

Some memories of Leo Haimson
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Long before I arrived at Columbia, I became familiar with Leo's work on late imperial social stability and the psychological culture of Russian Social Democracy through my graduate seminars at Indiana and Stanford. When I got the job offer from Columbia, the prospect of working with Leo and Marc Raeff, two giants in the field, was daunting and somewhat frightening. Leo had his office on the 12th floor of the International Affairs building, where I did too until my very last year at Columbia, so I saw him almost daily for many years.

At first together with Marc Raeff and Leo, and later with Dick Wortman and Leo, I was privileged to be part of a golden age in Russian history at Columbia that is not likely ever to be replicated here or elsewhere. We trained a brilliant cohort of young historians who have gone on to reshape the fields of late imperial and Soviet history in often profound ways. One of the special institutions outside of formal classes was the Russian history seminar, which brought together all graduate students, junior and senior, with faculty from near and often afar. Leo presided over these discussions of work in progress; he typically introduced the guest speaker, who then presented her work for nearly an hour. A few questions emerged from the audience, and Leo saved his commentary until several had spoken. At some moment, he got up, with a cigarette or pipe smoking away, scribbled some indecipherable squares, circles and arrows on the chalk board and brought everything together and put it in greater context. When he was on, he was dazzling, and that is how I became informally a student of Leo's as well. The seminars ended with a ritual Chinese dinner in a local restaurant where lively discussion continued over pot stickers, sesame chicken and his favorite, shrimp and walnuts. (I was soon designated as the official orderer of foods for these events.)

Later, in my capacity as associate director of the Harriman Institute, I worked closely with Leo on our first exchange with the still-Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Institutes of Russian History (then USSR) and World History. I got to know many remarkable historians in Leo's extensive network of contacts: Viktor Danilov and Albert Nenarokov in Moscow, Boris Anan'ich and Rafail Ganelin in St. Petersburg. These scholars too enriched our monthly seminar meetings and gave our students direct access to important developments in Russia.

I was also fortunate to know another side of Leo, a part of his life that gave him much happiness, his relationship with Natasha. Not long after he started seeing Natasha, he asked me if I would meet with her during one of my then-frequent trips to Moscow. Viktor Danilov, a mutual friend, arranged a meeting; I suspect he and Leo wanted to reassure Natasha that she would find a few friendly, Russian-speaking faces in New York when she made the big move that they were contemplating. A few days after she arrived in the US, my partner Johnny and I invited her to the annual revelry that is the Village Halloween Parade. She took it all in stride and with eyes wide open and seemed to be off to a great start. The story that perhaps most captures Leo for me is their wedding. Leo invited Bill Rosenberg and me to be witnesses for the wedding at City Hall. Leo and Natasha underwent all the requisite blood tests and medical certifications. We all dressed up on Monday morning in November to head downtown on the subway only to find that it was Veteran's Day and City Hall was closed. Bill couldn't stay any longer, so we inquired of the guard what to do? He said the Criminal Court just down the street was open 24/7 so we might try there. We somewhat dejectedly headed to the Criminal Court, where we found a sympathetic detective who said he would talk to the presiding judge, who, it turns out was a Columbia Law graduate

and also touched by the story of Leo and Natasha. In between indicting a drug dealer and a prostitute, the judge retired to the locker room and performed the ceremony. In one comic misinterpretation, he thought I was the groom, since I was better dressed than Leo, who was in his standard turtle-neck and jacket, and closer to Natasha's age. Of course, Leo had not thought about wedding rings, but the ceremony proceeded. At the point Bill had to return to Michigan, so I offered to take Leo and Natasha to Chinatown to pick out rings. Leo was anxious to get back to Morningside Heights and had of course made no plans to celebrate the wedding. I convinced them to have a nice late lunch in Little Italy before we all headed back uptown.

This is a good illustration of how absorbed Leo was in another set of worlds, the worlds of revolutionary workers and socialist intellectuals, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, and was often oblivious to the world he was actually living in. But I hope too it recalls the happier years of Leo's life that were later overshadowed by much suffering and pain, both his and Natasha's. We already missed Leo long before he died, but can cherish these memories and his legacy far into the future.