
Register of the Mike Conan Collection : The New Communist Movement, 1972-1994

Collection number: MSS 015

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Biography

Progressive Mike Conan (1946-1994) was born in the United States where he spent most of his life fighting for equality. He was a man who wasn't afraid to change strategies with changing times. Beginning in the early 1960's, Conan demonstrated an ever-growing interest in revolutionary change. He traveled to the South in 1964 where he became involved with voter registration work and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Not too long after that, he pushed on to Cuba where he was able to further establish his commitment to solidarity. Later in the decade, Conan became embroiled in the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam Movements. In an attempt to forge a revolutionary vanguard, he engaged in the "new communist" movement of the 1970's. However, when that dynamic movement lost its momentum, he moved on and took initiative in the broader effort to unite diverse strands of the Left. At his death, Mike Conan was active in the Northern California Committees of Correspondence, a Contributing Editor of *CrossRoads* magazine and a member of Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Socialist Organizing Network.

The Communist Labor Party, beginning as the Communist League, changed its name in 1970. Originally Maoist, the party became increasingly Pro-Soviet (Stalin era). The group described themselves as having "a polite but unwanted opposition to the Communist Party (CPUSA)." They declined greatly like most Maoist groups.

The Communist Party originated as a merger of four of the 1919 left wing Socialist Party split. The party's peak size was 100,000 in 1938. The Cold War and McCarthyism caused a decline to 40,000 by 1950, and 20,000 by 1956. Three factions developed: John Gates, editor of the *Daily World*, called for party reforms; William Foster advocated business; Eugene Denis tried to play off the other two. With the departure of Gates in 1957, the party had declined to 3,000 members. Gus Hall was elected General Secretary in 1959, a post which he still holds today. The no longer run presidential campaigns, but instead endorse the Democratic Party candidate while espousing antimonopoly populism.

Freedom Road Socialist Organization came about through the merger of the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters and the Proletarian Unity League in 1986. The Organization for Revolutionary Unity joins FRSO in 1987. The group held a Maoist orientation until 1989 when they condemned the student massacres in China. It is active in the Progressive Student Network and the Rainbow Coalition. Mike Conan was an active member of FRSO until his death.

The August Twenty-Ninth Movement and I Wok Kuen merged in 1978 to form the League for Revolutionary Struggle (though the League eschews such designation). The Revolutionary Communist League joins a year later. A large majority of the members are non-white. They are supportive of Jessie Jackson and the Democratic Party.

The joining of the Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs and Guardian Clubs formed Line of March in 1980. Members regarded the organizations as being a part of a single communist movement with CPUSA. LOM published the weekly *Frontline* and a pamphlet *Line of March*. A "self-critical review" in 1987 caused about 15% of LOM's members to resign, forming the Marxist-Leninist Network. In 1989, LOM changed its name to Frontline Political Organization. The Marxist-Leninist Party of the United States, formed in 1980, was previously the Central Organization of United States Marxist-Leninists. In the early eighties, it broke with their Canadian allies from the COUSML days. It published *Struggle* out of Detroit.

The National Caucus of Labor Committees was formed out of the Labor Caucus of the Students for a Democratic Society in 1967. The SDS had purged these members for support of a 1968 New York City teacher's strike. NCLC was led by Lyndon LaRouche.

The Progressive Labor Party, begun in 1965, was America's leading Maoist group until they denounced China in 1971. Much of their present work is with youth gangs and in prisons. Formed in 1973, the group's International Committee Against Racism is a regular participant in anti-Nazi and anti-Klan rallies.

The Proletarian Unity League formed after a split from the October League in the early seventies. It merged with the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters to form Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

Revolutionary Union became the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1975. It is the largest of the American Maoist groups. A faction consisting of a third of RCP's members left in 1978, becoming the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters, leaving about 400 members, 200 of which dropped out of the organization altogether. Bob Avakian is RCP's outspoken leader, charged with felony, among others, stemming from demonstrations against Deng Xiaoping when he visited the U.S. It has continued on, but at a reduced level. They are most recently noted for having members who were charged in the most prominent flag burning cases.

The Workers Congress was previously the Black Workers Congress, founded in 1971. BWC changed its name to WC, admitting whites into the organization. It broke up shortly thereafter.

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