



Introduction

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Introduction

This special issue of the journal is to mark the retirement of Dr. Jonathan 'Jon' D. Smele in June 2020 from Queen Mary, University of London. Jon has made fundamental contributions to our general understanding of the Russian Civil War and to our comprehension of the Kolchak regime in Siberia. He has also produced deeply researched reference volumes. These intellectual achievements are discussed in Evan Mawdsley's article. Jon is also familiar to the field and to readers of this journal as its Editor, from 2002-2011. Editing a major journal is a large responsibility. Jon stepped naturally into the role, combining patience, attention to detail, and sound scholarly advice. Trusted and valued for his knowledge, Jon's curiosity and passion for new research made him a wonderful correspondent. Here was an Editor who actually read and empathised with the author's endeavours and could reach his own independent evaluation. There was nothing mechanistic about Jon as Editor. Reading a decade of his editorship, the only constant is the commitment to originality. If this meant publishing a single author on a single theme several times over several issues, then so be it. Jon was also receptive to publishing articles by amateur historians and encouraged younger scholars to begin their publication career with *Revolutionary Russia*. Jon's respect for the Study Group and for its journal, initially *Sbornik* and subsequently *Revolutionary Russia*, is evident from his own articles in the journal, of which there are many, including an account of the first thirty years of the Study Group in a 2005 issue. His penchant for editorial roles also includes being founding co-editor, along with Michael Melancon, of the Bloomsbury History of Modern Russia series.

Jon undertook a BA in International History and Politics at the University of Leeds (1977-80). His interest in Russian and Soviet history, and in particular the Russian Civil War, took off when he joined the MPhil in Soviet and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow (1981-83). This course offered instruction in Russian, as well as a host of options covering the history, economics, politics, and international relations of the USSR. It was taught within the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies, famous as the home of the journal *Soviet Studies*, and for ideological analyses and debates of the Soviet system, most notably between Alec Nove and Hillel Ticktin. It was an exciting intellectual and publishing environment in which Jon focused on historical studies under James 'Jimmy' D. White and Evan Mawdsley, writing his MPhil thesis on Kolchak, a topic suggested by Jimmy. Alas, Glasgow did not have the funds to keep Jon on for his PhD. This opportunity arrived through a scholarship that Roger Pethybridge had arranged and advertised. Jon applied, was successful, and began his doctoral research in 1984. The PhD was awarded at the University of Wales (Swansea) in 1991.

Whilst still working on his PhD, Jon started work as a Temporary Lecturer in Russian History at the University of Edinburgh (1988-1991). This was followed by a year as Teaching Fellow in Modern European History at the University of Aberdeen (1991-1992), and two years as a Temporary Lectureship at Queen Mary, University of London (1992-1994). It was Queen Mary that offered Jon a permanent post in 1994, in which he was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1999, and where he remained until retirement. Even though he made his home in Glasgow (where else?), Jon was regularly at Queen Mary and was a wonderful colleague, fulfilling key administrative and teaching roles across the BA and MA programmes, of which the list is too large to mention. An insight into his inspirational lectures can be gleaned from

the audiobook that he wrote and narrated, *The Russian Revolution: From Tsarism to Bolshevism* (2009). Jon was a highly valued and much appreciated PhD supervisor, as is clear from the acknowledgements in the theses by Benjamin Wells on the Union of Regeneration, 1917-1991 (2004), Robert Henderson on Vladimir Burtsev and the Russian Revolutionary Emigration, 1891-1905 (2008), and Heather Campbell on Bolshevism, Islamism, nationalism, 1918-1923 (2014). Jon was also extremely generous with his time as External Examiner of course provisions at Aberdeen and Luton, and of PhDs at SSEES, Oxford, and elsewhere. There is a large debt of gratitude and affection for Jon from former students and colleagues, some of whom have contributed articles to this special issue.

The contents of each article are clear from the abstracts so there is no need to repeat them here. I do however wish to mention briefly the special relationship between contributors and Jon. It all began in Glasgow with Jimmy and Evan whose classes Jon attended on the MPhil at Glasgow. Evan and Jimmy have different and distinct approaches as historians. From Evan, Jon learnt the importance of attention to detail that is very apparent in Jon's work. From Jimmy, Jon was inspired by the determination to follow one's own research interests with no heed to the scholarly establishment or academic trends, and to base one's work on independent primary source research, excluding archives! Jon first met Geoffrey 'Geoff' Swain and Paul Dukes c. 1987 at an event organised and hosted by the University of Wales at its retreat at Gregynog, at which he recalls Paul wiping the floor with opponents at table tennis. In later years Paul sought Jon's advice on manuscripts at draft stage. Geoff became part of the Glasgow Russian academic scene when he took up the Alec Nove Chair. Geoff's studies of the Civil War, the SRs and the Greens forced Jon to rethink his own work, and debates between Jon and Geoff continue in good spirit to this day. Anthony 'Tony'

Heywood and Jon co-edited an anniversary volume on the 1905 Revolution and Jon joined the Advisory Board of Tony's multi-volume project on Russia's Great War and Revolution. Heather Campbell, former PhD student, is particularly grateful to Jon's editorial skills that made of her a much better writer.

I first noticed Jon in the coffee room at the Glasgow Institute when he was taking a break from a conference on the Civil War being held in the neighbouring Adam Smith Building. He was deep in conversation with Norman Pereira and I did not wish to intrude. Our friendship really started when we were both shortlisted for a job at the University of York. We went out drinking the night before the interview and needless to say neither of us were successful. Since then, we have bonded over numerous failures and misadventures that are best left between friends.

We hope that the articles collected here pay fitting tribute to Jon and to his career. Thanks are due to the current Editors for agreeing to facilitate this special issue in Jon's honour.

Alas we lacked the space and expertise to include an article on Jon's specialism beyond the Russian Revolution, that of contemporary popular and alternative music. In the 1980s, Jon was part of a network of bootleggers. To raise funds, he would make and sell copies on tape cassettes. One day a letter arrived from Bob Dylan's solicitors warning him to desist. Jon had by that time parted company with Dylan anyway over the singer songwriter's religious fundamentalist stage. In 1986 in Bristol Jon and his partner Robina were part of the now legendary EEC Punk Rock Mountain project that organised indie band gigs at the George and Railway pub. Jon's further credits include contributions to first issue of The Pastels fanzine *Pastelism* (1988) that features an interview with The Teenage Fanclub, a substantial article

on Daniel Johnston, and a pen portrait of Jon as a member of *Pastelism's* 'one big happy family' that carries a self-description as having 'the looks of his dad and the brains of his ma – unlucky as fuck'. Jon's expertise on Bob Dylan was acknowledged in June Skinner Sawyers, *Bob Dylan: New York* (Berkeley, CA, 2011, vii), a manuscript he reviewed for the publisher and corrected many errors. We conclude this introduction in more traditional fashion with a list of Jon's major academic publications.

Ian D. Thatcher, Middlesbrough, July 2021

Books:

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Smele, J.D. & Heywood, A.J. (eds), *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives*. London/New York: Routledge, 2005. xii + 284 pp.

Smele, J.D. (comp., ed. & annot.), *The Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917–1921: An Annotated Bibliography*. London/New York: Continuum, 2003. xxx + 623 pp.

Smele, J.D., *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918–1920*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xix + 759 pp.

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Articles and Chapters:

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Smele, J.D., ' 'If Grandma Had Whiskers...': Could the anti-Bolsheviks have won the Russian Revolutions and Civil Wars? Or, the Constraints and Conceits of Counterfactual History', *Revolutionary Russia*, 33(1), 2020, 6-37.

Smele, J.D., 'Still Searching for the 'Third Way': Geoffrey Swain's Interventions in the Russian Civil Wars', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(10), 2016, 1793-1812.

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Smele, J.D. ‘What the Papers Didn’t Say: Unpublished Despatches from Russia by M. Philips Price, May 1918–January 1919’, *Revolutionary Russia*, 8(2), 1995, 129–165.

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Smele, J.D. ‘An Attempt to Utilize the Northern Sea Route to Siberia in 1919’, *Sibirica*, 4, 1988, 28–40.

Smele, J.D. ‘Labour Conditions and the Collapse of the Siberian Economy under Kolchak, 1918–1920’, *Sbornik of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution*, 13, 1987, 31–60.