

## **On the substance of the commentary and my response:**

Stuart Eimer's comments mostly speak to whether or not my characterization of SEIU is valid, and he offers a second example of a good local within SEIU. I'm pretty sure I know the local he means, and it's a local I worked closely with and respect. I led the Stamford Organizing Project, which helped more than 2,000 janitors form a union in Fairfield County, Connecticut. Subsequently we all agreed that this new union should be merged into the local Eimer refers to in his comments, given that it was under new leadership. And clearly, there are other good locals in SEIU. That wasn't really my point, and in my article, at 12,000 words, I was not able to do justice to the full discussion. My book, at 330 pages and about 160,000 words, pretty accurately reflects the complexities of SEIU.

With one key point Eimer makes, suggesting that I know little about master agreements despite having led negotiations for them myself, I have to disagree. He writes:

“It is usually the case that master contracts of the sort that were pursued in both Washington and Connecticut will create winners and losers, as workers in more profitable firms will be asked to moderate their wage demands so that workers in less profitable firms can achieve the negotiated wage without putting their firms at a competitive disadvantage.”

The center of my argument then and now is that, in fact, under New Labor accords, *workers themselves* have never been asked to moderate their wage demands. Had they been, it would have been a democratic breakthrough. But they aren't asked—the decision is imposed on them by national (sometimes local) leadership. There is no discussion including the workers or agreement endorsed by them, and this is what leads to workers' massive distrust of their “own” national unions. This is why thousands of workers choose to no longer be members and pay dues when their state flips to “right-to-work,” or when the U.S. Supreme Court issues rulings spreading right-to-work across the country, as we saw in *Harris v. Quinn* and as many predict we will see in *Fredrichs v. the CTA*.

Kim Voss's commentary raises some excellent points. Capital has changed, she's absolutely correct. But capital is always changing, and the question then becomes, has New Labor chosen the correct strategies to meet those changes? On this, Voss and I do differ, respectfully, I believe. I disagree completely that the corporate campaign has a “greater effectiveness: it is more successful than the CIO model against the corporate antagonisms that dominate today's economy.” I'd point to any number of recent electoral campaigns that demonstrate the staggering consequence of New Labor moving away from workers and the workplace as evidence that the corporate campaign is far less effective. In both Wisconsin and Michigan, in recent elections and ballot initiatives, the margin of victory for opponents of the workers was *within* the union household vote. The consequences of New Labor leaders paying significant attention to everyone *but* workers for the past twenty years can be seen well beyond just falling density numbers. Neoliberalism requires more, not less, engagement with workers, their families, and their communities, through the workers themselves, through transformative, not transactional, efforts.

And on her point that there aren't any other recent victories that demonstrate the effectiveness of workers acting as their own leverage absent a corporate campaign, I'd reply with the Chicago Teachers Union strike, and the frequent and open-ended strikes by nurses and allied

professionals in Pennsylvania (PASNAP), strikes that have kept their standards high. Or to other 1199 locals outside the narrow confines of nursing homes, where strikes still lead to massively improved standards and to the corollary of workers who own and embrace their union. Having led strikes myself during the period under discussion, in a right-to-work state where members continued to pay dues in record numbers, I think there is enough counter-evidence to challenge the dominant narrative and probe the deeper questions I am raising. Why, at a time when neoliberalism is driving fatalism among workers, does a strategy to move away from workers make sense? How is it helping workers, their families, and their communities understand the opposition and the mechanisms of power deployed against the class? The attack is coming from all sides, not just from within the neat confines of the workplace, as Voss herself points out. Where is the evidence that New Labor's strategies are better equipping the class to engage in the fight?

The decision to sideline workers and create workerless worker strategies is failing labor badly: in density numbers, in the electoral arena, and in the diminishing number of workers who choose to continue paying dues in right-to-work states. I will argue in my next book that top-down and bottom-up has morphed into 90 percent to 95 percent top-down with about 5 percent to 10 percent bottom-up. And, importantly, since Voss cites Milkman's book on immigrant labor in Los Angeles, that top-down and bottom-up *might* work in low-wage sectors dominated by industries where the cost of the settlement is low. It won't work in many other sectors of our economy where the cost of settlement is too high for Alinsky-style strategies to matter much. Or, as a top corporate lobbyist has said about the deals made in Washington State, "the big employers can afford their ideology" and have basically ignored the terms of organizing-rights agreements all along. So even a deal that gave workers' rights away and required the union to raise funds for the employers, sacrificing other constituencies in the state budget fights, wasn't enough for big capital. These deals, the ones relying on so-called top-down and bottom-up, do not work in the sectors that are most strategic in rebuilding a powerful labor movement today.

All of that said, I respect and appreciate Voss's manner of engagement; she discussed my points rather than dismissing them, and though obviously I do not agree with everything she had to say, I find it worth considering and engaging on its own high level of debate.

Paul Osterman's response, I feel, shows a far more partisan, even sectarian—approach. Despite a world of differences between them, for both Marx and Alinsky there is what they wrote, and what they did, and what has been done by people who consider themselves followers of the founder. There are Alinskyites and Marxists who denounce fellow Alinskyites and Marxists, insisting that the other factions "misunderstand" the true message. In both camps, devotees point to the good work that has been done by members of the tradition, and critics point to the ways the tradition has led the left into problems.

Osterman insists that I misunderstand the Alinsky tradition, and although he does not explicitly say so, it is clear that his version of Alinsky is above all that of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The very concept of "misunderstanding" implies that there is an unambiguous truth, and all else is error. I'm glad to debate Alinsky at length, but I think that's what this is: a debate about varying interpretations of what has been written and what is practiced by groups that see themselves in the Alinsky tradition. In this connection it is perhaps worth noting that the editorial board asked me to cut my literature review and change my evidence, and the revised

version of the article (which is in many ways much stronger than my original submission, for which I am grateful) includes much less discussion of Alinsky than my original submission, which perhaps makes Osterman's remarks about my lack of grounding in Alinskyism more understandable, if no less inaccurate.

Heather Booth, who was trained in part by Alinsky's IAF and founded the Alinsky-influenced Midwest Academy of Organizing, has been quoted (by Frank Bardacke, in *Trampling Out the Vintage*, Verso, 2012, page 68) as saying Alinsky is to community organizing what Freud is to the field of psychology. Alinsky *is* a defining figure in the contemporary field of community organizing. The causal links I am making to what I very carefully named the "diaspora" and "strands of" and "legacy of" Alinsky are not based on a misunderstanding. In my article, I most assuredly do not blame the IAF for the failure of New Labor to keep its focus on workers, but the domination of Alinsky's legacy goes far beyond the IAF. It is these non-IAF Alinsky tendencies that have overlapped significantly in the backgrounds of the New Labor leadership, forming what Howard Kimeldorf calls the social basis of the staff recruitment for New Labor.

Osterman's principal critique of my article, however, *is* based on a misconception. There are no "true" Alinsky organizations that can tell us what Alinsky "really meant." The IAF, Osterman's reference point, is a perfect illustration. It is true that Alinsky founded and led the IAF until his death. But the IAF we know, and that Osterman describes, was created after Alinsky's death by Ed Chambers, Ernie Cortes, and a few others. They took some of Alinsky's ideas and practices, rejected others, and codified what they had into a well-honed (some would say rigid) model.

Some Alinsky-influenced community organizers do believe as a matter of principle that organizations should derive their power predominantly, if not solely, from the membership and are deeply suspicious of the staff-driven "extrinsic power" strategies characteristic of New Labor. The IAF organizers, claimants to the Alinsky mantle, are among those. How they apply these principles in practice is a complex question, well beyond the scope of my article (read Mark Warren, Heidi Swartz, et al). And whether this principle really derives from Alinsky, as the IAF claims, is debatable. (Some argue that it comes more from Catholic social teaching, which Chambers and Cortes read back into Alinsky, creating orthodoxy where none existed).

The *Playboy* interview is just as good a guide to what Alinsky stood for as the current practices of the IAF—arguably better. National People's Action and ACORN had just as good a claim to the Alinsky legacy as the modern IAF. Nothing in Osterman's lengthy discussion actually contests my hypothesis that Alinsky was a significant influence on the thinking of New Labor, or that because he was, we need to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of Alinsky.

My next book expands on the arguments I make in my article, adding illustrative cases in the public and private sector, in the service and tradeable economy, and in the nonunion social-movement sector among class-focused community organizing groups. The book will be out in 2016.

Jane F. McAlevey,  
Post Doc, Labor & Worklife Program, Harvard University Law School