

Leopold Haimson: His Gifts to Me

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Leopold was my graduate school advisor at Columbia from 1965 to 1972. We started at Columbia at the same moment, he fresh from Chicago and I from Wesleyan. Leo's book *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism* had major impact on me as an undergraduate, as it did on many students. I soon joined Leo's corner on the Menshevik thinkers.

He was different from any professor I had had before. Leopold would sit in our graduate seminars on the Russian revolution with a cup of coffee and a cigar, his hand shaking with intensity as he lifted the coffee cup or pulled on the cigar. Leopold was living the material he was researching, living it so intensely it seemed to be consuming him. His nervous intensity was to my mind the price of the penetrating brilliance that came through in his writing and his classroom performance.

What came across so clearly was that Leo was looking at the long wave in Russia's revolutionary history -- that he was not interested in Cold War mythologizing about totalitarian systems, but rather in the social and political realities of Russia in that period of momentous change. As we worked together, Leo learned that I was civil rights veteran and active in the early stages of the anti-war movement, and as a result full of the rhetoric of (student) revolution.

Leo defined a Master's topic that I only realized in retrospect was designed to test my political rhetoric. With Menshevik writing as my reference point, he asked me to look at how Russia's economic development would have differed had the Bolshevik putsch not occurred. The subject took me into the detail of Russia's economic development as part of 19th century Europe, and beyond thinking of the revolution in terms of Leninist formulas. The question would come back to me frequently when, years later, I started working in Russian finance, seeking ways to make bankable transactions in a country that had lost its European orientation a half century earlier. It was also an early -- and very valuable -- lesson on how one copes with reality that fails to follow political formulas.

As we began doctoral work, Leo took me the next step -- to look at Menshevik writing after 1905, when their worldview required the emergence of a politically active bourgeoisie. In our graduate seminars, others dealt with social classes (peasants, nobles) or reforms, but I had the beloved Menshevik theorists!

Events overtook academics in 1968, when Columbia became a stronghold of student protest. Leo took an active role in the faculty committee seeking to mediate between the administration and the rebels, of which I was one. To me and others, he made the pragmatic case that the war would ultimately be decided on the ground in Vietnam, and not on Morningside Heights. His emotions were clearly, however, with those who

were protesting, and he sought to protect us. When the police ultimately cleared the campus forcibly, Leopold suffered his own intense personal pain, greater than many of us who were arrested experienced.

In the years after the revolt, Leopold took extraordinary measures to protect me, joining faculty committees that awarded fellowships and advocating for me in those meetings. He met my young bride Anne who, like Leo, came from a family that fled Europe for their lives in World War II. Realizing the stresses of completing a doctorate that required extended study in Finland or Moscow, Leo encouraged me to consider shifting my work to a less demanding field. We sat in the West End over a cold beer "Why not, you know, switch to, say..... Sociology?" he said, gesturing with the cigar. I looked at him earnestly and said I wanted a field with intellectual rigor, and he immediately conceded the point. In retrospect, he was right, but at the time I could not see it.

As my graduate studies of Russia were replaced with trips to Russia under perestroika, we saw each other in Manhattan. I met Natasha, the love of his life. Leo seemed calmer, was enjoying himself more, at peace a little more with the world. He was very proud of his beautiful young wife, and wanted the world to know that.

Just as the Soviet Union dissolved, Leopold called to ask a favor. He had visitors from Moscow, academics who had taken the right stand during perestroika on opening archives in Petersburg that Leo wanted to see. Was there some way I could help them find clients for research? I was at Citibank at the time, responsible for corporate finance for the former Soviet Union. I met Leo's friends, directors of an institute housed in the former Comintern headquarters in Moscow. From the meeting came a company (a *sovmestnie predpriatie*) that published the first directory of Russian commercial banks, modeled on Western directories. The thick volume, supported by Western advertisers, quickly became the bible for Gaidar and the rest of Yeltsin's team. Ultimately, the business foundered on the same shoals that have destroyed so many joint ventures in Russia. But thanks to Leo, Anne and I toasted US-Russian capitalist cooperation under the defiant gaze of Georgi Dimitrov in the institute's board room, being regaled with stories of the insanity of life under Stalin and his successors. A fitting tribute to the Comintern!

Leo's body of work has the indelible hallmark of a great historian and a great mind. He captured an essential element of the Russian psycho-historical makeup in the *soznatel'nost-stikhiinost* dichotomy, one that returns endlessly to mind in dealing with Russian counterparts to this day. But beyond that seminal insight, he was a dedicated scholar, one who won his students' respect through his own deeply researched and eloquently drafted work. I will miss him, personally and spiritually.