

DAVID HOROWITZ, R.I.P.

Bill Donohue

David Horowitz, the former radical turned conservative, died April 29 after battling cancer. He was 86. He was a good friend, a brilliant speaker and writer, and a man of tremendous courage.

David was born and raised in Queens. To this day, when I take the Long Island Rail Road leaving Manhattan, passing into Queens, I look out the window and see the sign for Skillman Avenue. I think of David—that is where he grew up, in Long Island City.

His parents were diehard communists, and raised him as a “Red Diaper Baby.” Their indoctrination paid off, at least initially. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was a leader of the New Left, stoking anti-Americanism. He befriended Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, but later split with them once he learned they were involved in the death of a friend of his, Betty Van Patter.

David, and his friend, Peter Collier, founded *Ramparts*, a radical magazine that cheered for a communist victory in Vietnam. But as he watched what the communists did in Vietnam, his enthusiasm for Marxism soured. The final straw came in the late 1970s when Pol Pot murdered two-in-five of his fellow Cambodians. This shook him intellectually.

Then came the election of Ronald Reagan. This further triggered the reset: David became a rabid pro-American conservative. In 1987, he held a “Second Thoughts Conference” in Washington D.C. This is where he, and other ex-New Left activists, explained why they had had “Second Thoughts” about their political philosophy. Communist genocide has a way of shaking honest people up.

In the early 1990s, he and Peter founded *Heterodoxy*, a brilliant monthly that broke new grounds. Later in the decade, the David Horowitz Freedom Center was launched, and with it the influential publication, *FrontPage* magazine.

Peter had made such a turnaround that he called me at the Catholic League in the late 1990s to congratulate me on my work. More important, he said he made his way back to Catholicism.

It was about that time when David asked me to speak at a conference in Los Angeles that would assess the cultural impact that Hollywood was having. I was scheduled to be there anyway—Jeffrey Katzenberg invited me to review his yet-to-be released movie, *Prince of Egypt* (which I applauded), so I agreed.

It was an enormous room—full of actors, producers and directors—and virtually all of the speakers put a positive face on Hollywood. Until I spoke. After I finished with my remarks, the man sitting next to me on the platform turned to me and said, “They are going to have to get extra security to escort you out of here.”

What did I say that upset the elites? I told them they were a bunch of phonies. One after another, I said, you came to the microphone to tell us that you don’t allow your children to watch the television shows that you make. No, you said, your children watch Nickelodeon. I asked, “So whose children are your shows good for?” They knew exactly what I meant. The room was dead silent. But David loved it.

David was fond of saying that many conservatives don’t get it. They are so nice. The problem with that is they seriously underestimate how vicious the Left is. They need to toughen up. They don’t understand how driven and malicious radicals are.

In more recent years, David wrote a blurb for one my books,

and I endorsed one of his. He was always honest and full of energy.

As he grew intellectually, David, who was Jewish, became a staunch advocate of Christianity. He saw the cultural rot that militant secularism wrought, concluding that an ascendant Christianity was badly needed.

Not surprisingly, the Left turned on him, hating his slide to conservatism. But he didn't care—all he cared about was telling the truth.

America has lost a great one. I was honored to have known David Horowitz as a friend. May he rest in peace.