

**A Memorial for E. Victor Milione
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This afternoon we celebrate the life and accomplishment of one of the pioneers of American conservatism. During his more than fifty years as a conservative activist, E. Victor Milione seldom stood in the spotlight. Perhaps for this reason, his leadership was often easy to overlook. But there was one realm in which his achievement could be discerned and measured. Quietly, doggedly, unobtrusively, for most of his adult life Milione devoted himself to building the influential institution known to us today as the Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

To appreciate Milione's imprint upon ISI, and—through it—the larger world of American conservatism, we must turn for a moment to another man, the Institute's founder: Frank Chodorov. Chodorov was an uncompromising libertarian. A temperamental aginner and near-anarchist, he once remarked: "As for me, I will punch anyone who calls me a conservative in the nose. I am a radical."

In 1950 Chodorov published an article in *Human Events* urging the creation of a national network of Individualist Clubs to combat the ascendancy of socialistic thinking among the nation's college students. In a separate article he proposed what he called a "fifty-year project" to implement such an intellectual counterrevolution on the campus. Chodorov did not expect anything concrete to emerge from his published musings. Imagine his astonishment, then, when he received an unsolicited check in the mail for \$1,000 from none other than J. Howard Pew. Thoroughly taken aback, and having no definitive plan for using the check, Chodorov told Frank Hanighen of *Human Events* that he thought he would simply return it. Hanighen's advice was sage and swift: "Never send money back."

Not long afterward, Chodorov established the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists. At first ISI was little more than a vehicle for distributing libertarian literature to a scattered student Remnant. Then, about a year after its founding, a friend of ISI in the Midwest raised the princely sum of \$6,000 for its activities. As Chodorov later told the story:

That made me rich. So, I hired Vic Milione to run the outfit and to visit schools in the East.... I told him, "Vic, I have this money and as long as it lasts, you will get \$75 a week and expense money. You'll have to take your chances on the future.

Milione, then about thirty years old, had been working for an organization called Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System. It tells us much about him that he decided to take the chance.

So in 1953 Milione entered the service of ISI. His roles were many: part fundraiser, part office manager, part traveling salesman for a cause. He was a bit like a trade union organizer, except that the “union locals” he organized consisted of college students, entirely self-selected and governed by the ethos of voluntarism.

It was well for ISI that Milione joined its management. Chodorov, the president and visionary individualist, had some quirky business habits. When checks arrived in the mail he would deposit them, but he did not keep copies of his letters acknowledging the gifts. As Kenneth Cribb will tell you, that was no way to build a donor base.

This, then, was Vic Milione’s first notable contribution to ISI: he bought order to its struggling operations. For a time, after the \$6,000 bonanza ran out, he even worked without salary and expense money until he could secure additional funds. If ISI was Chodorov’s baby, it was Milione, as much as anyone, who raised the child to maturity.

But Milione was more than simply ISI’s chief operating officer. Eventually he became its president himself, with a vision and missionary impulse of his own.

Here we come to the second crucial contribution that he made to ISI. Frank Chodorov was not a conventionally religious man. For many years he was a vehement atheist. Toward the end of his life, as he sought a firm metaphysical foundation for his philosophy of individual rights, he reluctantly accepted what he called the “God-idea.” But at most, his was a vaguely deistic religion without a deity.

Milione, on the other hand, was a Roman Catholic, convinced (as he once put it) that the “basic premises of conservatism” include the conviction that “this is a God-centered universe” and that “man is a part of that creation.” To Milione, the fundamental purpose of ISI was to preserve Western civilization, a civilization that was religious at its core.

Over the years Milione broadened ISI’s mission to encompass more than a Chodorovian crusade against collectivism. Without Milione at its helm, ISI might easily have evolved in an exclusively libertarian direction. Instead, he made it a home for the traditionalist wing of conservatism as well. In so doing, he averted the seductive shoals of sectarianism and helped to enlarge the conservative mainstream.

In the process, he exerted an influence far beyond the campuses where ISI pursued its mission. The ecumenical Philadelphia Society, for example, which will convene here later today, was at its inception something of an ISI alumni society. Fittingly, Milione belonged to the Society for nearly forty years and was elected to the well-deserved rank of Distinguished Member.

As we sum up and honor his accomplishments, two final comments come to mind. First, I am struck anew by how humble ISI’s origins were in the 1950s and by how resolutely Milione persevered in those formative years, when funding was scarce and worldly wisdom might easily have prompted him to move elsewhere.

But “perseverance” does not quite say it all. Few people, I think, will persevere for long in adversity unless some transcendent purpose impels them. So it was with Milione’s mentor Frank Chodorov. At the end of his seminal proposal for a “fifty-year project” to reclaim the American mind, Chodorov asked: “Is the effort worth while? To which one offers as answer another question: What in life is more worth while than the pursuit of an ideal?”

Well, we know how Vic Milione answered that question. For his idealism, his fortitude, and his priceless institutional legacy, we salute him.