

IN MEMORIAM

## John B. Dunlop

Norman Naimark<sup>1</sup>, Paul Gregory<sup>2</sup> and Stephen Kotkin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Stanford University

<sup>2</sup>University of Houston

<sup>3</sup>Princeton University

Email: [naimark@stanford.edu](mailto:naimark@stanford.edu)

A Hoover scholar, friend, colleague, and Russian expert, John Dunlop, an inimitable scholar of Russia, passed away on October 14, 2023, surrounded by his beloved family members. Dunlop spent a year at the Hoover Institution as a National Fellow in 1978–79 and returned in 1983 as a Senior Fellow. During his four-decade career at Hoover, John served as a co-chair (with Thomas Hendrickson) of the US and World Affairs Seminar, as a Deputy Director of the Hoover Library, and as Acting Director of Stanford's Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (CREEES).

More than anything, Dunlop was an unusually gifted and insightful student of Russian history both during the communist period and afterwards. In fact, it was Russia, as distinct from the Soviet Union, that was his overwhelming passion, and there was little he did not know about its culture, politics, society, religious life, and myriad other subjects. He recognized the existence and salience of Russian nationalism when most other scholars either ignored or denied its existence. He was ahead of his time and remained ahead of the curve all the way into and through retirement. Many people today see Russia as evil, as reducible to Vladimir Putin, as something to ban and block and fight against. John was more aware than anyone of this threat, and warned us all of it, but for him Russia was far more capacious than a leader or tendency, no matter how strong.

Although he testified before Congressional hearings, gave countless lectures about Russian affairs, and wrote a bevy of books and articles on a variety of Russian-oriented subjects, John was happiest in his Hoover office collecting an amazingly wide-range of materials about Russian and Soviet matters, from the development of religious and nationalist circles in the 1970s and 1980s, the wars in Chechnya of Boris Eltsin and Putin, KGB-inspired bombings in Dagestan, Moscow, and Riazan' in 1999, the Moscow Dubrovka Theater hostage taking in 2002, the brutal school siege in Beslan in 2004, the Kremlin-inspired murders of journalists, opposition politicians, and dissidents, and Moscow's aggression against Ukraine since 2014. Dunlop combined an intensely close reading of Russian trial transcripts, investigative journalism, Radio Liberty materials, and open-source intelligence revelations to put together veracious accounts of the Kremlin's criminal behavior.

Dunlop's office contained a meticulously kept archive, filled with little-known materials culled from sometimes impossibly obscure sources. It is no wonder that the John B. Dunlop Collection, now available for research in the Hoover Archives, contains 232 boxes of material on some of the most tragic and perplexing sets of events in the transition from Soviet rule to that of Eltsin and ultimately Putin. Future historians of Putin's Russia, especially, will want to consult that archive for a wide range of important and little-known sources.

Dunlop is frequently referred to as a political scientist. He probably would have been happiest to be known as a contemporary historian. But few are aware that he was trained

as Slavacist, first at Harvard, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1964, and then at Yale for his PhD. He also spent two years at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, New York after his first year at Yale, which gave him deep insights into Russian spirituality and religious history. His PhD thesis and his first book—*Staretz Amvrosy: Model for Dostoevsky's Staretz Zossima* (Nordland 1972) was a perfect mesh of literary studies and the history of Russian Orthodoxy. His training in the seminary and his 59-year marriage to Olga Verhovskoy Dunlop, herself steeped in Russian Orthodoxy and its study and a former library and archive specialist at Hoover, shaped Dunlop's life-long dedication to and scholarship about the best in the Russian Orthodox tradition. After finishing his PhD and before coming to Hoover as a Senior Fellow, Dunlop was Professor and Chair of the Department of German and Russian Languages and Literatures at Oberlin College, from 1970 to 1983.

Dunlop's interventions in Russian and Soviet Studies frequently went against the grain of contemporaneous scholarship yet ended up capturing the essence of crucial developments in the USSR and the Russian Republic. He was one of the first to focus on Russia, as distinct from the Soviet Union, and identified major currents in Russian nationalism that undermined Soviet rule. One of those currents, "National Bolshevism," which he described at length in *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton 1983) could easily be seen as the precursor of "Putinism," an expansionist, bellicistic, autocratic, and Russocentric ideology that borders on fascism. He also predicted the fall of the Soviet Union in part because of the unexpected Russian insurgency at the end of the 1980s.

There is no doubt that Dunlop hoped that a more liberal, Slavophile, de-centralized, and "social-Christian" nationalist current, represented to some extent in the essays of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, some of which Dunlop edited and published, would emerge supreme with the rise of Eltsin. But, as he demonstrated in *The Rise of Russia and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton 1993), the shallow roots of Russian institutions threatened the development of a peaceful and democratic Russian state system. Dunlop was deeply suspicious of Putin and his "imperial" pretensions from the very beginning of his rule. In an appropriately titled essay, "The Lingering Dream of Empire," published in 2000 at the outset of Putin's presidency, he expressed surprise that so little attention was being paid to Putin's "goal of reintegrating Russia with other former Soviet republics." He specifically mentioned that Putin already had his eye on Ukraine at that early date. Dunlop saw Putin's victory in the March 2000 elections as a devastating blow to hopes for Russian democracy.

Dunlop dedicated the last decades of his career to exposing Putin as a criminal, a purveyor of state terror, and a violator of basic human rights and international norms. Along with David Satter, Dunlop authored works on the Moscow apartment bombings that brought Putin to power and on the botching of the Dubrovka and Beslan hostage crises at great cost to the lives of ordinary Russian citizens. Dunlop used the evidence from the criminal trials of the alleged Chechen assassins to successfully call into question the Kremlin's version of events. He applied the methods of careful scholarship to assemble convincing evidence and arguments that Putin appears ready to sacrifice the lives of Russians, both little-known and famous—most recent among them, Aleksei Navalnyi—to build his absolute power.

On a personal level, Dunlop was quite modest, humble, and even self-effacing. At seminars and meetings, he spoke up rarely, preferring to remain in the background. But his colleagues who read his work and communicated with him regularly about Russian affairs were in awe of his incredible erudition and knowledge of contemporary Russian politics. We all valued his email news notices that became increasingly frequent with the occupation of Donbas, the annexation of Crimea, and the February 22 invasion.

Dunlop's research and analysis have been described as scrupulous, methodical, and painstaking. He was careful with his evidence and cautious with his formulations. But his work was also deeply moral and ethical, while being committed to the elusive goal of freedom and justice for the Russian people. He never stopped believing that this was possible.