

Leo Panitch: Beloved Teacher and Public Thinker has Died of COVID-19

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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.

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