

IN MEMORY OF LEOPOLD HAIMSON (1927-2010) (Published in Russian in *Ab Imperio*, 2010, no. 4)

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Leopold Haimson, Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University, died in New York at the age of 83 on December 18, 2010. His loss will be keenly felt by his many friends in many different places, but especially in the three communities he considered home: New York, Paris, and St. Petersburg.

Haimson's deep connections to these three cities reflected both his wide range of interests as well as his cosmopolitan upbringing. He was born in Brussels into a family of emigrants from Russia who made their way to Belgium after 1917 by way of Kharbin and Berlin. Leopold's father, who was born in the Pale of Settlement, graduated from the University of Warsaw and subsequently received permission to settle in St. Petersburg. Leopold's parents spoke Russian to each other, but after emigrating to Belgium, the family's (and Leopold's) first language was French. In 1940, the Nazi onslaught forced the Haimsons to flee. Escaping to France during the Dunkirk evacuation, the thirteen year old boy wound up in the United States.

Two years later, having padded his age on his résumé, young Leopold was accepted by Harvard University, where he received his BA in 1945. As an undergraduate, he was primarily interested in the history of 18th century France. His undergraduate dissertation focused on Rousseau's influence on Robespierre. His interest shifted to the history of Russia only after he entered graduate school, also at Harvard, at the precocious age of 19.

Haimson wrote his doctoral dissertation on late 19th century Russian social democrat thought under the direction of the famous Russian émigré historian Michael Karpovich, many of whose students studied Russian intellectual history. While engaged in this work, he also participated in Margaret Mead's famous Columbia University project on the history of Soviet culture, producing several articles on the subject. He received his doctorate in 1952 and his first book, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, appeared three years later. In this exploration, intellectual history was intertwined with the biographical study of leading Russian Marxists. In 1956, Haimson joined the faculty of the University of Chicago, where he taught for ten years.

For Haimson's many friends and colleagues in St. Petersburg, the most significant moment in his scholarly biography was probably the famous Inter-university Menshevik Project, which he directed between 1960 and 1965. This Project produced a collection of interviews and other sources on the history of Menshevism, many of which were subsequently published. Especially in Russia, where some of these unique materials found clandestine circulation in Soviet times, the insights they provided by the surviving Menshevik leadership shed a clear new light on essential aspects of Russian revolutionary life, especially those associated with Social Democratic goals and values.

The initiative for the Menshevik Project came from Lydia Dan, the widow of Fedor Dan and the sister of the Tserderbaum brothers, all influential members of the RSDRP, the most prominent of whom was Iulii Martov. For Lydia Dan and her friends living in emigration -- especially G. Aronson, D. Dalin, B. Dvinov, B. Nikolaevskii, S. Shvarts -- the history of the RSDRP was a personal, family affair. Preserving the memory of their friends was also both the last political project of Mensheviks who wanted to preserve the tradition of Russian democratic socialism, and a reflection of their aspiration to perpetuate forever the memory of their friends and those most close to them. In effect, they wanted to write the "true" history of Menshevism, one that they felt were distorted not only in Soviet historiography, but from Western writing as well, and sought support for their effort.

In the person of Leopold Haimson they found an ideal colleague, an important ally, and a reliable friend. The young American scholar who met with Lydia Dan was already successful in his career, erudite, and with a broad knowledge of Russian culture; and his interest in political and social history was infused with a solid understanding of political theory, sociology, and cultural anthropology. His own life experience, his knowledge, his convictions, and his administrative capacities made him just the right candidate to head such a project. Under his influence, however, the project was transformed into something larger: through the prism of Menshevism, it became possible for historians in the United States and Western Europe, as well as for some few in Leningrad and Moscow, to look in new ways at the political, social, and cultural history of

Russia itself. The Menshevik Project not only substantially enriched his own and others' knowledge, but also changed him in significant ways as a research scholar. Discussions with informed participants of the revolutionary movement, thorough, attentive, and critical study of a multitude of new sources -- all of this allowed Haimson to feel deeply the cultural of Russian social democracy from within. We can say with assurance that had he not had this experience, much of his important research either would not have been written or would have been entirely different.

Of particular importance in this regard was the large two part article on "The Question of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," published just as Haimson was moving to Columbia in 1964-65, which came to have enormous historiographical influence especially for American scholars. The term "dual polarization" that Haimson coined here, and that has been frequently cited ever since, turned attention away from issues of ideology and high politics that were dominating Western writing and Cold War politics both at the time, to the determinative importance of social conflict within and between various kinds of culturally structured social formations. "Class" itself was not the central issue for Haimson, as it was for his contemporary E.P. Thompson, but the ways its representations and projections as well as understandings of collective needs were affecting the stability of pre-war Imperial Russian life. Haimson's powerful argument was that these factors were fatally weakening the tsarist order even before the onslaught of the first World War.

Indeed, even the Social Democrats themselves in the early twentieth century would have been delighted with this talented historian who cleverly joined social history with the history of politics (which became the principal characteristic of the "Haimson School"). And yet, this article was written in the middle of the twentieth century by an historian who raised new questions, used new research modalities, and gave particular attention to the relationship between history and political culture as well as to the study of the collective identity of different social groups. One also cannot call Haimson in any way a "party historian," apologetically evaluating the Mensheviks. He critically reviewed their tactics and their values, explicating the social and cultural that conditioned their failures. The article has not lost its relevance. It continues to be cited in every possible discussion about the antecedents of the Russian revolution, which Haimson himself considered inevitable.

It is also hard to deny that the context of the 1960s also affected Haimson as much as his careful and thorough study of various kinds of Menshevik texts, and that to a certain extent he might be considered the "last Menshevik historian," a characterization he himself, with some degree of irony, would certainly have accepted. When the anti-war protests erupted at Columbia in 1968, as well as in Paris and elsewhere, Haimson threw himself intellectually as well as literally into the fray. Years afterwards, students at Columbia still recognized the support this already distinguished member of the faculty gave to their efforts at securing institutional reform, most of which were eventually put in place.

Haimson devotion to his students after becoming a professor at Columbia University is well known even to those who were never fortunate to study with him. To no small degree, his passion as well as his erudition facilitated the university becoming one of the recognized "capitals" for the study of Russian history in the U.S.A. Dozens of well known researchers who continue to work successfully today wrote their dissertations at "Kolumbiika." Haimson's knowledge, Haimson's counsel, was unusually valuable to them. No less important were their arguments with Haimson about every sort of subject, but especially the nature of late imperial Russian political culture and the fall of the old regime --- disputes of the most interesting, heated, and sometimes even very sharp sort. Leo was an ardent and erudite teacher and scholar. A scholarly discussion in his presence rarely took the form of an abstract argument, and was even more rarely forgotten by those involved.

Arguments over the roots of the both 1917 revolutions found expression as well in Haimson's subsequent thinking and writing. Indeed, his later articles brought new understanding of the now familiar concepts of representation and social identity, and the practices they involved affected social transformation. Several compendia of articles devoted to the history of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary epoch were subsequently published under his editorship. All of this only confirmed his reputation as a distinguished specialist in the areas of early twentieth century Russian social and political history as well as a critical social thinker more broadly.

Haimson's penchant for critical thought and his trenchant way of expressing his views was hallmark of his critical graduate and public seminars. These took place weekly during part of the year at Columbia, of course, but also occurred in Paris, where he arranged a long term affiliation in with the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme. Haimson's long and frequent stays in Paris brought him in close contact with Fernand Braudel and other luminaries of the *Annales* school, many of whom regarded him as a close and important colleague.

Another important direction in Haimson's activities that emerged at this time was his participation in a large international project involving the statistical study of the strike movement in various countries, reflecting his long-term interest in sociology. In collaboration with colleagues in several countries, first and foremost French historians in Paris at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme like Eric Brian and Michelle Perrot, he led this important research for the better part of two decades. This made it possible to review the history of the Russian workers movement in an international context, something he pursued as well in the Paris version of his famous New York seminars, which were often sandwiched between his increasingly frequent trips to Russia.

Through these journeys -- at the time more arduous than one can possibly imagine today! -- Haimson pursued another of his deep commitments, especially in St. Petersburg: meeting, arguing, and collaborating with his Russian colleagues. Beginning in the 1960s, Leopold Haimson also played an enormous role in the collaboration between Western and Russian scholars. One can perhaps postulate that the experience of the Menshevik Project also played its role here. On one hand, many years of studying the political tactics of Russian intellectuals and their rhetorics allowed Haimson to find acceptable compromises with the influential "generals" of Soviet historical study. As one of the first western research scholars he gained the opportunity to work in the archives of Moscow and Leningrad, which both brought him enormous pleasure and seriously influenced his research. On the other hand, the experience of working in the Menshevik Project gave Haimson the possibility to feel deeply "from within" the particular culture of the Russian intelligentsia, a culture which he knew and valued well, perhaps even sometimes idealized. It is hardly surprising that those Soviet intellectuals who were less than fully sympathetic with Soviet authorities, saw in Leo something very special. They not only valued him for his knowledge but felt he was one of their "own."

This unique position allowed Haimson to play an absolutely special role during the time of perestroika. Even before 1985 a quiet and unannounced "historiographical convergence" was occurring: "revisionist" historians, one of the most prominent of which was Haimson, and several prominent Soviet historians with a common interest in understanding each other's work. Haimson's energy and his organizing skills pulled this cooperation to an absolutely new level. Within the framework of an already recognized international project on the history of the Russian workers' movement, an international colloquium took place in 1990 in Leningrad. For the first time, a number of prominent specialists in history of Russia met each other face to face. The material of this colloquium was subsequently published in the volume *Reform or Revolution? Russia, 1861-1917*, which became an intellectual "bestseller." This colloquium turned out to be the first in a long list of events organized by Leopold Haimson in cooperation with the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Science (now the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Science).

Another important project in which Haimson participated with his characteristic energy and passion was the establishment of the European University at St. Petersburg. The idea of creating a non-state graduate college captivated him. Leo did much in support of creating the faculty of history and gave as a gift to the University's library a rich collection of books and periodicals. In his later years, even the Menshevik Project took on new life. Together with Ziva Galili and Albert Nenarokov, Haimson published several volumes in Russia containing sources on the history of Menshevism, and had many of his own works translated into Russian.

Professor Leo Haimson was a distinguished bearer of French, and American academic traditions, intellectual tendencies, and political cultures. He studied at Harvard, taught at Chicago, Columbia, as well as in Paris; and felt himself fully at home in Paris and St. Petersburg as well as New York. He was an "intellectual cosmopolitan" and part of the Russian intelligentsia, a passionate and demanding teacher, a research scholar, passionate and partial in his study of the tragic history of the early twentieth century.

Many students and colleagues were helped by his books, his counsel, and his example. They have lost a remarkable mentor and good friend.