that is written, printed, and distributed by the organizers. The newsletter is used to spread information and explain tactics, to reinforce agitation, and to mobilize people (Selznick 1960:48-51).

Throughout the organizing drive opportunities are created for people to commit themselves to the new organization. The organizers listen to opinions on neighborhood conditions and problems, get to know people and learn about their day-to-day lives, and ask them to hold housemeetings (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:13). The aim is the creation of a new social reality, a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dolci suggests the essence of what's involved: the *heroes* and *saints* are ". . . those who know that things are true and real in the measure to which they become so and to which we make them become so" (1965:388).

4. The Action Organization

The organizing meeting.— The first general meeting of an ISA organization is held in a neighborhood location selected with a view to legitimation. LVU/UN-ISA used a local church. Only people contacted during the housemeeting drive are invited, no outsiders. ". . . Persons who may be asked to say a few words are local legitimators (clergy, leaders from other ISA organizations). Basically this night belongs to the people and the organizer, and it must be kept that way because they are the actors who have contracted to bring off this organization. . . . and outsiders can easily confuse things" (Stewart 1973:2-3)

The meeting begins with a review of the community's problems and the possibility for a better future through organization. "The organizer's talk is spiced with people's names and referrals to concrete community items" (Stewart 1973:3). The organizers ask questions to encourage

local people to describe the neighborhood conditions and their feelings about starting an organi-

zation. When excitement has built, the organization and dues structure are explained, and there is

a vote to organize. Temporary officers are elected and committees are established. (Stewart

1973:3)

        <u>Building organizational structure</u>.— Building structure is given greater emphasis and be-

comes formalized at the first general meeting. A constitution and by-laws committee is formed

and the organizers work closely with this group. They participate in the committee's meetings

and make available to them for study the formal documents from other democratic, grassroots

organizations. The organizers work closely with the entire membership—they avoid forming al-

liances—and they communicate to members what's happening in the neighborhood that's rele-

vant to the organization, and what's being achieved by the organization (Stewart 1973:3). They

also communicate basic principles of ISA organizations. The most important is that there be an

open decision-making process, encompassing the general membership, to govern and direct the

power and actions of the organization (Haggstrom 1963:10).

        The organization needs to have clear and effective (although not overwhelming) lines of

authority and communication established, and responsibilities explicitly allocated among the

members (Haggstrom 1968a:83). Haggstrom points out the importance of specifically defining

the relationship between the organizers and the members of the organization. ". . . If the poor de-

fine the organizer as a fixer and rely on him to do things for them, then it would end the pro-

spects for organization . . ." (Haggstrom 1968a:96-97). The organization must recruit and train

members to collect dues. If the organizers end up collecting dues, they won't have time for any-

thing else. The organizers lend skills, work to build a democratic process, and sometimes assert

leadership or fill roles that the members have not yet learned to fill (Haggstrom 1968a:97). This

relationship is mutually agreed upon and legitimized by the organization, and it's one that the

organization or the organizers can cancel at will (Haggstrom 1963:10).

Conflict as an organizational style.— The main style of action in ISA organizations is conflict with the social institutions and authorities that have a negative effect on the neighborhood. The organizers retell conflict situations experienced by other community groups and define the organization's struggle as a contest between the forces of good and evil (Haggstrom 1963:15). Action centers around the issues that were defined during the housemeeting drive. The organizers help ". . . in analysis and planning of strategy. . . ." Although not acting as leaders, they may step in and take an active role in a confrontation to "prevent a catastrophe" (Stewart 1973:4).

Coser states that ". . . conflict . . . prevents the ossification of the social system by exerting pressure for innovation and creativity (1957:197). Modern bureaucracies with their reliance on predictability and routines are most vulnerable to conflict tactics. The more rigid the system, the more intense and demanding the conflict (Coser 1957:202). Coser cites Park's statement that "the effect of this struggle is to increase the solidarity and improve the morale of the 'oppressed minority'" (1957:205). Although conflict can evolve into violence and may produce unexpected results, slowing down rather than speeding up change, one argument for its use is "*that it usually works*" (Schaller 1972:173). Haggstrom points out that ". . . conflict-avoidance strategies often *result in violence,* while conflict strategies often reduce violence (1968b:522). Withal, ISA model embodies the principle of non-violence.

Conflict tactics.— A wide range of conflict tactics are incorporated within the ISA model. Deutsch (1969:38-39) outlines the main ones. He notes that "harassment may be the only effective strategy available to a low power group. . . ." The technique is to use non-criminal means ". . . to inflict a loss, to interfere with, disrupt, or embarrass those with high power . . ." (Deutsch 1969:39). The specific tactics associated with this technique have become organizing legends: "sit-ins; tying up phones, mail, government offices, businesses, traffic, etc., by excessive and prolonged usage; ensnarling bureaucratic systems in their own red tape by requiring them to fol-

low their own formally stated rules and procedures; being excessively friendly and cooperative, creating psychological nuisances by producing outlandish behavior, appearances, and odors in stores, offices, and other public places; encouraging contagion of the ills of the slum (rats, uncollected garbage, etc.) to surrounding communities; etc." (Deutsch 1969:39-40). The most basic tactic is the face-to-face confrontation of public officials and political representatives.

Confrontations are managed in three stages: role-play, confrontation, and review. In preparing for confrontations, the members need to be exposed and sensitized to the realities of the opposition (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:2). Peer pressure plays a large part in "perception" during confrontations. And the cultural valuation of what's important determines what's remembered. Thus the review produces a perceptual gap between the organizers and the members. (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:1) It's important that the members don't confuse the verbal and symbolic gestures of opponents with actual concessions. These gestures are only "*promissory notes*, issued under pressure . . ." (Haggstrom 1968a:90-91). Translating concessions into actual practice ". . . will usually be far more difficult than eliciting the original verbal gestures" (Haggstrom 1968a:91).

Economic benefits in ISA organizations.— ISA provides economic benefits to affiliated organizations. The organizers use the power of collective buying to negotiate for the organization with local merchants and professionals to get discounts on goods and services.

Buyers' clubs are a major arena for members to participate in the organization. Meat, produce, and other specialty-buying clubs are organized. Members shop together and share in the savings. ISA benefits and the promise of forming buyers' clubs are held out during the organizing drive as inducements for people to join the organization.

CHAPTER III

THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS OF LVU/UN-ISA

1. Preliminaries

The protagonists.— The disaffiliation of ISA from La Vecindad Unida/United Neighbor-hood-ISA came nine months after the first general meeting of LVU/UN-ISA. The protagonists in this nearly year-long drama were the membership of the organization, the leadership, and the organizers. Fictitious names are used throughout this paper for the people who were involved.

The neighborhood is 12 square blocks in central Los Angeles—about 500 families live there—bounded by a freeway and three main thoroughfares. The people are black, Spanish-speaking, and white, with many in each group. Most of them make less than $10 thousand a year. Many of the Spanish-speaking people don't have immigration papers, and many aren't of Mexican origin. The quality of housing ranges from very poor—ramshackle in one or two cases—to what can be found in middle-income neighborhoods. Most of the people have no more than a high school education.

The LVU/UN-ISA membership reflected the make-up of the neighborhood. The division of labor within the organization tended to give authority to the men and responsibility to the women—male leaders were elected to office, female leaders ran the working committees. The leadership included those who were elected to office or volunteered to chair committees, and others who informally assumed leadership roles. The elected officers were Mr. Beck, president; Mr. Solano, vice president; Ms. Langer and then Mr. Vasquez, secretary; and Mr. Calabasas, treasurer. These officers—and Mr. Borden, Ms. Ray, and Ms. Mendez, the committee leaders— comprised the executive committee.

The organizing staff consisted initially of three people: Mr. Slater, an experienced organizer; and Ms. Tudor and Ms. Karagawa, both of whom, then, were recent graduates of an ISA

training program. Mr. Slater was the team leader during the organizing drive. Ms. Tudor became team leader when the organization was started in May. Mr. Slater took a leave of absence from July through September. In September, the three student organizers—Mr. Nutley, Mr. Chang, and myself—began meeting with the principal organizers.

Looking for and finding leaders.— The organizers tried during the organizing drive to identify people who had leadership potential. They encouraged these people to speak up during housemeetings, and at times the organizers would talk-up these potential leaders to other prospective members.

Beck didn't attend any of the housemeetings. On one occasion, however, one of the organizers talked informally with him and felt that he'd be a liability to the organization. His sympathies weren't with the people who lived in the neighborhood, and the organizers hoped he wouldn't attend the first general meeting. He was concerned about his property values and someday moving to an area "north of Wilshire." Beck came to the first meeting and was nominated to office by a neighborhood resident who also spoke up for him and translated his remarks into Spanish. None of the people identified as potential leaders during the organizing drive were elected to office.

The organizers found themselves outmaneuvered by Beck at the first meeting. They spoke out and suggested that the membership seriously consider electing as president a bilingual person because of the number of Spanish-speaking people in the neighborhood. This thinly veiled attack on Beck was unsuccessful. One of the organizers was particularly outspoken during the meeting and later she recalled, "Beck remembered I didn't congratulate him after the meeting, but I didn't congratulate anyone" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:38). Parenthetically, Beck's colors were sufficiently clear to observers at the organizing meeting so that nine months later a Catholic priest—one of the organization's first legitimators—remarked that from the very beginning he felt Beck would doom the organization.

Solano and Calabasas were the two other officers elected at the first meeting who remained in office until the disaffiliation. Several of these first officers were known in the neighborhood for their past participation in PTA, church groups, and similar organizations. Many of the residents who attended the first meeting didn't know personally the people they elected to office, but they may have known *of* them.

Early days.— During the early days of the organization, Beck and Solano worked on the constitution committee. Calabasas did his job as treasurer and supported the committee that was working to get street signs. Langer, who had been elected secretary, did very little during this period.

The organizers' team leader views this period as a time when most of the organization's leaders were sympathetic to the organizers' objectives, and when there was mutual trust between them. This view certainly doesn't apply to Beck or for long to Solano either. While during this period the relationship with Calabasas was one of give-and-take, openness and mutual criticism, the relationship between Beck and the organizers was deteriorating. They were becoming isolated—"Beck didn't like 'Kara' and tried to keep from dealing with her"—and open communication had broken down (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:64). The organizers were aware of Beck's tendency at meetings to cut off people who were speaking when he disagreed with them. They "tried to talk to him about it, but he was always putting 'efficiency over democracy'" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:39). Beck enjoyed Solano's active support throughout this period.

While these machinations were going on, the members were engaged in more productive activities. The organizers pushed hard at the beginning for action in the committees and people quickly became "hardnosed" about taking care of business. Work was moving on the traffic signs committee in June, and by July the neighborhood was being canvassed to get signatures on petitions for a police foot patrol and to register people to vote.

The organizers maintained good person-to-person relationships with most of the LVU/UN-ISA members throughout my period of participant-observation. In most cases there was genuineness, mutual respect, and warmth. But the organizers often relied for intelligence on the members with whom they had good relationships; they were more isolated from those who either withdrew from the organization or who didn't support them.

2. The Onset of Serious Problems

A meeting was held in August between representatives of the organization and the police department. Approximately 400 signatures of neighborhood residents had been collected on petitions for a police foot patrol. Beck's posture with police during this meeting was obsequious and appeasing, and he was apologetic about having "*only* 400 signatures" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:40). Some of the members were critical of how the meeting had been run and felt there should be a review, but a review session wasn't organized. September and October were the most successful months for organizational action. A smoothly run candidates' night was held for the upcoming councilmanic election; and the organization succeeded in pressuring the city to close a dangerous pedestrian tunnel under the freeway on the north boundary of the neighborhood. Many attempts had been made in the past to have the tunnel closed because it was the scene of numerous assaults on neighborhood residents.

Intensification of the crisis.— This period was also marked by an intensification of the leadership-organizer split and onset of the leadership crisis. The split widened when the newly elected councilman visited the neighborhood at the invitation of the organization. Beck didn't confine his comments to the tunnel issue—the only agendum mandated by the membership—but took it upon himself to raise another issue with the councilman. He wanted to have closed down a halfway house located on his street, and he solicited the councilman's help. The issue had not been discussed or voted upon by the membership. At the next executive committee meeting, the

organizers' team leader confronted Beck on his departure from the agreed-upon agendum. He was very upset by her "challenge" to *his* exercise of authority. Beck had responded by redefining the issue as a *personal* attack upon himself by the organizers. The executive committee endorsed ex post facto his statements and request to the councilman.

Beck and Solano shortly thereafter approached the organizers and proposed that the organization allow the police to use the office (in the church basement) as a stakeout in order to reduce crime in the neighborhood. The organizers told them it would have to be discussed and voted upon by the general membership—and the organizers were told in return not to mention the matter to anyone. They kept the confidence. The organizers' perspective was that "you couldn't tell the members . . . [that the organizers] prevented Beck from doing a lot of shit he wanted to do—all they could see were the organization's successes" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:44).

The fracture was complete after the permanent elections in October. Beck began to test in earnest the limits of his authority. He sent a letter to the organizers asking that they inform him of their daily work schedule and requesting they do certain tasks not mandated by the membership. The organizers responded to Beck's letter "in kind," with a letter of their own, refusing some of his requests and agreeing to others. He wrote back and asked that the conflict not be taken up at the next general meeting in October.

Beck had by this time won Solano's loyal support. He had written a letter to Solano's landlord, representing himself as president of LVU/UN-ISA, and succeeded in getting Solano's apartment painted for him.

The last general meeting before disaffiliation.— Beck was clearly in control of the October general meeting. He redefined the issue in the conflict—taking an aggressive posture—and focused attention on the organizers' actions. He used to his own advantage the organizers' letters to him, the unapproved changes they had made in the agenda for the meeting, and the presence

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of ISA personnel (the student organizers and others) who were not known to many of the members. He effectively suppressed the organizers' attempts to create an alternative reality. The organizers were invested in answering Beck's questions, and thus they *sustained* in large measure his definition of reality and the points at issue.

After the meeting the organizers continued to talk about how they would answer Beck's charges against ISA by bringing the ISA financial records to the nest general meeting—although the general membership had not asked for such action. The theme of the organizers' post-meeting discussions was, "it's either Beck or democracy" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:46). Caught up in Beck's reality, there was no discussion of shifting the grounds of the conflict, initiating action, raising and defining their own issues instead of responding to those raised by Beck.

Staff relationships.— During October and November the process among the organizers for discussing and resolving organizational problems was itself problem-ridden. The exclusive and personal relationship between Tudor and Slater contributed to the other organizers' feelings of being isolated from them. Although in time this particular difficulty was resolved, similar problems in communication plagued staff relationships. Tudor's reluctance to encourage and participate herself in wide-ranging, exploratory discussions was especially debilitating. Slater continually undermined attempts to create an atmosphere of mutual- and self-criticism, and open consideration of the *organizers'* role in setting up organizational problems. Sufficient trust was never established among the staff so that individuals would be open about their personal and professional stakes and commitments that were relevant to the organizing effort. The organizers were unwilling to be more than superficially open with *each other*. And an effective staff team never developed.

Members respond to the crisis.— The October general meeting was attended by less than a third of the members. The organizers had brought the conflict into the open in accord with their

principle of taking all decisions to the general membership. There had, of course, already been a delay of several months. During the meeting, most of the members were passive in the face of what must have appeared as a conflict between the organizers and the leadership. Following the meeting, the organizers continued to define the issue to the membership as "Beck vs. democracy, take your choice" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74: 47). Beck meanwhile was defining the issue as a *personal* attack upon himself. Borden told one of the organizers during an informal house-visit that he didn't want to be in "the position of choosing between Ms. Tudor and Mr. Beck" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74: 48). The issue had become highly personalized in the minds of many people, but the organizers weren't responding to this reality.

In November a general membership meeting was cancelled for the first time for lack of a quorum. Many members were still engaged in organizational activities and were paying dues, but they had withdrawn from the arena of the conflict, possibly awaiting a reconciliation of the principals involved. The view of one organizer was that "the membership was being used as a jury" and they were precluded from having a constructive role. They were expected to pick sides in a conflict that had not *yet* been presented to them by the organizers in terms of clearly defined issues (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74: 49). Their loyalties were divided between their neighbors and the organizers; and their dilemma wasn't lessened any by the leaders' charges that the organizers were leading immoral lives and associated with an organization of doubtful reputation, ISA, nor the organizers' charges that the leaders were undermining "democracy."

In a house-visit, Borden shared with one of the organizers his feeling that many members were staying away from the organization because of the conflict between Beck and the organizers. Borden talked with fondness and respect for several of the organizers, but he added that the organizers and leaders should get together in private and work out their differences. He referred to other members who believed, as he did, that the conflict shouldn't have been brought up by the organizers at the October general meeting. Democracy notwithstanding, Borden sympathized

with "the need for organizational flexibility" where leaders, and even members at times, could talk, act, and make commitments for the organization when important and timely matters arose between general meetings.

Although business wasn't transacted at the November meeting, between 12 and 14 members were present. Solano chaired the meeting in Beck's absence and spoke at length about how the organization should support the police department's "neighborhood watch" program but should go slowly in taking action to get a foot patrol. Vasquez' sympathies were in the same direction.

3. Getting Into Action

The organizers start moving.— The next general meeting was scheduled for early January and it was also canceled for lack of a quorum. Now, for the first time, the organizers began seriously to consider what action they might *initiate* to deal with the crisis. It was decided to place pressure on the leadership group in two ways: First, the organizers' team leader would confront the executive committee with their failure to fulfill their responsibilities as leaders, pointing out that the membership was far ahead of them in moving on issues and actively supporting organizational actions and activities. Second, the organizers would redouble their efforts among the members to build actions on major issues that the membership had already endorsed, to wit: the police foot patrol (which the leaders were trying to renege on), street closings (to reduce traffic congestion and speeding in the neighborhood—also being reneged on), and the meat buyers' club.

The shootings.— There were several gang shootings in the neighborhood in late December, during the holidays. No one was injured, but people were tense and fearful for their safety. In early January a 16-year-old boy, a gang member, was shot and killed in his front yard by members of a rival, outside gang. Within four days there were three other incidents of violence in

the neighborhood, including another shooting. While some residents regretted the death, others felt the neighborhood would be better off rid of the youthful gang members, the means notwithstanding.

Building for action.— Immediately following the first shooting death, the organizers met and decided to put their strategy into operation, to begin canvassing the community to build for an *ad hoc* neighborhood meeting within one or two days. The goal was to build the power of the general membership, and to intensify pressure on the executive committee to support a *mass meeting* in the neighborhood as a means to press the demand for a foot patrol. In an informal conversation between Beck and another member of the organization, Beck made it clear that he didn't want to get involved with the shootings. Solano felt the organizers shouldn't act too quickly and that one of the organization's committee's should first study the matter.

The *ad hoc* meeting was attended by about 25 people, but none of the organization's officers came. A delegation was formed to go to city hall and invite the councilman and mayor to come to the mass meeting and answer the residents' questions about the shootings and police protection—and, of course, about getting a foot patrol in the neighborhood. Two days later, four carloads of neighborhood people went to city hall to extend the invitation for the mass meeting. The action at city hall was unrehearsed. The councilman and his deputies were very defensive, but finally engaged the delegation in the public corridor outside of his office. Once engaged, the city hall officials aggressively attacked the "professional organizers" and divided the delegation. The officials were well armed with insiders' information about the organization and ISA, and the problems between the leadership and the organizers. One of the police department captains, seen earlier in the afternoon in the neighborhood with Beck, was at the councilman's office when the delegation arrived.

The councilman and the mayor's deputy both agreed to come to the mass meeting. Several members who took part in the action felt that Beck had sold out the organization by holding private conversations and contracts with the councilman and police officials.

Isolation of the organizers before the end.— Another shooting death took place several days before the mass meeting. Beck called the organizers and did an about-face on the shootings and the foot patrol issue, enthusiastically suggesting "we ought to jump into this now." Later that evening he recommended that the organizers work to get intensive media coverage of the mass meeting and that they put out another leaflet that wasn't so "low key." In the next day or two, several of the organization's officers encouraged the organizers to take more extreme positions on the shootings and foot patrol issue. The organizers suspected they were being set up to be isolated and attacked at the mass meeting by a combined effort of the leadership and the city hall and police representatives.

Two days before the mass meeting, a committee on street closings, including Borden and Vasquez, were to meet with a city traffic department official to gather information. That afternoon, for unexplained reasons, they had an unplanned meeting with the police captain who had previously been seen with Beck and in the councilman's office. The two LVU/UN-ISA officers met on the following day with two of the organizers to plan the agenda for the mass meeting. The two officers were superficially cordial but clearly opposed to the organizers' objectives for the upcoming meeting—they opposed taking *action* for a foot patrol and street closings. Their attitude was, "we want better police protection, maybe a foot patrol, but more research needs to be done—maybe we can get a foot patrol in the future." It was "obvious" for Borden and Vasquez that the neighborhood couldn't succeed in getting a foot patrol. Their language and arguments were the same the organizers had heard in recent weeks from the police and city hall officials.

The mass meeting.— What follows is my description of the mass meeting written several hours after it was over.

The meeting was planned to begin at 2:00 and got started at 2:30 with about 130 people. In terms of individuals and groups, everyone had shown their colors before this meeting.

The city hall officials generated a sea of words—their version of history, good deeds from city hall, socio-political analyses of neighborhood problems, and the need for "communication"—and effectively alternated many people away from the main issues they had come for. The organization's leadership actively and at times enthusiastically supported the politicians through control of the chair and redefining the main issues as nothing more than the need to eliminate gang violence through cooperation with the police.

The city hall people worked to divide the community under the guise of "describing the divisions." They repeated several times that "you people have to get together" and "you all know there's only one family involved in the shootings." The officials told of how the politicians have helped the community (ignoring the role of the organization), redefined the present problems so that the community is responsible for their solution, divided the community, proposed their own "program" (police department neighborhood watch and basic car plan) and asked people for a commitment to their program (which didn't work very well—only Solano and Beck raised their hands).

When people had talked for maybe an hour, the councilman appeared—as if by chance—and played the role of final arbiter for the discussion that had gone before him, acting (with some success) as if he represented all of the people impartially, and discussion could now come to an end in his name and his proposals. Nonetheless, at the end of the meeting there was a motion that carried well (Beck voted for it) that the organization would continue working to get a foot patrol.

The most charitable word that could be used to describe the leadership is treacherous, but they did nothing unexpected. Borden by-passed one of the critical agreed-upon question-and-answer sessions, and not long into the meeting gave over the prerogatives and power of the chair to the police representatives at the head table. Once the councilman arrived and took over, the meeting turned into a city hall pitch for the neighborhood watch and basic car plan. Apparent throughout the meeting was the ambivalence of people about, and the basic divisiveness of, "police problems" as a key organizational issue. The strongest applause during the meeting followed testimonials to good police work in the neighborhood and statements about how the neighborhood relied on and needed the police.

Everybody played their parts throughout the meeting, including the members: The leaders of the organization were double-dealing, likewise the politicians. The members who were with the leadership were lost to the organizers before they came and stayed that way. Those who were on the fence were subjected to almost unrelieved attempts by the politicians—openly supported by the organization's leaders—at unhealthy alternation, a process indirectly legitimized by the organizers who got the people to the meeting but never confronted what was happening for fear of being further isolated. There were many people, previously alternated to the organizers' reality, who were not only deserted by their elected leaders (although not entirely leaderless because Mendez spoke out against the city hall officials), but were expected to fight with the leaders of their own organiza-

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tion in the presence of their neighbors and the big shots from downtown—and to fight over an issue they were ambivalent about.

When the meeting was over, several of the leaders—Beck and Vasquez among others—stood in front of the church discussing with the city hall officials how the meeting had gone for *them* and how it could be evaluated in terms of their objectives. It was obvious that the leaders and politicians regarded the outcome of the meeting (with good reason) as an unqualified success for themselves in terms of controlling the organization and undermining the plans of the organizers.

The organizers' initial reaction to the meeting was largely in terms of how particular individuals had acted (although nothing new of any consequence in this regard emerged); and their emphasis was on interpreting the meeting as successful for themselves in several respects. Most of the comments picked out instances (if not exceptions, then of marginal importance) where opponents—leaders or city hall officials—were made to look foolish; or they focused (accurately) on the fact that many people saw through the leaders and politicians or were insulted by them. There seemed to be no recognition by the organizers, however, of the cost of the meeting in organizational mileage *lost*.

People had been moved by recent events in the neighborhood and pitched hard by the organizers to come to the mass meeting. What they got was a large dose of boredom at best and bullshit at worst (and maybe an incomprehensible lack of action during the meeting by the organizers). The so-called "power of the people to act effectively when united"—as a vision to which people were being alternated when pitched to come—was probably seriously undermined for some and put entirely to rest for others; and the perception of the organizers as guides to a new reality was probably destroyed for many.

4. The Disaffiliation

Reactions to the mass meeting.— The members reacted in various ways to the mass meeting. Although only a few had spoken out in the meeting, and only one of the organization's leaders had openly confronted the councilman and police officials, several members were put off by the councilman's patronizing attitude, double talk, and unwillingness to directly answer questions. While several people who had attended the meeting were critical of the city hall officials, there was no mention of the quisling roles played by the organization's leaders.

The decision to disaffiliate.— The decision to disaffiliate came after consideration of a series of unattractive alternatives based on the following assumptions:

1. Most of the members had defined the leadership crisis as a personal conflict between Beck and the organizers.

2. The loyalties of members had been seriously split and they were unwilling to confront either side in the conflict.

3. The prolonged leadership crisis had seriously depleted the members' energy and interest in attending organizational meetings.

4. The organizers were completely isolated from a majority of the organization's leaders.

5. The organization's officers had established covert communications, contracts, and alliances with city hall officials and police, the main targets of organizational actions.

6. While the members were continuing to pay dues, the political action character of the organization had been effectively subverted by the leadership crisis.

The organizers considered four alternatives to resolve the crisis: (1) attempting to rid the organization of the leadership by working from within; (2) attempting to work with the leadership and change them over time; (3) attempting to form a new organization in the neighborhood; and (4) disaffiliating.

It was decided to disaffiliate and thereby remove the organizers and ISA as issues in the leadership crisis. The goal was to effect the disaffiliation so as to disrupt the existing leadership group and put them on the defensive, and give maximum encouragement to incipient leaders. The organizers drafted a letter that outlined ISA's reasons for disaffiliating, and they attached it to a summary of specific abuses by the leaders. These were presented at an executive committee meeting, without prior notice, and then immediately distributed throughout the neighborhood. The letter closed with the statement that "if in the future the general membership acts to resolve the problems . . . , ISA will enthusiastically resume working with La Vecindad Unida/United Neighborhood."

The disaffiliation.— Beck had been threatening since the last general meeting in October to expose information that he had or could obtain which would discredit the organizers and ISA.

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Thus while the organizers' agendum for the executive committee meeting was simply to an-
nounce ISA's disaffiliation, Beck was finally to make his charges—to wit:

1.   "I was under the impression, wrongly, that ISA was a large institute."

2.   "ISA told us they were surviving on dues from the neighborhood, but their tax returns
        showed thousands in income."1

3.   "The organization itself should be run from the community, not from outside the commu-
        nity."

4.   "They took the office key away from Mr. Solano and controlled the meeting room until I
        got keys made for the executive committee members."

5.   "ISA brought in additional organizers without clearing first with LVU/UN."

6.   "I don't like the 'anti' attitude [of the organizers] and people in the councilman's office
        are offended by ISA."

7.   "The councilman's office doesn't want anything to do with LVU as long as we're associ-
        ated with ISA."

Beck finished by recommending that the neighborhood organization act to disaffiliate
from ISA. Mendez spoke out on behalf of the organizers, but Beck ignored her comments and
went on: "Another thing that disturbs me . . . is that these people [the organizers] are transients. .
. . They don't live normal lives. . . . They don't live the conventional type of pattern that we do. .
. ."

After the ISA letter of disaffiliation had been read, Vasquez expressed his distrust of the
organizers: "they have gone through so much training and [they] give up the riches of life . . .
and that's so rare. . . . ISA hasn't fulfilled its purposes as far as organizing the people. . . .
They're not developing leadership. . . . I'm eager to learn how to be a leader, but yet I haven't
felt I've been given a position where I could make decisions and set priorities on my own. . . . I
believe that if you're going to go strictly on the ideal of what a democratic organization should

be . . . , it can't be because that would slow down the machinery of accomplishing goals. . . . The leaders have to have a certain amount of leeway in how they go about reaching those objectives and goals." Solano explained that, "the executive committee tried to resolve our differences with ISA, but they pushed it to the membership."

After the organizers left the meeting, Beck unveiled plans to incorporate the organization, seek government grants, and buy up property in the neighborhood. He announced also that the councilman had promised to get parks for the neighborhood if the organization disaffiliated from ISA.

Postscript.— At the general meeting in February, following the disaffiliation, a motion was introduced by one of the members to have ISA return to work with the organization. Beck ruled the motion out of order, and he adjourned the meeting when he was confronted on the is-sue. Since that time, several of the most active members in the buyers' club have met and started to circulate a petition to remove the current group of officers and reestablish the organization as affiliate of ISA.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

1. The Analytical Questions

My main interest is in two analytical questions and the implications they have for grass-roots organizing. How did the leadership crisis of LVU/UB-ISA undermine the organization? And what could the *organizers* have done differently?

2. The Destructiveness of Cool Alternators

The LVU/UN-ISA case study shows the devastating effect a *cool alternator* can have on a democratic organization when the organizers don't *initiate early defensive action*. The cool alternating people are like politicians, and usually move quickly into leadership positions (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:59). They're people who aren't truly alternated but are using the organization or manipulating the membership in a destructive way to achieve a personal and private objective (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:9).

The cool alternator in this case was a 30-year-old television salesman for Sears who looked and dressed like a man of 40, lived with his mother and grandmother, and hadn't missed a day of work in eight years. The one ambition he openly shared was to move "north of Wilshire." One can imagine the meaning in Beck's life of the advent of the neighborhood organization. In a flash he became "President of La Vecindad Unida/United Neighborhood-ISA"—a leader—and had newly found "acquaintances" at city hall.

Michels (1915) sets out some of the dynamics of leadership in large-scale (national) democratic organizations. His ideas on the "psychological metamorphosis of the leaders," however, raise an issue that is relevant to leadership problems in democratic neighborhood organizations. He argues that in the beginning ". . . the leader is sincerely convinced of the excellence of

the principles he advocates" (Michels 1915:205). In time, however, "the consciousness of power always produces vanity, an undue belief in personal greatness" (Michels 1915:206). Michels' implicit suggestion is that the leader undergoes a character transformation, and that he becomes something other than what he first appeared to be. But this wasn't the case with the LVU/UN-ISA cool alternator. Beck was spotted before the first organizing meeting. The organizers and the organization's legitimators believed at the outset that he would be a seriously destructive force within the organization. The organizers acknowledged many times that Beck was "lost" from the beginning: "it seemed like Beck didn't understand . . . [democratic procedure] at all" (Grassroots Project Seminar 1973-74:63). But whether or not Beck could "understand" wasn't the issue—he played the prototypical cool alternator, never truly alternated, always covertly manipulating for personal ends.

3. The Obstacles to Resolving the Crisis

At the height of the LVU/UN-ISA leadership crisis—when the potential for both danger *and* opportunity were greatest—and afterwards, particularly in October, the organizer's were caught up in Beck's reality. Most of their energy was invested in responding to the issues and actions he had initiated.

Why didn't the organizers initiate their own defensive action earlier? It's a difficult question to answer with any certainty. The team leader answers that in September she had advice from two experienced organizers to "get into action" but that she was bogged down with personal problems. That doesn't explain, however, the failure of the *other* organizers to initiate action.

What can be said with some certainty is that LVU/UN-ISA organizers didn't work effectively as a team. Having said that, it's difficult to say more. My view is that team-building rests on the basic proposition that *the people are the program*: the experiences, biases, expectations, values, and personal stakes and commitments that staff bring to the organizing effort are crucial

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to its success or failure—whatever the organizational model. To achieve the integration of people so that they become an effective team requires that they be willing to engage one another, and are committed to resolving their differences and the unfinished business between them. The obstacles to working together must be systematically *worked through*—otherwise they remain obstacles.

There was little time and less inclination for such team-building among the LVU/UN-ISA staff. My experience tells me that this aspect of organizing is crucial and must be given a higher priority by organizers. My most basic assumption in this area is that for professional organizers to function effectively as a team, organizing must be a mutually sustaining enterprise where individual organizers are open to *personal* change and growth. What's needed is an openness and willingness to change, not that staff meetings be transformed into group therapy sessions.

3. What Could Be Done Differently?

In the beginning.— Very little time was set aside during the organizing drive to contact each family. The organizers hardly had a chance to talk more than once with each person. A second visit before the organizing meeting could be extremely valuable. The first contact rarely goes beyond digging issues and selling the person on organization. A second contact could be used to convey much more about what the style of the organization will be and what kinds of problems it faces, particularly threats to internal solidarity. The time spent in early contacts with people should not be limited; and to this end, a higher priority overall could be given to the early stages of the organizing drive.

More time could be devoted to communicating the genius and practical advantages, and the specific rules and pitfalls of democratic decision-making. It would mean granting a higher priority to creating the plausibility structure that is needed to support the new organizational reality of open decision-making and power-directed action.

Handling cool alternators.— The presence of a genuine cool alternator demands that the organizers very early initiate decisive defensive action. While the specifics of such action are situationally determined, the organizers' *tone* on cool alternators transcends any particular situation.

Organizers for the National Nonpartisan League quickly and thoroughly set their tone on elected leaders. The members were warned before the first organizing meeting ". . . repeatedly . . . against men who sought office of any sort" (Morlan 1955:47). The tone was communicated in the League's newspaper (Morlan 1955:47-48):

> Farmers must keep in mind that they cannot expect right service and a square deal at the hands of a man who goes gum-shoeing for political preferment. Farmers do not need in office a man who seeks the glory of political prestige.
> What we farmers want is a man who knows the farmers' needs, a man who is engaged in the same business as a regular famer—not the farmer who farms farmers. Not only so but they want a man who is so adverse to political preferment that he must be drafted into service.

Once set, the tone needs to be enforced, holding up for public view any "inobservance." Watch out for leaders who have the power to talk people down—don't give them any room to operate if they're destructive. Private confidences and contracts—like the police stakeout request—give the cool alternator a better foothold in the organization. Don't make any contracts—expose the destructive ones that have already been made.

Corporate structure.— In future grassroots organizing, the organizers' own organizational structure could play a more useful role in resolving crisis situations. The ISA structure, a board of directors closed except to professional organizers, has several drawbacks and few advantages aside from giving control of the corporation to the organizers. The LVU/UN-ISA staff members were denied the benefits of a less specialized board.

Incorporation for a political action organization should be considered carefully. The alternative is a tax-exempt association. While both forms of organization offer limited financial liability for their members, the association is less vulnerable to litigation.

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By a quirk of legal construction, the statements and actions of association members are considered to be their own and do not represent the organization for legal purposes. It's no accident that the political parties and labor unions aren't incorporated.

A bifurcated policy-making board may be used in either organizational form to extend the control of the founders while at the same time not unduly restricting participation. The bifurcated policy-making structure employs a board of *directors* and a board of *trustees*. Trustees undertake the normal policy-making functions of the organization. Membership on the board of directors is extended to individuals who support the organization and who may be considered candidates for the board of trustees. The explicit functions of the board of directors are ceremonial and honorary, but it also serves as a "proving ground" for prospective trustees who can be appointed when vacancies occur.

Board members can be selected from the major areas of expertise needed in the organizing enterprise—publications, legal, organizing, accounting, public relations, etc. A broadly based board, including representatives from affiliated organizations, could help to integrate ISA with the neighborhood organizations it sponsors.

A good board can provide a readily accessible source of expert, high-quality opinion. Board members can be loyal supporters of the organizing effort who have no direct stakes in the outcome of the action. What's suggested here requires that organizers invest a greater proportion of their resources engaging outside people in the development of their own organizational structure.

4. Reflections

My feelings about the leadership crisis of La Vecindad Unida/United Neighborhood-ISA and building democratic organizations in the future are summed up in the words of Wendell Phillips (Lomas 1968:16):

Trust the people—the wise and the ignorant, the good and the bad—with the gravest of questions, and in the end you educate the race. At the same time you secure, not perfect institutions, not necessarily good ones, but the best institutions possible while human nature is the basis and the only material to build with.

Democracy is a faith which holds that in the long run people have the judgment and wisdom to exercise power in their own name.

(Author unknown.)

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