

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MIKE ALEWITZ

Mike Alewitz has been organizing, educating, agitating, and generally stickin' it to the man for over five decades.

Alewitz was a student leader at Kent State University and an eyewitness to the massacre of four students and wounding of nine others on May 4, 1970. He was a leading activist in the national student strike that followed, helping to spread the strike that eventually encompassed over 400 campuses and millions of protesters.

He was subsequently the subject of a nationwide FBI investigation and was subpoenaed and testified before the Presidential Commission on Campus Unrest (Scranton Commission).

Alewitz was placed on the Attorney General's list as a terrorist by none other than the liberal Ramsey Clark. When called up for the military draft, he was declared 4F, subversive and unfit to serve – a characterization later reversed following the COINTELPRO revelations.

Aside from being shot at, Mike has been tear-gassed, pepper-sprayed, clubbed, arrested and beaten – which is relatively mild compared to many others.

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For two decades Alewitz was a leading cadre of the then-revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (now a degenerated right-wing cult). He led in the expansion of the socialist movement throughout the Midwest, South and West Coast as an organizer, spokesperson, candidate, etc. Until the SWP went down the crapper. Way down. He was expelled in a show-trial while painting the six-story Pathfinder Mural.

Fortunately, while in the SWP, he had a chance to meet, interview, organize with and learn from an earlier generation of outstanding revolutionaries, including James P. Cannon, Farrell Dobbs, Hugo Blanco, Peng Shu Tse, Peng Pi-Lan and others.

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Mike has traveled throughout the world creating agitprop murals that are used as tools to intervene and influence the labor movement - particularly to promote independence from the employers' political parties and build international solidarity. He has painted in South-Central Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Baghdad, Chernobyl, Mexico, Nicaragua, Belfast, Occupied Palestine and numerous other locations. Mostly in places you probably want to avoid.

In 1999, Alewitz was named a Millennium Artist by the White House Millennium Council, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. How it happened remains a mystery. In that capacity he executed a highly publicized series of murals painted in Maryland about Harriet Tubman, most of which were censored, vandalized by Nazis or destroyed by government officials.

Alewitz has organized cultural initiatives for numerous unions and progressive organizations including the United Mine Workers, Jobs with Justice, Teamsters, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, United Farm Workers, Ukraine Atomic Workers Union and many others.

In the mid-90s, when an attempt was made to create a labor party in the US, Alewitz served as chairperson of the Cultural Workers and Artist Caucus (CWAC!)

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Alewitz has used his artwork in support of many of the central labor strikes of recent decades, including meat packers, miners, air traffic controllers, textile workers, agricultural workers, newspaper workers, educators, energy workers, etc.

He has spoken and written extensively on political and cultural topics and is the co-author, with Paul Buhle, of *INSURGENT IMAGES: The Agitprop Murals of Mike Alewitz*. His art has been the subject of several documentary films.

Mike taught *Current Labor Problems* at Rutgers University Labor Education Center, where he was Artist-in-Residence for the NJ Industrial Union Council. The course focused on bringing striking workers to the university and he was given the boot after one semester.

Alewitz is Professor Emeritus at Central Connecticut State University, where he initiated and directed a unique community-based *Mural Painting and Street Art* program for sixteen years, overseeing the creation of over 100 student murals - the largest collection of socially engaged murals at any university in the world. The university administration has refused to recognize or reproduce any images of this remarkable project to this day.

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Mike's work life began as a child, hustling and working assorted crappy jobs. When he began organizing politically, he worked as a railroad laborer in New Orleans and along the Northeast Corridor (BRAC). He also worked as a production machinist in the sprawling General Electric defense plant in Lynn, MA (IUE 201).

Alewitz became a highly skilled billboard and sign-painter and an Honorary Master Trainer for the International Brotherhood of Painters (IBPAT). In 1997 he mistakenly accepted a position as Organizing Director for the United Scenic Artists, then a division of the IBPAT. He proposed a membership-driven organizing effort, embraced by the members.

Shortly thereafter, he was removed by top international officers, red-baited and physically threatened. Following a serious dialogue with the mobsters, everyone agreed he should travel to Mexico to paint a mural for the Frente Auténtico Trabajadores.

Alewitz is currently a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 (now affiliated with IATSE) and the CCSU chapter of American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

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Mike's most recent project is establishing *Red Square*, a studio/gallery/museum of his censored murals and agitprop art, located in New London CT. It is being created in tandem with the *Mike Alewicz Archives* at Tamiment Library, NYU, and the *Alewicz Digital Archives* at CCSU and the CT Digital Archives.

Because his art has given expression to working class aspirations, Mike's work has frequently been the target of censorship. His art and writing have been censored or destroyed by union officials, universities, foundations, socialists, museums, galleries and the police – along with groups as diverse as the Israeli Defense Forces and Sinn Fein.

When his mural *The City at the Crossroads of History*, commissioned for the Museum of the City of New York, and censored on direct political grounds, it received scant coverage or attention by the art or progressive press. Fear of funders.

Alewitz may hold the dubious distinction of being the most censored artist in the world. Like the workers he paints for, Alewicz has been canceled – unmentioned in the art press or liberal media, excluded from visiting artist programs or exhibitions.

Alewicz is so censored he has been completely censored from books on censorship.

Mike has never voted or supported a Democrat, Republican or other capitalist candidate. Since becoming a Marxist in 1968, he has seen nothing to change his conviction that capitalism must die, and that genuine change begins with mass action in the streets.

He remains inspired by the new generations of activists marching, striking, painting murals and generally gaining experience for the struggles to come.

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