

EDITORIAL NOTE

And Then There Were...(None?) An SOS to the AAASS

Nationalities Papers begins 1993, its twenty-first year, with this oversized (but not double) issue. Why?

A year ago, *Nationalities Papers* still enjoyed the recent collegial rivalry of *Soviet Nationalities*; by mid-year, that young journal had ceased to exist. Also in 1992, this journal had the distinguished company of *Problems of Communism*; but by the year's end, that eminent publication was terminated too. Both were victims of foundation policy and government budgetary responses to the profound political and economic changes that began with Gorbachev's ascent to power in March 1985 and ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. No new publications have replaced these two journals, and the profession is so much the poorer. Already limited outlets for research have thus become even more circumscribed.

The demise of these fellow journals has imposed the added responsibility, not to mention financial strain, on *Nationalities Papers* to publish larger issues—at least provisionally—to accommodate a few of the many scholars who might otherwise have appeared in the other two journals. The growing number of acceptable submissions to this editorial desk reflect not only a surge in professional work on nationalities issues—a topic so long marginalized by mainstream Sovietology—but also the shrinking number of journals in the field.

Scholars tend to forget—understandably, unless directly involved editorially—how fragile the future of a journal is in even the best of times. So much more so is it in these times of financial stringency: subject to sudden foundation re-prioritization, government re-allocation of funds, and, most importantly, to library de-accessing of journal acquisitions. *Nationalities Papers*, despite the good fortune of international events, is no more immune to these forces of “change” than any other journal.

Should this crisis be a collective concern? Is this emergency an AAASS matter? Repeated efforts in the past three or four years to form a committee of editors of journals under the aegis of the AAASS to confront this on-going crisis were met, in general, either lukewarmly or with semi-hostility. Revealingly, the greatest support for the proposal came from the ranks of the staff of *Problems of Communism* and the least from the previous executive members of the AAASS. In the face of the present dire circumstances—in which the entire profession finds itself in need of critical re-examination, redefinition and reorganization—perhaps the time is ripe for the AAASS to reconsider its role towards professional journals, to act as a *bona fide* umbrella organization, and respond imaginatively and alone, as other large and small

journals disappear. In most cases, a journal's continued survival depends on better management, better allocation of resources, proper use of technology, *etc.*; and these need to be identified and rectified in time, before the publication's viability is in doubt. Unfortunately, most editors act alone, rarely in contact with their counterparts; remedies for each situation could be found were there a coordinating committee to which one could turn to tap the combined skills and experiences of fellow editors.

Such an organizational resource—a committee of past and present editors, or a similar group—is not yet available. At present, all journals exist in a Darwinian world—each one struggling by itself to fend as best it can. Perhaps it is time for the AAASS to seize this opportunity to accept the responsibility and challenge of averting a crisis that faces *all* scholarly journals before “there are none”? It is not too late to act before the Hawaii Conference in November.

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