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Toronto: Beloved teacher and public thinker Leo Panitch has died of COVID-19

Tuesday 22 December 2020, by [JIANG Kevin](#) (Date first published: 21 December 2020).

Professor Leo Panitch was an equal-parts brilliant and generous public thinker who worked toward the betterment of humanity, his friends and colleagues say.

“If you watched Leo, you were immediately struck by his confidence,” said lifelong friend Sam Gindin. “. . . He was committed to (living) life as if it was possible for humans to build a better life.”

Panitch died Saturday of COVID-19 and pneumonia shortly following a cancer diagnosis. He was 75.

Panitch was born in 1945 to a working class family in Winnipeg. His father, a Jewish immigrant from Ukraine, worked as a garment cutter. The setting of his youth might have paved the way to his future philosophy, said friend Rick Salutin, an occasional Star columnist.

“He became a consummate academic and intellectual, but he wanted to put that at the service of the socialist movement and especially in the Marxist tradition,” Salutin said.

What struck Salutin over their years of friendship was Panitch’s “immense generosity.”

“He was always calling people, writing them and saying ‘That’s a wonderful thing you did,’ ” he said. “And that isn’t necessarily so with people who are somewhat famous, especially in academics, which can be a pretty cutthroat business.”

Panitch would go on to earn a bachelor’s degree in economics and political science from the University of Manitoba.

In 1967, Panitch married fellow Winnipeg native Melanie Pollock.

Soon after, he moved overseas to study at the London School of Economics. While earning his Masters and PhD he became close to renowned Marxist and sociologist Ralph Miliband. Panitch was even named godfather to his son, Ed Miliband, Salutin said.

Ed Miliband would later become the leader of the U.K. Labour party. The two stayed fast friends.

Panitch returned to Canada to teach at Carleton University in 1972, and later recruited to York University in 1984 as a political science professor.

In 1985, Panitch began working alongside his mentor Ralph Miliband as co-editor of the influential annual journal Socialist Register.

Gregory Albo, professor of political economy at York University and current co-editor of the Socialist Register, spoke of Panitch’s vision and leadership as being big factors in the journal’s success after Miliband’s death in 1994.

“I was lucky enough to co-edit with Leo over the last decade,” he said. “. . . Where that project goes without his leadership, Jesus, that’s a tough question.”

Panitch would pen numerous books and articles, gaining influence and fame. In the late 1980s to mid-’90s, he chaired York’s department of political science. In 2002, he became the Canada Research Chair in comparative political economy at York.

In the 2000s, he and Gindin finally got together to write the book they always dreamed of doing together.

“We decided to do a book on the American empire, trying to actually understand how globalization emerged,” he said.

Gindin reflected fondly on the 10 years spent working on the book.

“We had no pressure to finish it . . . for the two of us, it was just this wonderfully intense period of exploration and discovery.”

What started as an idea soon became something much larger. In 2012, “The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire” was published.

It would become the pair’s magnum opus, and a work Panitch remained very proud of.

“It was kind of like the seminal intellectual achievement of both of our lives,” Gindin said.

Panitch retired from York in 2016 a distinguished research professor and Royal Society of Canada fellow, but would continue penning books and essays until his death.

Despite being gone physically, Gindin said Panitch lives on.

“(Panitch) thought on a bigger scale,” he said. “His death doesn’t stop that kind of a dream. He saw himself as part of a longer-term thing that other people are going to have to continue.”

Panitch is survived by his wife of 53 years, Melanie, and two children, Maxim and Vida.

Kevin Jiang Staff Reporter

P.S.

• The Star. Mon., Dec. 21, 2020timer3 min. read:
<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/12/20/beloved-teacher-and-public-thinker-leo-panitch-has-died-of-covid-19.html>

• Kevin Jiang is a breaking news reporter, working out of the Star’s radio room in Toronto. Reach him via email: kjiang@thestar.ca