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WORLD -- LEONARD SCHAPIRO DIES, THE GRAND OLD MAN OF COMMUNIST STUDIES

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Leonard Schapiro, Professor Emeritus and Honorary Fellow of the London School of Economics and Political Science, died on 3 November 1983 at the age of 76. His contribution to the study and analysis of communism, above all its history in the Soviet Union, as well as to the teaching of the subject at an influential British academic institution, cannot be overestimated. Schapiro was not just one in a long sequence of Western academics concerned with communism; he stands out as an intellectual force with an impact on several generations of students and does alike.

Born in Scotland in 1908 into a family of Russian-Jewish background, Leonard Schapiro spent much of his childhood in Riga and St. Petersburg-Leningrad before making London the place of his creative life. A practicing lawyer (he was called to the bar in 1931), he rendered valuable services to the British Broadcasting Corporation and the War Office during the Second World War. His knowledge of Russian and other languages was an advantage, but he still returned to his barrister's desk in 1946. His first articles concerned Soviet behavior on the international scene, especially with regard to the international legal order as it was taking shape in the wake of the war. Schapiro joined the LSE as a member of the Department of Politics in 1955 and stayed there until his retirement in 1971, most of the time (since 1963) as Professor of Political Science with special reference to Russia.

Four books among his large output are generally considered of seminal significance. The Origins of Communist Autocracy (1953; second edition 1976) is a penetrating study of the coup that brought the Bolsheviks to power in 1917, a story -- as he himself put it -- of men who kept others from sharing power with them and of the consequences for themselves and their rivals. Schapiro's political history of The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1968; second edition 1970) has not been surpassed to date. It has been described as "the fullest and most influential treatment of the subject in any Western language," and many have acquired or sharpened their understanding of the tortuous and torturing progress of Soviet communist history from Schapiro's excellent study. Schapiro the historian of events became the historian of ideas in a book on Rationalism and Nationalism in Foreign Nineteenth Century Political Thought (1967) based on a series of lectures at Yale University in 1961. His outstanding qualities as a political scientist were demonstrated in a textbook of The Government and Politics of the Soviet Union (1948; with a number of subsequent new editions and reprints), a solid piece of scholarly work and perceptions compressed into lucid form. He wrote, of course, much more in the way of articles, contributions to symposiums, and conference papers. His short book on Totalitarianism (1972) as a concept and as a real and inhuman phenomenon that sweeps the life of individuals and nations has been accepted by advocates and opponents of the notion of political totality alike. Schapiro's great love outside the realm of political science and history was Ivan Turgenev, whose Spring Torrents (1972) he translated into English and whose affectionate and yet scholarly biography he had published four years ago (Turgenev: His Life and Times, 1978).

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WORLD (?) -- LEONARD SCHAPIRO DIES: THE GRAND OLD MAN OF COMMUNIST STUDIES

Methodologically, Leonard Schapiro was a traditionalist. He could not and would not accept that strand in Western political study of the Soviet Union that sees communism on a par with other systems of government, lending themselves easily to abstract comparisons. Neither was he a friend of the pseudomodern introduction of natural science and mathematical methods into research on communism. The communist system, for Leonard Schapiro, was a phenomenon sui generis that had to be approached with a wide background knowledge of Russian history and of the political profile of the rest of the world, but could not be reduced to just one of several possible forms of human organization. A value-free science of human action was, according to Schapiro, both theoretically mistaken and morally irresponsible. He saw human beings suffering, not just the cold contours of societal organizations picked out for laboratory-type dissection. His preoccupation with power, authority, and the run of history did not make him blind to the destiny of man. As his friend and colleague Harry Highy wrote in a festschrift for Schapiro's 70th birthday:

Schapiro has shown what superb results can still be attained through the traditional virtues of careful and exhaustive study of the facts, precision of thought and language, objectivity of analysis, which by no means excludes the exercise of moral judgment, and the marriage of common sense with Yorftzhan in the Hebraic sense.

We in Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty have a special reason to remember Leonard Schapiro fondly and with gratitude. Right from the creation of our services he has exercised an influence on the intellectual formation of our attitudes. He came to Munich often to give talks, lectures, and interviews. His series of discourses on the origins of Bolshevism, delivered in our stations with exemplary intellectual moderation in the 1960s, still constitutes a substantial backbone of our understanding of the communist system's determinants. Leonard Schapiro completed the manuscript of another book not long before his death, which will be published in the United States and Britain next spring. It is entitled 1817: The Russian Revolutions and the Origins of Present-Day Communism. RFE-AL is privileged to be able to pick, with the consent of Leonard Schapiro given while the book was still being written, a serialization of excerpts from this book for the near future.

Leonard Schapiro, the man and the scholar, will no doubt continue to influence Soviet and East European studies through the towering presence of his intellect and deep perceptions, despite his departure.

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Leonardo Schepinsky, "Some Reflections on Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev," an epilogue to G. B. Urban, ed., Stalinism: Its Impact on Russia and the World (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1963).

EXTRACTS

One of the most deplorable aspects of the critical literature on Stalin, both by Russians and by non-Russians, is its portrayal of Stalin as the supreme villain on one side, and everyone else as his innumerable victims on the other. For, if ever there was a man in history whose all are in some degree to blame, this is it. And not only are those guilty who put Stalin in office, and supported him there—whether for the fear of being swept from power, from personal ambition or from hatred of some potential rival. They also are to blame for Stalin who put Lenin in power—and this includes not only the Bolsheviks, but the socialists who half-supported the Bolsheviks by not opposing them in time, and the peasants and soldier masses who backed the Bolsheviks not for motives of idealism, but in order as they thought to grab more land, or escape one of the war. It is only in the recognition of this path that any hope lies for the transformation of Russian society—if there is any hope for such a development.

But if there is any prospect of improvement it certainly does not lie in violent overthrow of the present regime, which would unleash a barbarism of vengeance which could well be worse than "Stalinism". Nor is it to be hoped for its disintegration and collapse of the present system, which would almost certainly lead to another form of autocracy, as bad as, if not worse than, the tyrannies of the past. Above all, it does not lie in any all-embracing, all-resolving doctrine or ideology. No man knows that Russia would one day be faced by Dzhengiz Khan with the telegraph. It turned out to be much worse—Chinggis Khan with a doctrine. The lesson of "Stalinism" is that the Soviet people must be cured of the faith in some universal panacea or some all-powerful leader, which has been characteristic of the Russian radical movement since its inception.

There are occasional voices raised in "Uncensored Russia" (as Peter Redikoff called it) which suggest that some, at any rate, are beginning to realize this, as the following passage, which reached the West in 1964, indicates:

Then what is important? It sounds banal, self-improvement, individual effort. Study and thought for one's own moral development. The classical liberal virtues. Being honest and loyal and kind to the men people closest to one rather than professing my good intentions to world history or social movements. And for the country as a whole, tinkering with the economic and social system in small daily ways and stopping to measure what works. Measuring real wages instead of smooching Marxist slogans. Measuring real freedom and well-being instead of talking about class struggles and 'socialist' freedom. In other words, pragmatism. And an end to Marxism, and all other 'isms'.

We need to measure socialism by itself would produce a better society and hence human beings . . . But this obviously isn't true. Socialism alone doesn't make good men, good buildings, good anything. And certainly not good will.

The lesson of "Leninism" and "Stalinism" has never been put more clearly.

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