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Marty Peretz & The New Republic

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Yesterday, the New Republic announced that Marty Peretz is officially stepping down as editor-in-chief, a title he has held since 1974. I never worked for Marty directly, but I am proud to count myself among those whose careers as a writer Marty encouraged. In my case, that encouragement came rather bluntly, as many things that came from Marty's mouth did. When I complained about a particular article in the pages of his magazine he said, "Well, you do not choose to publish your opinions." My first published essay appeared in the pages of the New Republic a short time later.

Marty did many things for the magazine. He caused its editors and writers to think seriously not only about the issues of the day but about the way the liberal tradition could and should address those issues, and how that tradition had been hijacked by some who claimed the liberal label while undermining its core tenets. He understood that a magazine must be both contrary and constructive. He understood that there is no substitute for good writing and smart thinking. The stable of writers and editors to emerge from his tutelage is astounding: Michael Kinsley, Rick Hertzberg, Charles Krauthammer, Andrew Sullivan, Jeremy McCarter and so many more, got their start at TNR before going on to grace the pages of other journals with the skills first honed at his magazine.

Since 1974, TNR has also been the magazine that forces other journalists, politicians and academics to mind their P's & Q's when writing about Israel. An unabashed Zionist, for Marty, 1948 was not the year of Truman's upset victory.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to American intellectual life was his decision to hire Leon Wieseltier as literary editor of the magazine and let it be known that Leon would die in harness. There is not a sharper mind in Washington, and no one who has consistently provided pages with insight, argument and literary merit than Leon.

Marty was also unbelievably generous. Writers have never been well paid, and Marty was always quick to provide braces and scholarships for their children and other acts of kindness, some of them quite expensive. I once asked him to sponsor a friend from Mexico who wanted to study here in America but

was having immigration troubles. Marty had not even met the young man but he provided all the necessary documents and a large chunk of cash, to help my friend.

The TNR announcement indicates that Marty will continue to write for the magazine. So this is not an "Ave atque Vale" moment. But, it is an "Ave" moment. There are few people whose careers have been so consequential to the political and cultural life of the nation in the last quarter of the twentieth century. That is no small accomplishment.

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