

Geoffrey Hosking –Remembrance of Leopold Haimson

Leo was a very remarkable scholar-and-person combined. I first met him at the Varshavskaia hotel in Moscow in July 1967, when we both happened to be working there at the same time. I went to visit him in his room, and was caught up immediately in his combination of minute expertise with penetrating thought. We were currently working on roughly the same Duma archive sources, so I was able to follow closely his ideas and the backing for them in the sources, and it was very exciting. His obvious dedication, deep knowledge and personal charm combined with occasional fierceness (he could be scathing about slapdash scholarship) won the admiration of Soviet historians and archivists, with whom as you know he worked closely.

On one occasion in the Moscow archives we worked on opposite sides of the same desk, passing files across to one another and having whispered conversations - all in contravention of the regulations, I should think. We contravened them in another way too: Leo would light his cigar (which he more or less chain-smoked at the time) while poring over the papers. So, emboldened, I took out my pipe and started to smoke that too. At the end of the week he left for Leningrad. When, on Monday morning, I lit up my pipe as usual, the custodian of the reading room said sternly: 'U nas ne kuriat!'

Later on, in 1973, he arranged for me to spend a semester as a fellow at Columbia, and was very kind in making sure that my wife, small daughter and I had a pleasant apartment to live in. I shall never forget the experience of attending his graduate seminars. I don't think I have ever experienced such intense scholarly give-and-take. Under his guidance, the students had done extremely meticulous work on the Duma stenographic reports and contemporary Russian newspapers. Their papers were full of detailed knowledge, not always discriminately presented,

but in the course of each seminar, we would gradually tease out what their evidence meant, or at least what arguments could be put together on their basis. He was like a loving but demanding father: he would always expect the best, and could be harsh if his proteges offered less. But most of them remained devoted to him, for good reason. I became a kind of 'honorary member' of the group, and was able to make friends with some of them and follow them in their subsequent careers, with occasional meetings for supper at AAASS conventions. Only recently Bob Edelman gave an excellent paper at SSEES on Moscow Spartak, a theme which I remember following from a fairly early stage in its inception. Recently, alas, I have rather lost touch with most of the others, as I have been working in non-Russian fields. But I believe they still meet. Their continued solidarity owes a lot to Leo's own personality.

Leo and I did not always agree either on politics or on our interpretation of pre-1914 Russian history, but he always took a keen and fatherly interest in my work. He invited me to give a seminar on Soviet 'village prose' when I was working on that. More recently, I would often phone him on his birthday, which was the same day as mine. The last time I saw him was on his 80th birthday (also my 65th), which you will remember. Although he was in a wheelchair, his mind flashed as brightly as ever, and he was visibly very moved to see so many former students and colleagues.