CHAPTER VI

The Rising Right

> The Institute's work with students is often perceived as long range with results that are remote.... Twenty-eight years of effort, however, is now producing significant results. The earlier generation of youth ... are in the forefront of leadership in every area of American life.
>
> E. Victor Milione[1]

The 1980 presidential election results constituted not merely a rejection of President Carter's dismal domestic and foreign policy record but a mandate for President-elect Reagan to change the direction of American politics. Former Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern said that the voters had "abandoned American liberalism." The *Washington Post* titled its editorial on the Reagan victory "Tidal Wave."[2] Political historian Michael Barone wrote that the 1980 election showed that "most American voters wanted limits on the growth of government at home, a more assertive foreign policy abroad, and some greater honoring of traditional moral values in their basic institutions."[3]

1. E. Victor Milione, Introduction, "I Am Proud To Be an ISI Alumnus," published by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1981: 1.
2. "Start of a New Era," *U.S. News & World Report*, November 17, 1980: 21-66.
3. Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America From Roosevelt to Reagan:* 596.

To help in this formidable task, President Reagan could count on a broad-shouldered, assertive conservative movement that had come a long way since the founding of the miniscule Intercollegiate Society of Individualists nearly thirty years before. Reagan could look for programs and policies to think tanks like Heritage (headed by Weaver Fellow Ed Feulner), whose mammoth one-thousand-page *Mandate for Leadership* (co-edited by former ISI staffer Charles Heatherly) contained two thousand specific recommendations to move the federal government in a conservative direction. He could call on groups like the American Conservative Union (headed by ISI alumnus Representative Robert Bauman of Maryland) and the National Right to Work Committee (whose roster included onetime ISI regional director James Taylor) for political muscle. He could staff his White House with dedicated conservatives like Richard V. Allen, T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr. and Wayne Valis, and his administration with seasoned professionals like John F. Lehman, Jr. (secretary of the navy), Donald Devine (director, Office of Personnel Management), Paul Craig Roberts (assistant treasury secretary for economic policy), Charles Heatherly (special assistant of the secretary of education), Robert F. Turner (counsel for the President's Intelligence Oversight Board), William R. Robie (counsel to the associate attorney general for attorney personnel), and William Schneider, Jr. (associate director for National Security and International Affairs, Office of Management and Budget). Every one of them was an ISI alumnus. As Reagan himself would later note in an appreciative letter to ISI's president on the occasion of the Institute's fortieth anniversary, "By the time the Reagan Revolution marched into Washington, I had the troops I needed—thanks in no small measure to the work with American youth ISI had been doing since 1953."[4]

Vic Milione was proud of the Institute's manifold contributions to the Reagan administration, commenting in a 1981 brochure:

> The Institute's work with students is often perceived as long range with results that are remote. This was true in the early years of the ISI effort. Twenty-eight years of effort, however, is now producing signifi-

4. Ronald Reagan to T. Kenneth Cribb, January 30, 1993.

> cant results. The earlier generation of youth with potential needed time to mature. They have matured, they are upwardly mobile, and they are in the forefront of leadership in every area of American life.[5]

At the same time, Milione could not forebear from pointing out—in a Heritage publication—that politics was only one of many aspects of American society, and not necessarily the most important. "The spiritual moorings of the country, the family, the ethical norms that create better character," he said, "all must be preserved. That's not going to be accomplished by government."[6] While Milione's admonition was justified—and it certainly reflected ISI's philosophy of addressing political, social, and cultural matters at their deepest level—it struck some conservatives, exuberant about the possibilities of a Reagan administration, as unduly cautionary. This was, they felt, a time to seize the day, not to worry about the coming of the night.

Milione's insistence on maintaining a certain amount of space between ISI and the rest of the conservative movement had kept the Institute separate from the philosophical wars between traditionalists and libertarians in the 1950s and the 1960s. Rather than taking sides, ISI had presented the views of prominent members of both strains of conservatism, from Ludwig von Mises and Milton Friedman to Richard Weaver and Russell Kirk. ISI's public stand of independence had made it difficult for liberal critics to link ISI with extremist groups, like the John Birch Society, as part of the "radical Right"—an early version of the Clintons' "vast right-wing conspiracy." But in the politics-driven 1980s, ISI's independent stance and its insistence on emphasizing education above all else hindered it from fully benefiting from the political ascendancy of the conservative movement.

ISI's non-political, even romantic character was reflected in an informal institution established early in the Reagan years by former ISI staffers working in the administration or on K Street or in Washington think

5. Vic Milione, Introduction, "I Am Proud To Be An ISI Alumnus": 1.
6. As quoted in "Training the Next Generation: Spotlight on E. Victor Milione," The Heritage Foundation Newsletter, Spring 1982: 10.

tanks. "The Committee to Save Western Civilization" was founded by ISIer Robert Reilly, together with Robert and Elaine Schadler. How did the committee intend to "save" civilization? To begin with, by organizing a white-tie Viennese Waltz Ball that signaled a renaissance of high culture and high spirits in the nation's capital after four years of Jimmy Carter's cardigan sweaters and hand-wringing malaise. And whereas Washington social events are usually exercises in networking, this civilizing event was held purely for its own enjoyment. The waltz ball has been held annually each February in the beautiful great hall of the Organization of American States ever since its successful debut in 1983.

No Longer Alone

Meanwhile, other and more aggressive organizations took full advantage of the Reagan years. Among them were two relatively new groups also committed to youth activities—Young America's Foundation, led by Ron Robinson, a former executive director of the activist Young Americans for Freedom, and the Leadership Institute, headed by New Right leader (and ISI alumnus) Morton Blackwell. Both began to compete with ISI on the campus—Young America's Foundation by sponsoring prominent conservative speakers such as William F. Buckley Jr. and Patrick J. Buchanan, the Leadership Institute by holding intense weekend seminars on how to organize a conservative campus club and a campus publication. Echoing language long used by ISI, Young America's Foundation declared that it "sought to build what amounts to an alternative academic establishment; an establishment that offers a full range of educational programs and services for American students."[7] The days when ISI was the only conservative organization on campus were over.

Accordingly, ISI's income increased only moderately in the early 1980s, reflecting the greater competition for donations, and perhaps some fatigue at the top, understandable after thirty years of knocking on the

7. Ron Robinson, "Building an Alternative Academic Establishment," introduction to the 1978-79 Report of Young America's Foundation, c. 1979, Private Papers of James Taylor.

doors of foundations and corporations. In 1980, the year in which Ronald Reagan was elected president, the Institute spent just under $690,000 and wound up with a disturbing deficit of $136,909. Over the next five years, the ISI budget fluctuated between a low of $778,876 in 1982 and a high of $922,543 in 1983. But it was unable to balance its budget, averaging an annual deficit between 1982 and 1985 of nearly $77,000, and it never topped $1 million, a long-time financial goal. In short, the conservative movement's moment of political triumph did not translate into significant institutional advancement for ISI.

Nevertheless, ISI not only maintained all of its current programs—without an endowment, cash reserve, or real estate—but added a few new ones, agreeing, for example, to help publish a new historical journal, *Continuity*, edited by Aileen Kraditor of Boston University and Paul Gottfried of Rockford College. The first issue, published in the fall of 1980, included articles by Alan J. Levine, "Some Revisionist Theses on the Cold War, 1943-1946"; by Lee Congdon, "Lukacs, Camus, and the Russian Terrorists"; by Louise L. Stevenson, "A Conservative Critique of Victorian Culture"; and by Paul Gottfried, "Hegel, Plato, and the Nature of Civic Religion." Co-editor Kraditor said she hoped that, like Lenin's early journal *Iskra, Continuity* would "spark" thought, organization, and influence. Consistent with its title, said Kraditor, the journal would explore through history "the continuity between the work of our philosophers and that of our policy-formulators."[8]

ISI held two summer schools and three "Role of Business in Society" institutes in 1981—in Boulder, Colorado; Claremont, California; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Stanford, California; and Rosemont, Pennsylvania. The two summer schools focused on national defense and U.S. foreign policy with Angelo Codevilla, arguing (at the former) for a laser weapon defense against Soviet ICBMs—two years before President Reagan announced his intention to research and develop a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). With remarkable foresight, Codevilla said that the impact of a

8. "First 'Continuity' Published," *ISI Campus Report,* Spring 1981: 4.

U.S. antimissile defense system would be "revolutionary," as indeed it was.[9] After the Cold War ended, former Soviet officials admitted that the American commitment to SDI convinced them they could not win an arms race and led them to negotiations and a peaceful end to nearly fifty years of U.S.-Soviet hostility. Beginning at 9 A.M. and officially ending at 9 P.M. (although informal libation-lubricated discussions continued until well after midnight), the five-man faculty at the other summer school examined "American Foreign Policy and the Problem of Will." Professor Harold W. Rood of Claremont College "stole the show," according to *Campus Report,* with his examples of the vulnerability of the American press to Soviet disinformation.[10]

Launched in 1973 in Oregon, ISI's "Role of Business in Society" program (ROBIS) had by 1981 reached 1,075 high school teachers through its summer programs. Using economists such as Robert Hessen, James Gwartney, William H. Peterson, and Walter Williams, ROBIS analyzed the nature and functions of the free market system, its relationship with a free society and "the key role of business" in the system. "Businessmen have come to look upon all intellectuals as enemies," said ISI Western director Peter Schramm, who coordinated the ROBIS programs in the West. But he reassured potential underwriters that ISI had enlisted a group of teachers, writers, and scholars capable of elucidating the principles of the free economy "in a way that appeals to both the moral imagination and the practical good sense of students and teachers alike."[11]

The evaluations of the attending high school teachers confirmed Schramm's statement: "One of the most beneficial learning opportunities that I have ever participated in"; "the Institute was superior to any similar workshop or method of instruction that I have experienced"; "I have never felt my mind was being stretched so much in a small period of time." In many instances ISI co-sponsored an institute with a local college or uni-

9. Christopher Harmon, "Expert Discusses Laser Weapons at Western Session," *ISI Campus Report,* Spring 1982: 6.

10. Ibid: Thomas F. Payne, "Fifty-five Students Attend Eastern Summer School."

11. "The Role of Business in Society," Summary Report and Fund Proposal 1980-81, edited by Peter W. Schramm, ISI Archives.

versity—for example, the University of Colorado at Boulder and the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga. Each five-day summer institute cost only $15,000, and attracted the support of what ISI called "far-sighted members of the business community."[12]

Two decades before presidential candidate George W. Bush campaigned as a "compassionate conservative," the Institute sponsored a National Friends and Alumni Conference on "The Humane Vision of Conservatism." Among the speakers who spanned the conservative spectrum were nuclear physicist Edward Teller; George Gilder, author of the best-selling *Wealth and Poverty*; neoconservative founder Irving Kristol; national security adviser Richard V. Allen; and Senator John East, Republican of North Carolina. At an evening banquet attended by more than three hundred people, Senator East said that the "great task of conservatism" is to "recover the idea of a moral and ethical base of society" and referred to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's belief that "a spiritual exhaustion" existed in the West. In his banquet remarks, Allen said that the Reagan administration's human rights policy was "linked with our survival as a free people." Allen pointedly confessed that the ISI literature he had read as a student at Notre Dame University along with the classes he took under longtime ISI lecturer Gerhart Niemeyer "changed my whole way of thinking."[13]

In pursuit of the truth, ISI co-sponsored with *Modern Age* a conference on "Conservatism and Libertarianism" that featured scholars such as Murray N. Rothbard, Stephen J. Tonsor, Dante Germino, and Gottfried Dietze. M. Stanton Evans (anticipating his seminal work of the 1990s, *The Theme Is Freedom*) argued that Western political values were a product of Western religion. Seeking common ground between conservatives and libertarians, Evans said that "our tradition is a tradition of freedom, and libertarian precepts are undergirded by the traditional values of our faith."[14] The Institute also presented a seminar on "Hearth and Home:

12. Ibid.

13. Gregory Wolfe, "Sen. East, Allen Address ISI Conference," *Conservative Digest*, June 1981.

14. Nancy Klinghoffer, "'Conservatism and Libertarianism' Debated at *Modern Age* Symposium," *ISI Campus Report*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, Spring, 1981: 5.

The Family in American Life" at Russell Kirk's home in Mecosta, Michigan, during which Kirk argued that the current decline of the family could be traced to the decline of piety as well as "the material impoverishment of the family" from such devices as the inheritance tax.[15] Despite its nonpolitical stance, the Institute was mentioned more and more often in the mainstream media, struggling to understand the conservative emergence: *U.S. News & World Report* said that "ISI has become the right wing's major conduit to the nation's campuses," while a prominent Soviet journal attacked the organization as "a leading propaganda organ of American conservatism."[16]

In the spring of 1982, ISI reluctantly, and sadly, ended its summer school program after twenty-two years and some fifty schools on campuses, from New York City to Stanford, California. The decision did not affect the "Role of Business in Society" (ROBIS) summer conferences for high school teachers, generally underwritten by local business organizations. The reasons for shutting down the schools were programmatic and budgetary. A number of excellent summer programs were now available for students. Also, the college population had doubled, and doubled again: the primary need in the 1980s was to reach the ever-expanding student body. That was best accomplished, it was decided, through on-campus speakers and one-day or two-day seminars rather than weeklong schools. And while the summer schools had transformed the lives and careers of many of the over two thousand students who attended them, they were not cost-efficient. By using the summer school funds for lectures and other programs, Vic Milione explained, "we will be able to reach more students."[17] ISI alumni understood that the Institute had to be practical, and yet when they heard the news, more than one graduate's thoughts lingered on the intellectual excitement he had experienced at a summer school.

15. Donald J. Senese, "'Health and Home' Seminar Held at Home of Russell Kirk," *ISI Campus Report*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, Spring, 1891, ISI Archives.

16. "The Conservative Network: How It Plans to Keep on Winning," *U.S. News & World Report*, July 20, 1981: 47; Yu Levchenko, "A 'Battle for the Minds' of the Younger Generation," *International Affairs*, May 1986: 122.

17. "ISI Ends Summer School Program," *ISI Campus Report*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1-2, Spring 1983: 1, 13.

Challenging Leviathan

ISI was required to change its methods of operating because the American campus had changed, and enormously, in the three decades since the founding of the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists. In 1950, the number of students in American colleges and universities was 1.863 million; the faculty numbered 246,722. The total income of American higher education was $2.375 billion, with $524 million coming from the federal government. According to the historian Christopher J. Lucas, the "typical" collegian in the late 1940s and early 1950s was male, white, and upper middle class. He was single, attended college full time, lived on campus, and "pursued a liberal-arts degree program bounded by extensive common course requirements."[18] He did not go on to an advanced degree but immediately went to work, usually in the private sector.

By the year 1985, the total enrollment of students in American higher education was 12.247 million, a sixfold increase since 1950. The faculty numbered 715,000, almost a threefold increase. College and university income was over $100 billion—almost fifty times what it had been three-and-a-half decades earlier. The federal government's share was $12.705 billion, a twentyfold rise. In 1985, the typical college student was likely to be female (over 55 percent), one in five was a member of a racial or ethnic minority, and an increasing percentage were in their midtwenties. Many students divided their time between working and attending college, were more apt to commute to campus rather than live in a dormitory or fraternity house, and took more than four years to finish their undergraduate degrees. And many of them were in no hurry to begin working: the nation's 2,000-plus colleges and universities were granting about a million bachelor's degrees, 300,000 master's degrees, and nearly 40,000 doctorates every year. Higher education was now big business, with the billion-dollar university a "commonplace."[19]

18. Christopher J. Lucas, *Crisis in the Academy: Rethinking Higher Education in America*, New York, 1996: 17-18.

19. Martin Anderson, *Imposters in the Temple: A Blueprint for Improving Higher Education in America*, Stanford, California, 1996: 28.

As the academy grew ever larger, educators like Linda Ray Pratt of Nebraska insisted on asking fundamental questions: "Are we educating good citizens, potential leaders, women and men with power over their own faculties and mental resources to question and discern? Or are we training a 'workforce?'"[20] A disturbing answer was provided by *A Nation at Risk*, the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, appointed by President Reagan. The report, wrote educators John D. Pulliam and James J. Van Patten, had an effect "similar to that of Sputnik in 1957."[21] Its blunt conclusion was that for all the billions of dollars and the impressive infrastructure of administrators, teachers, and buildings, an alarming number of young Americans could not read, write, or do the most elementary sums.

On nineteen academic tests American students were never first or second but often last when ranked with other industrial nations. About 13 percent of the nation's seventeen-year-olds and 40 percent of minority youth were functionally illiterate. Some 23 million adults could not pass simple reading or writing tests. SAT scores had declined steadily for seventeen years. And the average achievement scores of college graduates had fallen between 1975 and 1980. Public disquiet and demands for reform of higher education were widespread and became even louder when a 1985 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) examined literacy levels among a large national sample of twenty-one to twenty-five-year olds. The NAEP found that roughly half of the young adults surveyed who had graduated from college with bachelor's degrees could not perform such simple intellectual tasks as summarizing the content of a newspaper article, calculating a 10 percent tip for lunch, and interpreting a bus schedule.[22]

As ISI ended its third decade in 1983 (the year of the publication of *A Nation at Risk)*, it knew very well that, whatever conservatism's success in the world of politics, liberalism still rode high in the saddle on the

20. Lucas, *Crisis in the Academy*: 146.

21. John D. Pulliam and James J. Van Patten, *History of Education in America*, 7th ed. Upper Saddle, New Jersey, 1999: 243.

22. Lucas, *Crisis in the Academy*: 203.

campus and in the culture. The Institute had no choice but to increase its efforts to help the American college student obtain "that education necessary to good citizenship, the preservation of liberty, and the humane life."[23] And so it sought funding for conservative campus publications, pointing out to one potential donor that it was supporting *The Hillsdale Review,* the *Dawson Newsletter (*St. Louis University), *Above Ground* (Brandeis University), and hoped to assist a new student publication at the University of Dallas.[24] ISI moreover covered the bulk of the costs of two hundred lectures a year at colleges and universities, large and small—among them, Walter Berns on "Free Speech in a Democracy," Allan Bloom on "Quality and Equality," Russell Kirk on "T. S. Eliot," and Arthur Shenfield on "Capitalism and the Intellectuals."

Tacking ever to the right, *The Intercollegiate Review* published articles such as "The Urban Crisis Revisited" by Robert Nisbet, "The Hydra of Marxism," by Gerhart Niemeyer, "Robert Frost: The Individual and Society" by Peter J. Stanlis, "Islam on the Move" by Thomas Molnar, "The Social Role of Drama" by M. E. Bradford, and "Moral Rights and the Law" by Ernest van den Haag—and a book review by Representative Jack Kemp of New York. In 1987, the *IR* would mark the bicentennial of the United States Constitution with an impressive symposium featuring George W. Carey, Charles Kesler, William Campbell, Harvey C. Mansfield, Francis Canavan, and George Anastaplo. Through the *IR* reprint program, essays and book reviews were made available for classroom use—250,000 reprints were ordered in the program's ten years of operation.

ISI also continued to distribute, at reduced cost, "mind-clearing classics" on the principles of freedom and the heritage of Western civilization, including *A Humane Economy* by Wilhelm Roepke; *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss,* edited by Joseph Cropsey; *In Defense of Freedom* by Frank S. Meyer; and four essentials of the modern conservative canon—*The Road to Serf-*

23. Excerpted from the Minutes of the ISI Board of Trustees Meeting, May 15, 1981, Washington, D.C., ISI Archives.

24. E. Victor Milione to Richard M. Larry, August 9, 1982, ISI Archives.

dom by F. A. Hayek, *Ideas Have Consequences* by Richard M. Weaver, *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers, and *The Conservative Mind* by Russell Kirk.

In 1953, ISI's audience had been almost all undergraduates, but thirty years later, graduation and the accretion of teachers had expanded significantly two critical constituencies—faculty members and alumni. The Institute estimated that its faculty members constituted about one-fourth of the strongly conservative professors in America. ISI responded to their needs by providing publishing and lecturing opportunities and bringing speakers to their campuses. One of the main reasons why the Institute agreed to absorb *Modern Age* was to better serve its faculty members. ISI also took advantage of the critical mass of conservative academics in political science and history by helping to publish *The Political Science Reviewer* and, later, *Continuity,* establishing "self-supporting catalysts for change" in the two disciplines.[25]

Weaver Fellows continued to make their way up the academic ladder, acknowledging their debt to ISI all along the way. By the mid-1980s, they had published over one hundred books and several thousand essays and articles, placing the Western tradition at the center of their teaching. Among the many academics and their works were William B. Allen, associate professor of government, Harvey Mudd College (*Works of Fisher Ames)*; Bruce Bartlett, deputy director, Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress (*Reaganomics: Supply-Side Economics in Action)*; Burton Folsom, assistant professor of history, Murray State University (*Urban Capitalists)*; William Graebner, professor of history, State University of New York (*A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978)*; Robert Hessen, senior research fellow, Hoover Institution (*Steel Titan: The Life of Charles M. Schwab)*; Michael J. Malbin, resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (*Unelected Representatives: Congressional Staff and the Future of Representative Government)*; David L. Schaefer, associate professor of political science, Holy Cross College (*Justice or Tyranny? A Critique of John Rawls' "A Theory of Justice"*;

25. Generic foundation proposal letter signed by E. Victor Milione, October 1982, ISI Archives.

and Jeffrey D. Wallin, associate professor of politics, University of Dallas (*Statesmanship and Rhetoric).*

The ISI Ethos

Swedish-born Claes G. Ryn first read *Modern Age* and *The Intercollegiate Review* as a twenty-year-old Gymnasium student in his native country and went on to write in 1968 the first book in the West on postwar American conservatism. He correctly predicted there would be "long-term electoral consequences" from "the intellectual ferment" of conservatism. In the spring of 1969, Ryn attended the national meeting of the Philadelphia Society in Chicago, meeting for the first time conservative scholars like Eric Voegelin, Eliseo Vivas, and Ernest van den Haag, about whom he had written. He enrolled as a graduate student at Louisiana State University and received a "most helpful" Weaver Fellowship in his last year there. Today a professor of politics at the Catholic University of America and chairman of the National Humanities Institute, Ryn continues to be impressed by what he and *Modern Age* editor George Panichas call "the ISI ethos." According to this ethos, politics and economics are secondary to moral and cultural issues, what Edmund Burke called "the decent drapery of life." Summing up the Institute's influence, Ryn reflects that it would be "hard to imagine what conservatism in America would be without ISI."[26]

ISI had sponsored its first alumni event—a public policy conference in Washington, D.C.—in 1973 and continued the tradition into the 1980s. The most significant change was that, in the past, most of the participants and guests had been professors and lawyers, but now they were drawn "from the upper reaches" of the Reagan administration. While such people could and did provide financial support to the Institute, the more critical fact, in Vic Milione's mind, was that their participation enabled ISI "to stitch together a national quilt of commercially and politically potent individuals" committed to the principles of liberty.[27] In rec-

26. Bracy Bersnak's interview with Claes G. Ryn, April 22, 2003.
27. Ibid.

ognition of the network's importance, Elaine Schadler was named alumni executive director.

At the same time, ISI continued to attract intelligent dedicated young people to Bryn Mawr to fill its various staff positions. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, for example, John Rao, George Forsyth, Donald E. Atkins, Jr., and Stephen M. Krason all served as Eastern director. Atkins was a 1972 graduate of Trinity College, where he majored in economics and political science; his interest in conservative thought started in junior high school. A mixer of the political and intellectual, Atkins was the founder and first chairman of the T. S. Eliot chapter of Young Americans for Freedom in Pennsylvania. During the same period, Peter Schramm was the ISI Western director, followed by Edward N. Peters. Another key staffer was Carol Russell, secretary and administrator of the Western office before becoming director of the Institute's lecture program. Married and with four children, Russell was a woman of many talents, including flying (she was a licensed pilot), sewing, and cooking—once, she invited thirty-four ISI students from Claremont and other nearby colleges to her home for Thanksgiving dinner.

As publications director, Gregory Wolfe edited *The Intercollegiate Review,* supervised the production of *Continuity* and *The Political Science Reviewer,* and administered the Richard M. Weaver Fellowship Awards program. A self-described "compulsive organizer," Wolfe also edited *The Hillsdale Review,* a conservative journal of cultural criticism, which he had founded as a student at Hillsdale College. Published in over a dozen journals, the young editor-writer talked about finding the time somehow to write a book on the fiction of Evelyn Waugh; in 1995, he would publish the biography of a somewhat different English man of letters, Malcolm Muggeridge.

In all these ways, wrote Vic Milione on the occasion of the Institute's thirtieth anniversary in 1983, ISI resisted the prevailing educational arguments that moral values were "arbitrary taboos," industry was nothing more than "institutionalized greed," and limited government was "an impediment to the immediate and ultimate solution" of the nation's prob-

lems. Board chairman Henry Regnery stated that ISI had never deviated from its purpose to help "guide and direct the future leadership of the country."[28]

Challenging the Academy

The 1980s were boom years for conservatives, as all the elements of a successful political movement came together—a time-tested philosophy, a national constituency, effective fund-raising, solid organization, media sophistication, and charismatic, principled leadership. At the center of the conservative movement was a remarkable political fusionist, President Ronald Reagan, who brought together dissatisfied Democrats and traditional Republicans, Irish Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants, anti-government Westerners and patriotic Southerners, free market libertarians and cultural conservatives. He did so by appealing, as he put it in his final Oval Office address, to their best hopes, not their worst fears. He did so by reiterating traditional American themes of duty, honor, and country. "In his evocation of our national memory and symbols of pride," said former education secretary William J. Bennett, "in his summoning us to our national purpose and to national greatness, he performed the crucial task of political leadership."[29]

But rapid growth, political success, and public acclaim breed rifts and divisions, and the conservative movement proved to be no exception as traditionalists and libertarians fiercely debated with neoconservatives and New Rightists about the present and the future intellectual direction of American conservatism. Stephen Tonsor of the University of Michigan, a conservative professor long associated with ISI, delivered a stinging rebuke of the neoconservatives at the April 1986 national meeting of the Philadelphia Society, saying:

> It has always struck me as odd, even perverse, that former Marxists have been permitted, yes invited, to play such a leading role in the Conservative movement of the twentieth century. It is splendid when

28. Messages from E. Victor Milione and Henry Regnery, Program of ISI's 30th anniversary dinner, Sept. 30, 1983, Washington, D.C.: 2,4.
29. William J. Bennett to the author, September 3, 1997.

> the town whore gets religion and joins the church. Now and then she makes a good choir director, but when she begins to tell the minister what he ought to say in his Sunday sermons, matters have been carried too far.[30]

While traditionalists applauded loudly, neoconservatives protested just as loudly, unappeased by Tonsor's qualification that he and other traditionalists welcomed "the assistance of neoconservatives ... in the work of dismantling the failed political structures erected by modernity." The key word here was "political." The Michigan professor made it Kristol-clear that in his view the neoconservatives were cultural modernists despite their rejection of Marxism and some aspects of the modern welfare state. If neoconservatives wished conservatives to take their conservatism seriously, Tonsor wrote, "they must return to the religious roots, beliefs and values of our common heritage."[31]

So serious a subject required serious examination, and in the Spring 1986 issue of *The Intercollegiate Review,* editor Gregory Wolfe presented a symposium on "The State of Conservatism," featuring seven well-known conservative writers, all closely identified with ISI. In his introduction, Wolfe said the dangers that threatened the integrity of the conservative movement could be summarized in a single term: "politicization." He said that the contributors to the *IR* symposium largely agreed that at least four developments had contributed to "the current crisis of conservative identity and mission." First, the 1960s radicalization of the academy and the Democratic Party had forced a number of "liberal refugees" to cross political borders, with many of them becoming neoconservatives. The second factor, Wolfe wrote, was the rapid decay of America's social fabric over the last two decades which had spawned the populist, evangelical movement known as the New Right. Third, conservative successes in national politics had attracted "the inevitable groups of pragmatists and camp followers," motivated by self-interest rather than principle. And

30. Stephen J. Tonsor, "Why I Too Am Not a Neoconservative," *National Review,* June 20, 1986: 55.

31. Ibid: 55-56.

finally, conservatives had acquiesced and even abetted the redefinition of "legitimate" conservatism by the liberal-dominated mass media. As a result, Wolfe concluded unequivocally, "the post-war conservative movement has been defined out of existence."[32] Wolfe made no claim that the symposium contributors largely agreed with this Spenglerian conclusion, and indeed several of them, including Russell Kirk and, surprisingly, paleoconservative Paul Gottfried, offered a measured degree of hope about the future of traditional conservatism.

Historian Clyde Wilson of the University of South Carolina agreed with Wolfe that what he called "intellectual conservatives" were in "a state of demoralization and discouragement" because they had been "crowded out" by ex-liberals and because of the "unraveling of the social fabric." But the task of the conservative intellectual, Wilson said, remained what it had always been, although it had acquired new urgency: "to keep alive the wisdom that we are heir to" and to hand it on. While not denying there had been a "fundamental change in the country's politics," a rather gloomy Gerhart Niemeyer wondered whether "in terms of ideas, there is such a thing as American conservatism."

Modern Age editor George Panichas wrote that in the last decade, "conservatism has experienced a spiritual decline even as it has made considerable political gains." No significant restoration of "an authentic conservatism," Panichas wrote, was possible without giving "first allegiance to spiritual principles of order—to the life of the spirit, as Eric Voegelin insists." George Carey offered three suggestions for conservatives: First, accept that even if the Soviet Union disappeared, "American conservatism would still be confronted with an internal liberalism which is eroding the foundations of the republic." Next, conservatives had to understand that "rolling back" the liberal excesses "can only come about by cultivating the popular roots of conservatism." And, anticipating the stunning success of Newt Gingrich's Contract with America in the 1994 elections, Carey argued that the future of conservatism rested with politicians

32. Gregory Wolfe, "The State of Conservatism: A Symposium," *The Intercollegiate Review,* Vol. 21 No. 3, Spring 1986: 3-4.

like Reagan who "can give expression of the discontents, identify their source, and thereby maintain and broaden the alliance."[33]

Opportunists and Statists

English professor and Philadelphia Society president M. E. Bradford (who had recently lost to William Bennett in a bid to head the National Endowment for the Humanities) variously described neoconservatives as "thieves," "interlopers," "opportunists," and "statists." The first priority of conservatives, he wrote, was to refuse to surrender "our hard-won identity to those who would use it as a cloak for policies contrary to what we intend." Bradford then turned to an issue of major concern to nearly all the symposium participants, the judiciary, saying that conservatives needed to encourage the administration "to concentrate its surviving reserves of conservatism on judicial appointments." Reiterating a favorite theme of Richard Weaver, Bradford said that conservatives had to correct a fundamental shortcoming, "our indifference to the art of rhetoric, our inability to deal with the ostensibly benevolent simplicities of the adversary, who hopes to win with language what he lost at the polls."[34]

Best known for his unrelenting criticism of neoconservatives, historian Paul Gottfried devoted almost equal time in his essay to dismissing the New Right, calling it "lowbrow," "naive," and "intellectually crude." Gottfried identified three common mistakes among interpreters of the American Right—confusing the visibility of both neoconservatives and New Rightists with "electoral clout"; treating neoconservatives as "genuine conservatives"; and "ignoring the continued vitality of the Old Right." Gottfried can be challenged on the first point—the New Right was directly responsible for the defeat of about a dozen liberal senators in the 1978 and 1980 elections (producing a Republican Senate in the first six years of the Reagan administration). Furthermore, liberal pollster Lou

33. Ibid: Clyde Wilson, "The Conservative Identity": 6, 8; Gerhart Niemeyer, "Is There a Conservative Mission?": 9; George Panichas, "Conservatism and the Life of the Spirit": 25; George Carey, "The Popular Roots of Conservatism": 12-14.

34. Ibid: M. E. Bradford, "On Being Conservative in a Post-Liberal Era": 15-18.

Harris credited the Moral Majority as a major factor in Ronald Reagan's presidential victory in 1980.

But Gottfried's point about the Old Right, or traditional conservatives, was on the mark. Members of the founding generation such as Kirk, Buckley, and Molnar were still busily writing and debating. The second generation including Stan Evans, George Nash, and George Panichas was "leaving its imprint on conservative thought." In the end, Gottfried predicted that the Old Right rather than the neoconservatives would have the greater impact, because it held to the concept of "a differentiated humanity," valued social diversity, and perceived the necessary relationship "between established custom and human nature." "The Old Right still lives," Gottfried said proudly, "reports on its demise have been greatly exaggerated."[35]

It remained for Russell Kirk, the man who had given the conservative movement its name, to offer a balanced assessment of American conservatism, conceding the remarkable political victories since 1953, but pointing out that "relatively few intellectual gains" had occurred. His major proof was that university and college staffs were "far more dominated by radicals" than they had been in the 1950s. "Ballot-box victories," Kirk wrote, can be quickly undone "if unsupported by the enduring art of persuasion." However, he was not alarmed by the various conservative factions because "enough common ground" could be cultivated to maintain unity on large questions. It was important, he said, ever the Burkean, that conservatives in politics "steer clear of the Scylla of abstraction and the Charybdis of opportunism." For all the factionalism within the conservative movement, Kirk insisted that "a conservative cast of character and of mind capable of sacrifice, thought, and sound sentiment" had survived.[36]

By reason of its timing, by the elevated tone of the essays, and by the participation of several of the most respected conservative intellectuals in America, the Spring 1986 issue of *The Intercollegiate Review* proved yet again how essential ISI was to the conservative movement. The move-

35. Ibid: Paul Gottfried, "A View of Contemporary Conservatism": 19-21.
36. Ibid: Russell Kirk, "Enlivening the Conservative Mind": 26-28.

ment that had begun in the 1950s had brought together disparate intellectual strands—anti-communists, libertarians, and traditionalists—but the thinkers of each strand had all understood that they faced a "total crisis" of civilization in the twentieth century. However, such cultural matters are often forgotten or left aside when the opportunity to exercise political power presents itself. If ISI had not published this symposium on the state of conservatism, no one else would have, and fundamental questions about the present and the future of conservatism would have gone unanswered, even unaddressed.

The Battle of Ideas

At about this time, ISI started on a road that would eventually lead to book publishing by establishing a relationship with the University Press of America to "co-publish" edited collections of selected conferences. Edited by George Carey of Georgetown University, the initial books were *Essays on Christianity and Political Philosophy*, which explored the relationship between Christian faith and the limitations it places on the role of the state, and *Freedom and Virtue: The Conservative/Libertarian Debate*, with new contributions on this perennial question by Walter Berns, Murray Rothbard, and Paul Kurtz.

All of this activity ISI undertook on an annual budget of about three-quarters of a million dollars and a full-time staff of ten, crowded into a small suite measuring just 2,145 square feet. The atmosphere was nearly Dickensian. "The entry door," Christopher Long remembers, "was metal, and the offices were piled high with decades of accumulated paper." Empty rectangles on the orange walls showed where artwork had once hung, and the smell of nicotine was everywhere.[37] And yet there were few complaints from the staff members who deferred the beautification of their surroundings in favor of educating as many students as they could about the value of liberty and the conditions of a good society.

They knew that ISI's contribution to what trustee Richard V. Allen called "the battle of ideas on the college campus" had been vital—and not

37. Christopher Long to Lee Edwards, September 5, 2002.

just on the campus.[38] Through the sponsorship of hundreds of lectures, seminars, and schools which had been attended by thousands of students, through the distribution of thousands of books, pamphlets, and journals which had been read by the tens of thousands, through the several hundred Weaver Fellows who had produced dozens of textbooks and thousands of scholarly articles on philosophy, economics, history, international relations, and nearly every other subject under the academic sun, ISI had helped conservatives transform themselves from a weak remnant into a powerful national movement.

In the 1950s and 1960s, wrote Allen in an ISI fund-raising letter, the conservative network was "small and fragmented, unfunded and described by liberals and leftists as the 'extreme right' and 'the radical right.'" In the mid-1980s, conservatives had "every reason to be optimistic." President Reagan headed a generally conservative administration that had restored the confidence of most Americans in the future, slowed the growth of government (and even reduced it in some areas), and declared that the United States was out to end the Cold War by winning it. Outside the administration, the conservative movement continued to grow in strength and stature. The Heritage Foundation had nearly doubled its annual income, and the Cato Institute had moved its national headquarters to Washington. New organizations like the Family Research Council and the Competitive Enterprise Institute had gained measurable influence. *National Review*, *Human Events*, and *The American Spectator* had reached new circulation highs. And the American Conservative Union attracted as many as 1,500 activists to its annual Conservative Political Action Conferences.

The rise of the Right was recognized by a leading organ of the Left—the *Washington Post*—which published "The Conservative Elite," a four-part series by investigative reporter Sidney Blumenthal, who later served as a key White House aide to President Bill Clinton. To movement conservatives, Blumenthal wrote, "the Reagan Revolution means more than the attempt to create an electoral realignment. Just as important to them

38. Richard V. Allen to R. J. Buckley, February 21, 1984, ISI Archives.

is the effort to give life to the conservative elite, the revolution's vanguard." The forging of a conservative policy-making elite that would run the government in Washington, he said, "could be this administration's lasting legacy in Washington." Featured in the September 1985 articles was T. Kenneth Cribb, then counselor to Attorney General Edwin Meese III, who commented, "This isn't merely a Republican regime but a conservative regime." And according to Blumenthal, the conservatives who carried the greatest weight were those who had affiliations with organizations like The Heritage Foundation and the "Intercollegiate Society of Individualists [sic]."[39]

But how long would the conservative ascendancy last? The answer, Dick Allen argued in his ISI fund-raising letter, lay in whether conservatives continued to generate "dynamic new ideas." And the generation of new ideas depended on what happened on the campus. "Political power comes and goes," Allen wrote, while "true values and worthy ideals never lose their strength."[40] For thirty years, he pointed out, ISI had provided a "unique and invaluable service," offering young men and women "the deeper philosophical foundation on which they could build their practical plans—the core values to help them organize their careers."[41] ISI believed with Russell Kirk that the future "will be decided in the minds of the rising generation—and within that generation by the minority who have the gift of reason."[42]

Embued with a reverence for the past and filled with a desire to shape the future, hundreds of ISI alumni had come to Washington, D.C. Navy Secretary John Lehman exaggerated, but not by much, when he said that "nearly every sensible young policymaker here in Washington has had some association with ISI."[43] They could be found in the White

39. Sidney Blumenthal, "Staying Power: Cadres for the Right Train for the Future," *Washington Post,* September 22, 1985.

40. Allen to Buckley, February 21, 1984.

41. Ibid.

42. E. Victor Milione, "A Message from the President," on the 30th anniversary of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Washington-Sheraton Hotel, September 30th-October 1st, 1983: 2. Henry Regnery, "The Purpose of ISI," Ibid: 4.

43. Ibid.

House and the Congress, in the executive branch, and in the private sector. In words that varied little, they echoed Heritage President Ed Feulner's statement that "were it not for the local ISI chapter during my undergraduate days, I would not have gained the philosophical underpinnings that are necessary for one to develop political knowledge and understanding."[44]

It seemed that everything was in place for ISI to take full advantage of the ascendancy of the Right—a seasoned principled leader in Vic Milione, a small but experienced staff led by John Lulves, a proven program centered on literature, lectures, and the Weaver Fellowships, a network of illustrious alumni willing to help open doors and wallets. ISI remained as it had been for more than thirty years—the only national conservative organization that directed *all* of its efforts to the college campus. "If the future is to develop within a society that is civilized, humane, and free," an ISI brochure declared, "it remains vital to continue 'to educate for liberty.'"[45]

And then one morning in February 1985, sixty-one-year-old Vic Milione was still at home when he began perspiring heavily and felt quite ill. Overriding Vic's objections, his wife Mali insisted that he go immediately to Bryn Mawr General Hospital. The requisite tests were followed by a swift decision to operate that resulted in a heart-bypass procedure. There were no serious complications from the surgery, but recovery required several months. It was not until the summer that Milione returned to work full-time in the office. His work schedule was much the same, and his mind could still wrap itself around the logic and rhetoric of Richard Weaver and Jacob Burckhardt. But there were new lines in his face and his carefully trimmed beard was noticeably more gray. Vic Milione's commitment to the cause of a free society and his beloved ISI was undiminished, but it was clear to all, including the man himself, that it was time to begin planning for the retirement of "Mr. ISI"—and for the se-

44. Edwin J. Feulner, as quoted in the brochure "Achievement Past & Present: ISI in the Fourth Decade," c. 1984, ISI Archives.

45. Ibid: 31.

lection of his successor. That person would have to be conservative, familiar with ISI and its programs, a good administrator, a proficient fundraiser, and someone who could take full advantage of the burgeoning conservative movement in leading the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in the post-Reagan years.

The new president would also be required to shape ISI's strategy of how to deal with the continuing deterioration of the American academy—whose critical condition was graphically described in the best-selling works of two of the Institute's popular lecturers.