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## Book Review: Pragmatics of Community Organization, by Bill Lee

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BOOK REVIEW  
By Susan Campbell\*

PRAGMATICS OF  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

BY BILL LEE

In a society where the practice and benefits of community organizing are generally understood from personal political analysis and experience, *Pragmatics of Community Organization* provides the organizer with some useful theory and strategies. Beginning with quotes from the writings of Gandhi and an introduction that places community organizing in an honoured historical context, this book gives the work of organizers some long overdue respect and culture.

Clinic organizers are sure to find some useful hints in chapter two which deals with the practical realities of being paid to organize the powerless by powerful bodies like government. While it does not condone the control exercised within these relationships, it does assist us in using these resources to the fuller advantage of the people with whom we organize. When we can clearly define the limits of paid organizing, people are in a better position to determine what should and can be done to move beyond these often artificial limits, to ensure a greater chance for real change.

In considering the model of organizing presented, it is important to reiterate the author's caution that they represent an "ideal process that can only be found in books". With this in mind, the model becomes a recipe to which we can add or subtract ingredients to concoct the flavour of our local efforts to affect change and develop community power. Many organizers may not find too many new ideas in the model, but as a guide, it is useful in providing a perspective and an analysis when the going gets tough or the personal closeness to the issue at hand gets in the way. For new organizers, it provides a fairly solid examination of social structure,

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class and equality that helps to identify strategies and tactics that are based on common sense. From a literary perspective, the style and presentation of ideas in this book are often awkward and difficult. The author uses quotes excessively from social theorists and practitioners to stress valuable points and conclusions, but not always smoothly or in an easily readable fashion. This makes it a less accessible source of information than is surely necessary.

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