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For several decades Michael Gecan has worked with groups that serve their communities when conservative get-tough rhetoric and endless liberal programs do not cut it.

A Chicagoan by birth and a survivor of the 1958 Our Lady of the Angels School fire that took the lives of 92 children and three nuns, Gecan brings his deep knowledge of that city's blighted neighborhoods, bloated bureaucracy, and venal political machine to bear on a thoroughgoing and nationwide critique. He paints a vivid picture of civic, political, and religious institutions in decline, from suburban budget crises to failing public schools: a national mid-life crisis.

Gecan reveals an urban landscape in which careerism, nepotism, and greed are the principal movers in policy, while the institutions that preserve and advance communities_schools, churches, affordable housing, recreational opportunities_have fallen prey to the indifference of pols and developers and the shortsightedness of technocrats.

But Gecan would not be a lifelong organizer if he did not see the possibility for change. With relational work_the heart of organizing_at the center of new efforts, he shows how local experiments can create vibrant institutions that truly serve their constituents. Most importantly, he calls on national and local leadership to shed old ways of thinking and face new realities